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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 15 May 2025

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. The first item of business is general question time.

Gypsy Traveller Community (Public Apology)

1. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will issue a formal public apology to members of the Gypsy Traveller community, in light of reports of the harm caused by what was known as the tinkers experiment. (S6O-04656)

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart): In 2023, we commissioned independent archival research to better understand historical policies and their impact on the Gypsy Traveller communities. That research is now complete and we expect to publish the report online by the end of May.

Alongside the archival research report, we will release a summary of findings from our initial engagement with community members who have been impacted by those historical policies, as well as our initial response. These are complex and sensitive matters, and we are committed to getting this right to provide meaningful answers for everyone who has been affected.

Mark Ruskell: I welcome the fact that more research is being done, but what the community needs is an apology. The research must lead to an apology, because generations of families have been impacted by actions that were sanctioned by the state.

My constituents have suffered. People who could have thrived have instead been shunned by local communities, racially abused and provided with inadequate, if not inhumane, housing conditions. They have endured decades of physical and mental ill health. What further action can the Scottish Government undertake to make meaningful improvements in the lives of those who have been impacted by this truly shameful period in our history?

Kaukab Stewart: I thank Mark Ruskell for his supplementary question. There has been engagement with the affected communities over the past few years. I visited communities in Bobbin Mill and heard about the effects of the tinkers experiment directly from them.

The initiatives that we are taking, through the Gypsy Traveller action plan, for instance, are driving positive change in tackling inequality for communities across Scotland. In partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we published our second joint action plan in September 2024, which set out concrete steps to improve outcomes for Gypsy Travellers. The voices of those communities and of key stakeholders helped to shape that plan. The plan acknowledges the improvements that have been made in many areas since the publication of the previous plan in 2019, but it recognises that more needs to be done.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): In recent years, the Scottish Government has invested millions of pounds in infrastructure improvements for Gypsy Traveller sites. Scotland has 8,000 park home residents. There are three park home sites in my constituency that have—by contrast—received little support, and some sites are owned by Gypsy Travellers. When will the fees that are charged on park home residents be held to the consumer prices index, rather than the retail prices index, as the Minister for Housing suggested on 27 February?

Kaukab Stewart: The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced on 26 March 2024, includes provisions to change the basis of pitch fee uprating under the Mobile Homes Act 1983 from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index. The timetable for implementing the changes that are proposed in the bill will be decided by the Parliament; we propose to implement the changes shortly after the bill receives royal assent.

The bill and its accompanying documents have been published on the Scottish Parliament website. The bill was introduced on 26 March 2024 and is at stage 2 of the Parliament's scrutiny.

The Presiding Officer: As ever, concise questions and responses are appreciated.

National Health Service (Delayed Discharges)

2. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the latest Public Health Scotland statistics on delayed discharges in NHS Scotland, which show that the average length of delay for March 2025 was 27 days. (S6O-04657)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): I remain concerned about the delays that people are experiencing in our hospitals. I am clear that, for those who are delayed, a 27-day average is unacceptable. That is why reducing delayed discharge remains a priority for the Government. However, it is important to reflect on the fact that 97 per cent of all discharges happen without delay. In addition,

the latest figures show some progress in reducing the number of people who are delayed, although we continue to work to drive that number down much further.

Our operational improvement plan sets out how we are taking forward the commitment in the NHS renewal framework to shift the balance of care from hospital to the community. I am hopeful that the work that local systems are undertaking as part of that will deliver better outcomes for patients and ensure that hospital beds are there for those who need them.

Annie Wells: In March alone, delayed discharges led to 60,129 hospital bed days being lost, which is a rise of 3 per cent on the same month last year. That is thousands of people who are stuck in hospital for longer than is necessary. Will the cabinet secretary spell out what immediate and medium-term actions the Government is taking to tackle that, and when we can expect to see real progress?

Neil Gray: I hear what Annie Wells is saying, and I appreciate the concern, which I share. In March, we saw a reduction in the level of delayed discharge. I accept that it was marginal and small, but it is progress. It is going in the right direction, and I fully anticipate that there will be further progress to come.

The progress comes off the back of intensive work that is being done on a whole-system basis—with our health and social care partnerships, our health service, our local government colleagues and our community and voluntary sector partners—to ensure that capacity is in place to support them. In Glasgow, in particular, that work is under way. We are supporting similar work in Lothian, and it will be rolled out to other parts of the country through the operational improvement plan. Annie Wells will see greater progress coming.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will have seen the recent headline that said:

“Numbers of Glasgow patients delayed in hospital reaches highest level in decade”.

In South Ayrshire, which is in my South Scotland region, the average daily number of beds that are occupied due to delayed discharge is almost three times greater than that in East Ayrshire. How can there be such a difference between neighbouring local authority areas, which already share a number of services and health boards? I have asked the cabinet secretary this question before: what is the Government doing to help local authorities to share resources and best practice to improve delayed discharge across Ayrshire?

Neil Gray: That is a key concern. Carol Mochan will have heard this narrated by not just me but the First Minister. Ayrshire is a good example of the variation that exists in the delayed discharge and social care experience in Scotland, which is part of the reason why we want to reform and improve the way in which social care is delivered. I recently met North Ayrshire leaders—again, on a whole-system basis, including leaders from the health board, the local authority and the health and social care partnership—to look at how we can support them to make improvements on the challenging position that they have been in.

We have given additional resource to our local authority partners through the budget. Part of the agreement was that there would be an intensity of focus on, and a prioritisation of that resource into, social care. I am looking for transparency about where that resource has landed and what it is delivering, to ensure that that part of the agreement has been honoured.

Railway Infrastructure (East Kilbride Enhancement Project)

3. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the East Kilbride enhancement project. (S6O-04658)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): The East Kilbride enhancement project continues to make excellent progress in line with the committed delivery programme. The 16-week closure of the line for essential works will conclude very soon, and I can advise the Parliament that services will return on the route on Sunday 18 May. I can also announce that the relocated and refurbished Hairmyres station will open on that date. I thank the travelling public for their patience during the closure period while we have delivered this very welcome electrification and enhancement rail project.

Collette Stevenson: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for the update and for the Scottish Government's support for this transformational project. I, along with many local rail users, welcome the fact that trains will be operating on the line again in the coming days.

Given that South Lanarkshire Council is responsible for the car parking and transport interchange at the new Hairmyres station, what discussions have been had with it regarding progress on those points? Will the cabinet secretary outline the advantages to rail users of that Scottish National Party Government investment? Will she also say how the programme for government commitment to scrap peak rail fares will benefit my constituents who travel from East Kilbride, Hairmyres and Thorntonhall?

Fiona Hyslop: The member is right to point out that local authorities have responsibilities in relation to such rail projects. There has been close partnership working, and I can advise that the full south car park and a small portion of the north car park will be available from Sunday 18 May. From the day of opening, there will be double the provision that was available at the previous station. South Lanarkshire Council is working closely with its contractor to complete that work.

I confirm that the bus service will call at the station from Sunday, with additional bus services calling at the station in the coming months. This transformational project will offer fully accessible and sustainable transport options for passengers as a result of the Scottish Government's investment. *[Fiona Hyslop has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]*

Given the role that the rail service plays in supporting commuters, I am sure that the Government's decision to abolish peak rail fares for good from September will benefit Ms Stevenson's constituents and all workers and rail passengers who rely on the train to get to and from work.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the minister agree that it is a matter of regret that Transport Scotland asked Network Rail to abandon full dual tracking of the line, which would have enabled a turn-up-and-go frequency of four trains an hour? That will not be achievable on a single-track route.

Fiona Hyslop: The member will be aware that there was thorough analysis of capacity and performance, and it was determined that, rather than double tracking the whole route, the operational benefits could be delivered by the 1.4km extension of the existing double-track section. Rather than spending a disproportionate amount of scarce funds on double tracking the whole route, there has been prudent and wise investment planning, which has resulted in a similar output at a much lower cost.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I am very much looking forward to meeting the cabinet secretary at the opening of the new Hairmyres station on Monday. I will be travelling there sustainably by bike. How will she be getting there?

Fiona Hyslop: I am currently making the arrangements, because going from West Lothian to Lanarkshire is a challenging trip, as the member might know. The sustainable travel aspects of the new arrangement are really important, particularly for those who work at University hospital Hairmyres. The idea is to provide choice and ensure provision, particularly for cyclists such as Mr Simpson.

Stroke Thrombectomy Services

4. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what steps it is taking to roll out stroke thrombectomy services on a 24/7 basis across the country. (S6O-04659)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Government is committed to the sustainable expansion of the thrombectomy service. Work is on-going to align the governance and delivery of thrombectomy with similar national programmes and to establish the most effective means of achieving that with national health service colleagues.

Our focus remains on maximising access and ensuring that as many people as possible can benefit from thrombectomy. Procurement for a national artificial intelligence imaging tool is under way. Once that is implemented, it will support increased access to that important procedure.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the minister for her response, but stroke care in Scotland is in crisis.

The system failed Anthony Bundy. He was failed by the FAST—face, arms, speech, time—test, by the lack of 24/7 thrombectomy services and by a 17-hour wait for a procedure that works only if delivered quickly. That is indefensible.

Scotland does not have a modern stroke service; we have a part-time system that is costing lives. Will the Government commit to a nationwide 24/7 thrombectomy roll-out, with the required staff and infrastructure, and will it work with the Bundy family to deliver real change?

Jenni Minto: I recognise the work that Stephen Kerr has been doing with the Bundy family, whom I had the privilege of meeting last year to listen to their experience.

As a result of that, I have had numerous conversations with colleagues. I have also visited the NHS Lothian thrombectomy hub, where I learned at first hand how the east of Scotland thrombectomy service works and discussed with clinical and service management the issues of sustainable delivery, staffing levels and equity of access.

As I said in my first response, work is on-going to establish the most effective means of further expanding access to thrombectomy to maximise the number of patients who are able to benefit from the treatment.

Non-domestic Rates (Self-catering Operators)

5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has undertaken with stakeholders in response to reported concerns regarding the

implementation of the revised non-domestic rates processes for self-catering operators. (S6O-04660)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): The thresholds that currently apply to self-catering accommodation for the purposes of non-domestic rates were introduced following a recommendation by the 2017 independent Barclay review of non-domestic rates, to counter a known tax avoidance tactic for second homes.

Officials have engaged regularly with Scottish assessors, local authorities and business representatives on the implementation of that policy, which was introduced on 1 April 2022, and the Minister for Public Finance has offered to meet the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers in response to its recent concerns.

Alexander Stewart: The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce have written to the Scottish Government to highlight their concerns and to suggest constructive solutions for the review of the policy. Given the importance of self-catering to the Scottish tourism economy, to which it contributes almost £1 billion, does the cabinet secretary agree that the current unfortunate situation needs to be addressed rapidly, before long-term damage is done to the sector?

Shona Robison: We absolutely value the contribution that self-catering makes to the tourism sector. We have recognised that by providing hospitality relief of 40 per cent, from which the hospitality sector—of which self-catering accommodation is a part—will benefit. Many operators will also be eligible for the small business bonus scheme.

As I said in my initial answer, the Minister for Public Finance will meet the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers. I am sure that he would also be willing to meet the Scottish Chambers of Commerce to hear its concerns.

Legislation to End Conversion Therapy Practices

6. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with charitable and third sector organisations regarding the decision not to introduce legislation to end conversion therapy practices, and other equalities-related legislation, during the current parliamentary session. (S6O-04661)

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart): Ministers and officials regularly meet a wide range of organisations to ensure that their expertise and the voices of people with lived experience inform our work. We have continually engaged with LGBTQI+ and other stakeholders as we have

developed our work on ending conversion practices.

We have updated stakeholders on our intention to work with the United Kingdom Government to fully explore legislation that would cover England, Wales and Scotland, but if the UK Government's bill does not meet our priorities or does not go far enough, we intend to publish our own bill in the first year of the next parliamentary session. We will also continue to work with stakeholders in areas such as mental health and education to develop non-legislative measures to tackle conversion practices, as well as continuing our broader work to protect and promote equality and human rights.

Jamie Greene: As the minister will know, it was announced this week that all major political parties have been barred from attending this summer's pride events across Scotland. That saddens me, but can the minister blame the organisers of those events? In its 2021 manifesto, on which it was elected, the Scottish National Party promised to introduce a bill on the issue. It is more than five years since it promised to do so, and the consultation on the bill ended more than a year ago, so the excuse that the Government has run out of time simply does not wash any more.

I ask the Government to rethink its position on the matter. If the Government will not introduce legislation to end the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy, I will.

Kaukab Stewart: We are absolutely committed to protecting trans people and the wider LGBTQI+ community.

The Scottish Government remains committed to protecting our communities from the harm that is caused by conversion practices. That commitment includes work on the legislation that we intend to publish, as I stated, in year 1 of the next session of Parliament, should a UK bill not meet our priorities.

I reiterate that we are continuing to develop and deliver non-legislative supportive measures to end conversion practices and to support survivors, and that we will work with LGBTQI+ organisations over the next 12 months as we do that.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions. Before we move to the next item of business, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery the honourable Sue Lines, President of the Senate, from the Parliament of Australia. *[Applause.]*

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Ferries

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): This week, we discovered that the CalMac ferry MV Glen Rosa will not be completed until June 2026 at the earliest and that it will enter service at least eight years late. Why will it take so long?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I make it clear that the time taken to build the Glen Rosa is unacceptable. Yesterday, the Deputy First Minister set out to Parliament many of the reasons why that is the case. The delay has, obviously, caused disruption to island communities and the Scottish Government is focusing on ensuring, through the measures that the Deputy First Minister outlined yesterday, that early progress is made on the Glen Rosa so that it can join the Glen Sannox in service at the earliest possible opportunity.

Russell Findlay: We asked John Swinney's predecessor how high the eventual bill for the Glen Rosa and the Glen Sannox was likely to be. Three years ago, we specifically asked Nicola Sturgeon whether the cost would exceed £400 million, and she said:

"I simply do not recognise those numbers."—[*Official Report*, 31 March 2022; c 13.]

Scotland's taxpayers certainly do recognise those numbers, because they are the ones paying the bill for the Scottish National Party's mess. This week, the BBC reported that the ferries will now cost £460 million and counting. Does John Swinney at least recognise those numbers? What will the final cost to taxpayers be?

The First Minister: The total forecast cost to complete the vessel has increased from £150 million to £172.5 million, with an additional risk contingency of £12.5 million. I cannot be definitive in my answer to Mr Findlay on that point because the risk contingency depends on the sequence of events that takes place during the completion of the vessel.

I make it clear to Parliament that it is unacceptable that those vessels have cost so much and that such delays have been experienced. The Government is focused on ensuring that the vessels enter service, so that we can deliver on our commitments to provide sustainable ferry services for island communities.

Russell Findlay: That is a deeply concerning answer from the First Minister, who is clearly not willing, or perhaps not able, to say how much that will end up costing taxpayers or when the boats will both be in service.

It was John Swinney who personally signed off what was a corrupt CalMac procurement process. He has never accepted blame and no one in the SNP ever has or ever will. Not a single one of them has held up their hands to islanders or to taxpayers. We have seen half a billion pounds and almost a decade wasted, so who is responsible?

The First Minister: I unreservedly accept my responsibility for everything that happens in the name of my Government. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Members!

The First Minister: I am the First Minister of Scotland and I always accept my responsibilities in the exercise of Government responsibilities.

Russell Findlay mentioned engagement with island communities. I engage regularly with island communities on issues with ferry services, and my Cabinet Secretary for Transport was recently in South Uist engaging with island communities and delivering practical solutions to those affected by ferry disruptions. That is what the Government will focus on. We will accept our responsibilities and will deliver on our commitments to island communities, which is what the Government is doing.

Russell Findlay: The First Minister says that he is responsible, but he is clearly responsible in words only and not in deeds. No SNP minister has been held to account. The last thing that the islanders need is more visits from SNP politicians. They want to see ferries. We have a half-billion-pound blunder, but no SNP minister has ever been sacked.

The ferry saga symbolises so much that is wrong under the SNP. John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon shamelessly exploited Ferguson Marine and its workers for party political purposes. During election campaigns, they loved posing for the cameras at the nationalised yard. The truth is that they preferred public relations grandstanding to providing a decent ferry service for islanders. Who can forget when Sturgeon launched a ferry with painted-on windows?

John Swinney has sunk half a billion pounds—money that could have been spent on raising school standards, fixing the roads or creating more general practitioner appointments. How much better off would people be if that money had gone into our public services instead of going down the drain?

The Presiding Officer: Let us always use first names and surnames.

The First Minister: Let us look at the Government's commitment to ferry services. When the Government came to office in 2007, the budget for ferry services was £90 million. In the

current financial year, it is five times that. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: That is to operate the services to our communities, which are now more extensive than when we came to office.

We have delivered the Glen Sannox into service. We have purchased the additional vessel of the Loch Frisa. We have chartered the MV Alfred and the MV Arrow to provide additional resilience. We have commissioned two new vessels for Islay, two new vessels for the Little Minch routes and seven new vessels for some of the smaller routes. We have progressed investment in key ports and harbours and we are confirming revenue funding and strategic support to the island ferry services in Scotland.

This Government will keep true to its commitments—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: This Government will keep true to its commitments to island communities. That is principally delivered through the fact that ferry travel to our island communities is significantly cheaper than it would have been—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: —had the Government not introduced road equivalent tariff for our ferry services. We have made ferry services more affordable for people in our island communities. We are investing—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I know that there are many members in the chamber who wish to have an opportunity to put a question. We will be able to undertake our business more effectively if members can hear one another.

The First Minister: The Government has invested in road equivalent tariff, we have reduced ferry fares for our island communities, we are providing specific support to island communities that have been affected by disruption and we are investing in the new vessel fleet. That is this Government delivering on its commitments to support our island communities in Scotland.

Ferries

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Island communities need ferries. I think that the First Minister is missing that point.

The MV Glen Rosa ferry, which was due more than half a decade ago, has been delayed by

another nine months, with costs rising by up to £35 million. With the Glen Sannox, which was launched almost seven years late, the cost of the two ships is now more than £460 million. That is nearly five times the original contract price. The fact that the new vessels do not fit at the preferred port of Ardrossan makes the matter even worse. In the same week, it has been revealed that cancellations due to repairs on the ageing CalMac fleet have risen by a staggering 531 per cent. So much for steadying the ship. Why is John Swinney unable to get a grip on this crisis?

The First Minister (John Swinney): As a consequence of decisions that I have made, for which I am very happy to be accountable, we have made investment in two new vessels—the Glen Rosa and the Glen Sannox—two additional vessels are coming for the Islay route, two new vessels are coming for the Little Minch route and seven small vessels are coming.

On CalMac sailings, statistics for the last full year show that there were 170,215 scheduled sailings on the CalMac network. Only 3.4 per cent of sailings were cancelled due to technical or other reasons; the overwhelming majority of cancellations on the route were, understandably, because of weather-related issues.

I am acutely conscious of the challenges with the island ferry network, but, despite those issues, the network performs very strongly for island communities, and the Government's investment will help to build resilience in the years to come.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister has basically said that island communities should be angry with the weather rather than with the Scottish Government, but they are angry with the Scottish Government because it has failed them.

The Scottish National Party's ferry fiasco is damaging lives and livelihoods on the Isle of Arran. For islanders, that means round trips of at least three hours for hospital appointments, school trips cancelled for kids at a moment's notice and utter chaos for businesses. Let me give a few examples. Linda Johnston, the co-founder of the Auchrannie resort, told me that

"businesses are being pushed to breaking point".

Bill Calderwood, of the Isle of Arran ferry committee, said:

"The community are at a loss at what more can be said about the continued examples of mismanagement on this project".

Sheila Gilmore, the chief executive of VisitArran, said:

"We are going through an economic and social crisis. Arran is an amazing island with so much to offer, if only more people could get there".

Why are John Swinney and the SNP repeatedly failing our island communities?

The First Minister: I understand the pressures that exist in Arran, and I have met many of the businesses and organisations that Mr Sarwar mentioned, but I will point out a number of things in response.

The principal vessel that is responsible for servicing the Arran network, the MV Caledonian Isles, required extensive repair and is expected to re-enter service on 9 June. It will be able to operate from the port of Ardrossan, which is its main and home port. In the interim, two vessels have been providing sustainable services from Troon—I accept that that is a different location from Ardrossan—the MV Glen Sannox and the MV Alfred, which, according to the information that is available to me, have been delivering appropriate and adequate capacity for the Arran route at all times. CalMac has made judgments to ensure that the route has been sustainable.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport made it clear that the Government is engaged in active discussions about acquiring the Ardrossan port in order for us to undertake the necessary improvements and strengthening of the port, which have not taken place to date because it is in private ownership.

The Government is delivering a sustained ferry service to the island of Arran, which is providing adequate capacity, and the Government will continue its investment programme, which will be strengthened by the arrival of the Glen Rosa and the other steps that I mentioned in relation to Ardrossan.

Anas Sarwar: The fact is that the SNP is addicted to wasting people's money. A prison that was supposed to cost £100 million is now costing £1 billion—and that amount is rising—millions and millions of pounds of public money have been wasted on legal fees to defend the incompetence of the SNP Government, and we are rapidly approaching half a billion pounds of public money having been spent on two delayed ferries. Today, I can reveal that more than £500 million has been spent on fixing the ageing ferry fleet, while overbudget vessels lay unfinished.

This is now a £1 billion SNP ferry fiasco, made by the SNP but paid for by working Scots. Is it not the case that John Swinney and the SNP cannot be trusted with the public's money?

The First Minister: The Government has applied consistent stewardship of the public finances, which has resulted in our delivering balanced budgets for every year of the Government's term in office, despite the enormous pressures that exist on public finances.

Mr Sarwar talked about the construction costs for prisons. I wonder whether he has looked at any data on the impact on capital costs of the energy price increases after the invasion of Ukraine. Those costs are affecting every capital project in the whole of the United Kingdom, as a consequence of those factors. That is not to mention the fact that the Barlinnie project that he cited is a larger and more extensive project than was originally conceived.

In relation to ferry services, as I indicated to Russell Findlay, the Government has invested in the ferry network to do two things: to ensure that we can acquire new capacity for the years to come—those vessels will be delivered on to the network—and to make it more affordable for people in island communities to utilise ferry services.

I say to Mr Sarwar that the Government will, at all times, invest in our ferry network, invest in our island communities and apply the stringent controls to public finances that have resulted in the Government being re-elected several times—and we intend to be re-elected again in 2026.

Social Care (Availability of Care Homes)

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): There is a crisis in social care in Scotland. Research by my colleague Angus MacDonald, MP, shows that, in the past decade, the number of care homes for older people in the Highlands fell by a fifth. At the same time, the older population in that part of the country is surging.

Duncan lived in Acharacle in the west Highlands, but, when he needed a care home, the nearest that was available was in Fort Augustus, because the care home that was local to him had closed. That is the equivalent of placing an Edinburgh resident in a care home in Dumfries. The travel time meant that his wife, Nino, was robbed of precious hours with her dying husband every day—time that she can never get back. Does the First Minister think that that is acceptable?

The First Minister (John Swinney): It is essential that we have effective social care services in all our communities in Scotland, no matter the geography. The experience of the couple in Acharacle that Alex Cole-Hamilton cited is concerning. Of course I want people to have access to local care services. We work closely on joint work between the health service and local authorities to support the delivery of care in all our communities, which is the subject of focused work that is being done to ensure that care home provision and social care services are available in all communities around the country.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: It is not just people such as Nino who are being denied precious time with their loved ones, because, on any given night, 2,000 Scots are stuck in hospital in this country. They are well enough to leave but they cannot. Why? It is because there is no care home place to receive them or care package to help them to go home. That means that hospitals are overwhelmed, people are not getting operations and ambulances are stacking up outside our accident and emergency departments.

Will the First Minister commit to building new care homes in areas such as the west Highlands, delivering key worker housing and boosting salaries to make social care a profession of choice—and to doing those things with urgency?

The First Minister: I agree with a lot of what Alex Cole-Hamilton has said, because there is a link between hospital capacity, social care capacity and ambulance demand. They are interlinked, so the Government takes a whole-system approach—that is how the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and I take those issues forward in our dialogue with the health service.

The level of delayed discharges is falling—it has come down from its peak by just short of 200 places. *[John Swinney has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* It is still far too high, but it is coming down because of the investment that the Government's budget, which Mr Cole-Hamilton supported, is putting into health and social care at a community level. The Government has intervened to support the acquisition by the public sector of care homes—one in Fort William and one in Mallaig.

There is another dimension to this matter, which Mr Cole-Hamilton and I might agree on—namely, the prevailing attitude about care staff in our country. On Monday, the message from the Prime Minister was catastrophic for the care sector in Scotland. I have never heard anything so damaging for the delivery of care in our communities. Mr Cole-Hamilton is absolutely entitled to put those questions to me, but the Prime Minister's irresponsible statements on Monday will have huge implications for the delivery of social care here. If members want to dismiss what I am saying, perhaps they will take seriously what Dr Donald Macaskill, the chief executive of Scottish Care, said when he suggested that our ability to deliver social care in this country has been directly damaged by the actions, language and rhetoric of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. That is a disgrace.

Disability Benefits (Reductions)

4. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the First Minister, regarding any

implications for its work to tackle poverty, what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the Department for Work and Pensions' forecasts reportedly indicating that the United Kingdom Government's planned reductions to disability benefits will impact 700,000 families that are already in poverty. (S6F-04087)

The First Minister (John Swinney): I remain deeply concerned about the effects of the reforms on people across Scotland, particularly those with disabilities or long-term conditions. The UK Government's own analysis shows that the reforms will push a further 250,000 people, including 50,000 children, into relative poverty by the end of the decade. We will see 3.2 million families lose out because of planned changes to the universal credit health element.

The Scottish Government is taking concrete action to support disabled people in Scotland. For example, since January, we have provided support to 430,000 people through our adult disability payment and, following the national roll-out of pension-age disability payments, we are now providing support to disabled people of all ages.

Collette Stevenson: The Scottish Labour Party has been shamefully silent about the UK Government's cuts to disability benefits, despite their damaging impact. That is on top of its failure to oppose the Labour UK Government's cuts to winter fuel payments and the maintenance of Westminster's cruel two-child cap and its failure to back fair compensation for the WASPI women—women against state pension inequality. While Scottish Labour sits on its hands and watches the UK Government push more people into poverty, will the First Minister advise what steps the Scottish National Party Government is taking here to support households that have been affected by the worst aspects of Westminster austerity?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government has intervened on several of those issues. We have taken steps to restore winter fuel payments to pensioners in Scotland. We have made provision for that in our budget, which takes direct account of the cuts that the incoming Labour UK Government made as one of its first acts. We have also invested in providing the Scottish child payment, which is keeping thousands of children here out of poverty. Our budget also included provision for steps to remove the two-child cap, which I would have expected the Labour UK Government to remove, but it has not done so. I assure my colleague Collette Stevenson that the Scottish Government will do all that we can to eradicate poverty, but our challenge is all the greater because of the actions of the Labour UK Government.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The first principle underlying the adult disability payment is to help people to get employment and stay in it; it was never intended to be an income replacement benefit. Does the First Minister agree that the proposed reductions to that benefit, whereby people who require help to wash, dress and prepare meals will no longer qualify, will risk their ability to maintain employment and so go against the benefit's fundamental principle?

The First Minister: I agree with Mr Balfour on that point. The structure of that payment is designed to support people to make as much of a contribution to wider society, particularly through employment, as they can. However, if the proposals that Mr Balfour mentions are enacted, the practical issues that he legitimately raises will impede individuals' doing that. Not only is such an approach damaging and short sighted; it will undermine individuals' ability to make an economic contribution in the long term. That is but one of the many aspects of its folly. I am very happy to endorse the points that Mr Balfour makes.

NHS 24 (Performance)

5. Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to address the performance of NHS 24, in light of reports that nearly one in five calls to the service went unanswered last year. (S6F-04075)

The First Minister (John Swinney): NHS 24 continues to strive to improve its call-handling times. However, I apologise to anyone who has experienced an extended wait.

Calls to NHS 24 can be recorded as unanswered for a variety of reasons, not all of which are related to waiting times. Callers are offered a range of options, including signposting to NHS Inform for self-care advice or to other services that might be more clinically appropriate to meet their needs.

NHS 24's workforce has increased by almost 50 per cent since 2014, with a record number of call handlers and clinical advisers in place, and we have increased NHS 24's budget to a record £118.3 million this year.

Sandesh Gulhane: I declare an interest as a practising national health service general practitioner.

First Minister, I have worked in out-of-hours services. The staff are working flat out, and the patients I saw were distressed and desperate for help. However, last year, more than 300,000 calls to NHS 24 were abandoned, with one person left waiting more than four hours just to get through. Those are not just statistics; they are real people

left without urgent health advice when they need it most. No manager has been held accountable for that debacle, yet the Scottish Government is spending £118.3 million on NHS 24 this year.

First Minister, stop talking about money and start talking about outcomes. For that level of spending, the public deserve much better. Will the First Minister guarantee that, next year, we will see significant improvements for desperate patients?

The Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

The First Minister: I repeat a point that I made earlier, which is that calls can be abandoned for a variety of reasons, not all of which are related to waiting times. The message menu that members of the public hear includes a range of signposting options that encourage people to seek advice elsewhere, particularly when the service is under pressure. Dr Gulhane will be familiar with those options from his professional background. He will also know that not all callers need to get through to NHS 24, as some might be able to get advice from NHS Inform that addresses their concerns.

Having spent time with NHS call handlers, as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has done, and having listened to the professional advice that they give, I would say two things. First, I commend the quality and strength of the advice available through the telephone service, which is of a high clinical level. Secondly, I believe that the signposting to face-to-face services is undertaken very effectively.

I am concerned about the data that Dr Gulhane refers to, because I cannot quite understand how a call could be waiting for four hours to be answered. I will interrogate that data further, as the extremity of that situation causes me concern, and I will look more closely at the long waits that Dr Gulhane raises.

On the whole, I believe that NHS 24 serves us well. However, I acknowledge that, during periods of high demand, people might wait longer than they would wish.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Can the First Minister outline how the Scottish Government is working to implement the recommendations in its report on the redesign of urgent care, which was published in January? Specifically, is the Government targeting current staffing levels at NHS 24?

The First Minister: A key issue—which relates to Dr Gulhane's question—is that of capacity. Over time, the Government has been expanding capacity in NHS 24. As a consequence of the redesign of urgent care, we invested an additional £4 million to enable NHS 24 to recruit more staff

and reduce call waiting times. That investment also supports public awareness about when to contact 111 and how to access other services.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister will know that, when NHS 24 triages a call, the caller can be phoned back by a nurse or doctor—often more than once. The caller is then triaged again by the health board, and it can take hours before they are seen. Thomas Rodger, who was 27 years old and from Falkirk, phoned NHS 24 several times before dying in hospital because he was struggling to breathe. Will the First Minister publish data on the time from the initial call to the point of treatment?

The First Minister: I will explore that point. However, it might be difficult to provide a complete picture other than in an individual case. I understand that, in the case that Jackie Baillie raises, that would undoubtedly be possible. I stress that I am not a clinician, but, from what Jackie Baillie said about that case, it sounds like a call that should have gone directly to the Scottish Ambulance Service, because, if someone has difficulty breathing, that raises some pretty acute issues. I simply offer that as an observation, and I am very sorry to hear the circumstances that Jackie Baillie puts to me.

We could consider Jackie Baillie's suggestion in relation to individual cases, as there would be merit in exploring the journey that individuals have to go through, and it would be possible to do so. Many of us will have had the experience of having to tell our story multiple times. If that process can be made smoother, we should absolutely aim to do so. However, at a systemic level, it would be difficult to collect or assemble the kind of data that Jackie Baillie is asking for.

United Kingdom-United States of America Trade Deal (Implications for Businesses)

6. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the recently announced UK-USA trade deal and its potential implications for businesses in Scotland. (S6F-04082)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Scottish Government will consider the full details of the trade deal and all of its implications for Scotland when those details are clear. We understand that only general terms have been agreed, with much detail requiring further negotiation.

Michelle Thomson: I wonder whether the First Minister agrees that a so-called deal that fails to engage with the Scottish Government, fails to take account of Scotland's salmon and whisky industries, fails to protect our beef sector and

lands us with 10 per cent tariffs across the board is accurately described by the Nobel laureate Professor Joe Stiglitz as

"not worth the paper that it is written on."

The First Minister: The issues that Michelle Thomson raises are absolutely material to consideration of the UK-USA trade deal. It is a source of enormous disappointment and frustration to the Scottish Government, because of the effect that the trade deal will have on Scottish business, that we were not engaged in its formulation prior to its agreement by the United Kingdom Government. Indeed, I personally found the process deeply unsatisfactory—the Deputy First Minister has communicated that to the UK Government. That view is held not just by me but by my counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a lot yet to be done on the trade deal to ensure that key industries such as salmon and whisky are protected.

As Michelle Thomson will know, the Scottish Government has taken steps to intervene to support the Scottish company base, with the explanation in the programme for government last week of further support for exporters, on which the Government will follow through.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am not surprised by the question, because I understand that the Scottish National Party has never supported a single trade deal in the UK Parliament, whether negotiated by the UK Government or by Brussels. Trade deals offer great opportunity, but surely it is important that we protect UK food, welfare and environmental standards. NFU Scotland is right to say that the deal raises a number of important questions for Scotland's farmers. In contrast to the SNP's flawed domestic agriculture policy, is the First Minister able to give any reassurances on the work that his Government is doing to protect Scotland's vital agriculture industry as the talks progress?

The First Minister: We work very closely with NFU Scotland and the agriculture sector. As the member of the Scottish Parliament for Perthshire North, which involves extensive agricultural interests, I spend a lot of my time engaging with the agriculture industry. If Mr Eagle is worried about that, let me assure him that the Government is very much engaged on those issues.

When it comes to the protection and promotion of the agriculture sector, I venture to suggest that the farming sector feels better supported in Scotland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom and that this Government's approach to the sector is more sympathetic to its needs and interests. That will, of course, be the case during my leadership of the Scottish Government. The

issues that Mr Eagle raises about the trade deal are vital and material in relation to the farming industry, and we will do all that we can to address those issues with the UK Government.

On Mr Eagle's point about trade engagement, one of the trade arrangements that I have always been very supportive of, and that I am keen for us to have more of, is a good trading relationship with the European Union. That relationship was shattered by the stupidity of Brexit and the actions of the Conservative Government, and I want to get us back into those arrangements as quickly as I possibly can.

The Presiding Officer: We move to constituency and general supplementary questions.

Nature Restoration Fund

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): It is welcome that the Scottish Government's nature restoration fund has now invested more than £65 million in hundreds of projects that are helping Scotland's species, woodlands, rivers and seas back on the road to recovery. How will the extension of the fund, which was announced in the First Minister's programme for government, build on that work and help to tackle the nature crisis?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Around 250 projects are benefiting from the nature restoration fund so far. We are extending the fund, which will provide essential investment for the steps that we are taking to halt biodiversity loss in Scotland's species, woodlands, rivers and seas, and to encourage them back on the road to recovery.

UHI Perth

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Yesterday, we learned that the principal of UHI Perth had stepped down with immediate effect. That follows on from concerns about management decisions taken at the college, the collapse of the long-established subsidiary company Air Service Training (Engineering) Ltd and funding challenges caused by Scottish National Party budget choices, leaving the college with a £2 million deficit. What action will the Scottish Government now take to provide assurance to staff and students that their futures are secure?

The First Minister (John Swinney): First, I thank Dr Margaret Cook for her service as principal of UHI Perth, and I wish her well for the future. The college is a self-governing and autonomous institution that is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands. It is responsible for its own decisions within the funding envelopes that the Scottish Government provides. The Government, of course, supports substantially the

college sector in Scotland. Decisions on distribution of funds are made on the Government's behalf by the Scottish Funding Council, in accordance with legislation.

The Government strongly supports the college sector. I look forward to the leadership of UHI Perth taking forward the strengthened measures that are required to ensure the future of the institution, which plays a significant part in the education of my constituents and has a formidable footprint in the local economy in Perthshire.

Childhood Cancer Diagnosis (Financial Support)

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): My constituent Ryan Thomas Quinn is in the Parliament today. His friend Aaron Murphy died tragically young, and Ryan is raising awareness of the considerable financial costs for families affected by childhood cancer diagnosis, many of whom are forced to borrow money to cope.

I recognise that, under special rules for terminal illness, fast-track access to disability payments is in place, and I welcome the guidance for doctors and nurses on ensuring access to those benefits. Could something similar be offered to those affected by childhood cancer? How can we ensure that families are able to quickly access all routes of funding and support following a childhood cancer diagnosis?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am sympathetic to the point that Claire Baker makes, and I welcome Ryan to Parliament. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice are meeting him this afternoon, which was no doubt arranged by Claire Baker. I welcome that engagement.

I commit to the Government engaging on the issue. Claire Baker makes a reasonable point about supporting families with children who are affected by a cancer diagnosis, which is a tragic and traumatising experience to have. I commit my ministers to addressing the issue.

While I am on my feet, I might say that, several years ago, Perth high school, which educates children in my constituency, lost a child to teenage cancer. A couple of weeks ago, around 400 of the young people ran in the Perth park run to raise money for the Teenage Cancer Trust, which they do every year in memory of the young person who they lost. That is an indication of the absolute solidarity of young people on this tragic issue, and I compliment them on their activities in that respect. *[Applause.]*

Wave Energy (Orkney)

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome yesterday's announcement at the All-Energy conference that Orkney will be the site of the UK's largest wave energy project, demonstrating Scotland's massive potential in wave and tidal stream generation. Will the First Minister provide more details on that initiative, and does he agree that we must continue to build momentum to ensure that Scotland can become a world leader in renewables?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am delighted to welcome the news, which Emma Roddick has commented on, that CorPower Ocean will site its 5 megawatt array at the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney. The project is scheduled to deploy in 2029 and will see components manufactured locally, creating skilled jobs and supporting the local supply chain. This is another indication of our communities' outlook and willingness to embrace renewables. It is a huge fillip to the magnificent activity that has been going on at EMEC in Orkney for many years.

I assure Emma Roddick that the Government will ensure that there is wide awareness of the significance of a project of this nature in strengthening our agenda on renewables, which is a huge strength for Scotland.

Accessible Housing (Clackmannan)

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Plans to build affordable homes for disabled residents in Clackmannan have been delayed while costs are recalculated. The council previously laid proposals to construct bungalows on a site in the town, but those proposals have now been reduced. Given the urgent requirements for more accessible housing in my region, what assurances can the Scottish Government give that it will do all that it can to maximise the availability for that much-needed development to progress?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I will say two things to Mr Stewart in that respect. First, our planning hub is looking practically at a number of sites that have stalled or have some difficulty. We all know that issues can emerge in the system, and our planning hub is looking at those particular developments. If Mr Stewart writes to me, I will make sure that the relevant minister takes that forward.

My second point is on the question of construction costs, which I referred to earlier in my answer to Mr Sarwar. One of the problems with a number of developments is that the cost of construction materials increased substantially during 2021-22. The annual average growth rate in construction costs was 5 per cent in the four-year period between 2017 and 2020. In 2021-22, it

was 24 per cent—nearly five times as much. Those are some of the practical cost issues that are being wrestled with.

If Mr Stewart wants to send me details of that situation, I will certainly explore what can be done through the planning hub to support his constituents.

British Horse Society “Dead Slow” Campaign

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): As the welcome summer months approach, we enter the season of gala days and common ridings across the Borders, Midlothian and throughout rural Scotland. The British Horse Society has launched a “Dead Slow” campaign, which is aimed at motorists, in order to prevent injuries and even deaths for riders and horses.

Will the First Minister encourage drivers—particularly city drivers—to remind themselves of their obligations under the highway code on how to drive when there are horses on the roads in rural areas? I declare an interest as convener of the cross-party group on animal welfare.

The First Minister (John Swinney): Horse riders are recognised as vulnerable road users, and we work with partners such as the British Horse Society to improve safety. A vulnerable road users working group, which includes the British Horse Society, met on 1 May.

We very much support the activities that Christine Grahame referred to. Common ridings are a critical part of the identity of the Scottish Borders, and gala days around the community are important celebrations of local activity. In our awareness campaigns, we will urge all drivers, particularly those who are unfamiliar with rural roads, to follow the highway code by passing horses at no more than 10mph and giving at least 2m of space for horses as they pass.

Glasgow's Pride (Political Party Participation)

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): This week, Glasgow's Pride announced that, in line with major pride events in England, political parties are no longer welcome to participate. That never happened even in the worst days of political homophobia in the 1980s and 1990s. It is a direct result of political attacks on the rights of LGBTQ+ people, especially in relation to transphobia.

Does the First Minister acknowledge that the political landscape as a whole has betrayed the trust of our community? Does he understand that there are Scottish Government employees who are currently living in fear that their workplaces will be subject to segregation policies, as has already happened in Parliament? What does the First

Minister intend to do to begin restoring the trust that has been lost?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I recognise and sympathise with the point that Mr Harvie has made. As I have said consistently since the Supreme Court judgment, I am concerned by how individuals, particularly those in the trans community, are feeling as a consequence of the climate that we are in. I am very struck by the fact that the climate of the discourse on this issue is absolutely unacceptable.

Let me, from this podium, make it clear—as I made it clear in the programme for government announcement—that my Government is absolutely resolute in our support for the LGBTQI+ community, and that we will take actions that will be aimed at protecting the rights of all, because the rights of all must be protected in our society. That is the solemn commitment that I give to the community and to the Parliament today.

Ninewells Hospital (Maternity Services)

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): This morning, Healthcare Improvement Scotland published the report of its unannounced inspection of maternity services at Ninewells hospital in Dundee. The report contains shocking details, including delays to the induction of labour of up to three days, vital equipment such as fetal heartbeat monitors being damaged and not replaced, and a rapid fall in the number of experienced midwives. Despite hard-working staff providing “compassionate and responsive care”, the state of the service was so bad in January that the HIS made a second visit in February and said that it was

“not assured that sufficient progress or improvement had been made”.

The situation is hugely worrying for families and especially for expectant mothers across Dundee and Angus. What will the First Minister’s Government do to ensure that necessary improvements to maternity services happen?

The First Minister (John Swinney): First, it is important that inspections of that type take place so that we can challenge unacceptable practice. Therefore, I am grateful to Healthcare Improvement Scotland for the thoroughness of the work that it has undertaken. Secondly, although I understand the legitimate points that Mr Marra has made, strengths in the service were also identified, which Mr Marra acknowledged in his question. That should be recognised, but it should not be an excuse for not addressing unacceptable practice. My third point is that it is essential that the NHS Tayside leadership takes forward those issues with urgency. That will be communicated firmly to

the leadership—it probably already has been—by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. When I asked my question, I should have said that I am in receipt of adult disability payment. I apologise for not declaring that.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Balfour. That is on the record.

That concludes First Minister’s question time. The next item of business is a members’ business debate. There will be a short suspension to allow those who are leaving the gallery and the chamber to do so before the next item of business begins.

12:47

Meeting suspended.

12:49

On resuming—

Second Home Ownership

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-17422, in the name of Ross Greer, on addressing the impact of second home ownership in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Please excuse my voice; I hope that it lasts the pace.

As members will be aware, we will resume business at 2 pm and we must leave sufficient time for staff to be able to clear the chamber. I therefore ask members to stick to the agreed speaking time that they have signed up to. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament is concerned about the reported impact of the expansion of second home ownership on communities across Scotland; believes that the impact of second home ownership is felt more keenly in some communities than in others, including in areas of natural beauty; notes with concern reports that, in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, 5% of all houses are second homes or holiday lets, compared with 1% nationally, and that the figure is 12% in the Cairngorms National Park, rising to 20% in areas such as parts of Badenoch and Strathspey, that they account for over one third in Lochranza, on the Isle of Arran, and that in Coigach almost half of all homes are second homes or holiday lets; considers that recent changes to the additional dwelling supplement (ADS) and council tax have contributed to a reduction in second home purchases, with 2,455 fewer second homes bought in 2024 than in 2023; understands that the increased rate of ADS alone is expected to raise more than a quarter of a billion of pounds for public services, including the provision of affordable housing in 2025-26, and notes the view that further targeted measures, including potential tax reforms, should be considered to rebalance primary and second home ownership levels in communities where the housing crisis is particularly acute.

12:50

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I thank all the members who signed my motion, giving us the opportunity to discuss the issue today, particularly those whom, admittedly, I harassed to make sure that I received the support of three different parties. We have entered a new era in which members' business debates require the support of three parties rather than two due to the recent changes in the composition of the Parliamentary Bureau, so I am grateful to those whom I chased around corridors to make sure that they had seen my motion for signing it.

It was exactly a year ago today that the Parliament declared a housing emergency in

Scotland. Laura, who is married and has four children aged four, five, 13 and 17, spoke to the BBC today, a year on from that declaration. Her family became homeless in June 2021 after being evicted by their landlord from a privately rented home. She told the BBC:

"Calling it a housing emergency and not doing anything about it isn't helping anyone."

Late last year, 10,000 children were in temporary accommodation in Scotland. As of this spring, more children were in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh than in all of Wales. The crisis has no single cause. Sky-high rents, which are far outstripping wage growth, have made renting simply unaffordable for many people, particularly in the private rented sector. A lack of rights for tenants and poor enforcement against dodgy landlords have resulted in exploitation.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which was drafted by my Green colleague Patrick Harvie, will significantly improve that. If Parliament passes it, the bill will deliver rent controls and more rights for tenants. It will make it harder to evict tenants, which is absolutely key. One of the most important issues is that there are simply not enough affordable and available homes. However, there is little point in building more, particularly in the worst-affected communities, if those homes will not be available to those who need somewhere to live. In many areas, desperately needed houses are being bought and used as holiday homes or short-term lets.

Across Scotland, about 1 per cent of all homes are second homes. However, in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, the figure is 5 per cent; in the Cairngorms, it is 12 per cent, rising to about 20 per cent in towns such as Braemar; in Lochranza on Arran it is 40 per cent; and in parts of Wester Ross, every second home is a holiday home or a holiday let. Those latter areas are not the only parts of the country where such housing now represents a majority of the whole of the local housing sector. That cannot be right. It drives up prices and reduces availability.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Mr Greer quite rightly identifies areas where there is a density of second home ownership for holiday homes, but does he also accept that there are many people, such as members of the Scottish Parliament, who, for the purposes of employment, for example, require a second home and are being penalised by the additional taxes?

Ross Greer: I recognise that distinctions should be made between the different types of second home use. I do not think that that diminishes the impact that such use has on local housing supply or on people who are simply unable to find a first

home—a home that they actually need to live in. I will come on to talk about the need for a more targeted and nuanced approach to the tax measures in this area.

The impact right now on people in those communities, particularly young people, is that they are often forced to leave the communities that they have grown up in because there is no home for them to live in as an adult. That is having a devastating impact in urban and rural areas.

We need only walk a few feet from the Parliament to see the key lock boxes and the impact that the issue is having in the centre of Edinburgh, but the situation is causing an existential crisis for rural and island communities. Those who have children or want to have children are being forced to leave because there is no home for them to raise their family in. As a result of that, schools in those communities close. Communities cannot continue without young families and children. I have heard people say that being in an area that is increasingly dominated by homes that sit empty for most of the year is like living in a museum or a theme park. Those areas their status and that feeling of being a real community. There is a clear pattern to areas with above-average second home ownership.

Among Scotland's council areas, Argyll and Bute is at the top of the table of second home ownership, with 3,000 second homes and about 1,700 licensed short-term let premises. In Highland, there are about 3,500 second homes and 6,500 short-term lets. In North Ayrshire, there are 1,500 second homes and 800 short-term lets. Edinburgh is below average on second homes, as we would expect—in fact, the primary home of many second-home owners is in a city such as Edinburgh. However, Edinburgh is second only to Highland when it comes to short-term let licences that have been issued. Across Scotland, there are about 50,000 properties in total, with about 22,000 second homes and 27,500 licensed short-term lets—and that does not include short-term lets that are not yet licensed.

I lodged the motion to find out whether other parties and individual members agree that the balance across our housing sector is not right. If they agree that the balance is not right, what can we do about it?

Progress has been made. The Greens have delivered the power for councils to double council tax on second and holiday homes. We also doubled, from 4 per cent to 8 per cent, the additional dwelling supplement for people buying an additional property. As a result, there are 2,500 fewer second homes in Scotland than there were a year ago. I welcome the Scottish Government's support for my amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill that seeks to lift the 200 per cent

cap and to let councils set whatever rate they think is appropriate for their local situation.

The balance is still not right, and we need to go further. Short-term let licensing is helping, but more rigorous enforcement is required. However, the tax policy that we have set on holiday homes versus the one on short-term lets is somewhat contradictory. Holiday homes are—quite rightly—subject to double council tax; soon, the charge could be more than that, if my amendment is agreed to. However, short-term lets that are let out for at least 70 days a year are subject to non-domestic rates rather than council tax. Indeed, the owners are much more likely to pay nothing—they can go from a double council tax bill to a 100 per cent reduction on their non-domestic rates as a result of the small business bonus scheme. That is despite the fact that, in some communities, short-term lets are devastating the local housing market and depriving people of the opportunity to stay in the community in which they were raised—and the short-term let owners get a tax break to do that.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Will Ross Greer take an intervention?

Ross Greer: If there is any time in hand, Deputy Presiding Officer, I will do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is very limited time.

Ross Greer: I apologise to the member. I think that I am supposed to come to a close in a moment.

The Parliament has already agreed that we are in a housing crisis across Scotland and that dramatic action is required to address it. However, there is no point in building homes to tackle the crisis, because they are being bought and used as second homes or short-term lets.

The issue is existential for our rural communities. Tax is a powerful tool to tackle it, but it is not our only tool. This afternoon, I look forward to hearing other proposals to escalate action. There are 10,000 children across Scotland in temporary accommodation, but there are 50,000 second homes and short-term lets. That is not right, but it is not inevitable, either. It can be fixed. Fixing it will require standing up to the wealthy. It will require saying and doing what powerful people do not like and what they will not want to hear. However, we owe it to those who need a home of their own to take that action now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who wish to speak in the debate to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak button.

12:57

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank Ross Greer for securing the debate for the chamber. As he and other members will know, this is an issue not only that has a massive impact on many parts of my region—some of which get a shout-out in his motion—but in which I take great personal interest as somebody with experience of struggling to find one secure home to live in and of all the trauma and negative impacts that go along with that.

It was pointed out that some MSPs have second homes. Personally, it is very difficult for me to live with the knowledge that I have a second home at this point. I do not own it, and it is necessary because I represent the Highlands and Islands in our national Parliament, which for some reason is not situated in the Highlands and Islands. However, as a formerly homeless person, having two places to live in is weird and unsettling for me, especially as I walk past the Crisis office when I come down to the Parliament in the morning. I often wish that other people felt half as uncomfortable as that about buying up half of the houses along the Caledonian canal.

As Ross Greer has said, there are different kinds of second home requirements. Many of my constituents have a second home in order to do things such as work in fragile communities to keep the school, general practitioner surgery, dentist or other services running. There are ways of supporting that kind of living situation while also targeting the more harmful kind.

Like most MSPs who represent areas of natural beauty, I suspect, I frequently receive representations from non-constituents who own property in my region to encourage me to resist policy and legislation that would make it harder for them to maintain their extra homes. There is a perception among many of those people that their ownership is harmless and normal. It might be becoming normal, but it is certainly not harmless. When properties lie empty, regardless of whether a cleaner is hired to look after them a few days a year, they are not housing anyone who lives, works or volunteers in the local area, or who otherwise contributes to it. In many rural and island areas, a few homes, a few families and a couple of children can make the difference to the sustainability or otherwise of a whole community.

During Covid, I was struck by the realisation of many people, who did not really notice before, that many homes around them did not contain neighbours. People who could just about manage before the lockdowns realised suddenly that there was no one down the road to help to pick up shopping, parcels or medication. There was nobody living within the radius that they were

allowed to walk within—the properties around them were empty and they felt really alone.

Second homes are voids in a community. The fact that almost every council now charges their owners extra council tax is a step forward in addressing their lack of societal value, but Ross Greer is absolutely right that more can be done. Those purchasing extra homes should be aware of the impact and their responsibility to the community that they want to appreciate. They should be prepared to pay up to allow local services to continue without the staff who might have lived in their holiday home, and for national and local government and other housing providers to build other houses that can be lived in. I believe that if someone is not willing to pay extra towards all that, they have no business purchasing a second home.

Ross Greer is right that everyone should have a home before we start discussing the rights of people to own multiples. It is a house. We are talking about having a safe, secure place to live, and the ability to enjoy life and to be a productive member of society and of a community. Nobody should be sitting without a home, or leaving their community or passing up skilled work because there is not affordable housing available, while others are fighting for their right not to be taxed on their second, third or fourth home.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Meghan Gallacher.

13:01

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I hope that you feel better soon, Presiding Officer.

One of my favourite comic strips when I was growing up was “The Broons”. “The Broons” is a staple in many Scottish households, with generations eagerly awaiting the next edition. It is published in the *Sunday Post* each week, and many people collect the annuals.

Why on earth am I talking about “The Broons” today? The Broons, fae Glebe Street, have their but and ben,

“a rare wee beauty spot wi a difference”.

It is a second home, which is the topic of the debate today. A but and ben, for those who are unfamiliar with the term, is a traditional Scottish residential house featuring two rooms—the but being the outer room or kitchen area and the ben being the inner room or living space.

The Broons, a typical working-class family who live in a tenement flat, have that second home in the Highlands, which is a relatively short distance from their home. The Broons belong to more than

one community. Second home ownership is intrinsically Scottish.

The fictional Broons enjoy their weekends there and, although the younger Broons need some encouragement to enjoy their short breaks, the family have many an adventure while enjoying some time away with the family. One short comic strip section even shows how the family renovated the but and ben to bring the property back into use.

The point that I am making is that second homes are not always for the rich and wealthy. I hope that that is taken into consideration during the debate, because ordinary working Scots are also involved in second home ownership.

Ross Greer: I agree that, historically, that has been a prominent part of Scottish life. A generation ago, my working-class family from Maryhill had a hut at Carbeth. However, does Meghan Gallacher acknowledge that, over the past 20 to 30 years in particular, the balance of second home ownership has skewed massively towards those in our society who are far wealthier? The prospect of owning a second home is now far out of reach for the vast majority of working-class Scots in this country.

Meghan Gallacher: That is why we need to look at the whole of our housing sector. We need to build more homes in order to tackle the housing emergency. We are not going to do it otherwise, because, as it stands, supply is completely outweighed by the demand of people who need homes. I think that we can all agree on that point.

Just before the debate, I had a look at what properties are available in certain areas, including north Ayrshire, which Ross Greer represents. I discovered, from looking at the website of just one selling company, that, on Arran—to take that as a silo—there are 81 properties available right now. Therefore, there are homes available, but we need to look deeper into the reasons why people are not buying in those areas. That is an important point to make in the debate that we are having today.

We need to look at the facts. Second homes equate to just 1 per cent of the total number of dwellings in Scotland. People tend to buy second homes in areas that they would like to move to permanently when they retire, which means that they contribute to not just one but two economies. We have had discussions about exemptions and all the rest of it. It is in the interests of people who have second homes to play an active role in supporting both the community in which they have their primary home and the one in which they have their secondary home.

The best way of ensuring that communities that have particularly high levels of second home ownership are able to thrive is to make sure that

we have a sufficient supply of homes to meet demand. That is the biggest point that I can make today.

We also need to look at how we approach the housing sector from an ideological perspective, given the need to ensure that we have enough homes to tackle the housing emergency. If we put in place policies that stifle investment and development and constrain the provision of more affordable homes in the private rented sector or elsewhere, we will not be able to tackle the big problems that we face with housing today.

I will leave my remarks there, in case I get a telling-off about timing from the Presiding Officer.

13:06

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests: I previously owned property to rent.

I thank Ross Greer for bringing the debate to the chamber. I acknowledge the work that he has done on the impact of second home ownership and his fierce commitment to ensuring that we address the housing needs of people in Scotland. It was appropriate that he raised the fact that it has been a year since a housing emergency was announced.

Second homes are defined as homes that are furnished and lived in for at least 25 days in a 12-month period, but which are not someone's main residence. My understanding—I am not an expert in this area; as members know, I cover the health brief—is that, as of September 2024, there were just over 21,000 second homes in Scotland. In my view, that represents a housing market failure, because the primary purpose of homes, as Emma Roddick pointed out, is that they are for living in. That failure, which has taken away the opportunity to provide housing for individuals, families and communities, is one that Scottish Labour believes that we need to reverse. We need to bring those homes back into use.

I think that Ross Greer's motion fairly sets out the challenges of second home ownership. During my time in the Parliament, the sense that I have gained from debates, research papers and constituents—especially those who live in rural areas—is that those challenges are very real.

Of course, when we read the research, we realise that second home ownership is a multifaceted issue—of course it is. Some people say that there are benefits associated with the spend that is connected to second home properties. Some argue that it improves the local economy and keeps resources available for people who live locally. However, it is fair to say that the most compelling evidence to push

Parliament to tackle some of the issues comes from local testimony.

As we have heard, there are concerns that a high concentration of second homes causes an increase in house prices and rents and reduces the housing supply for local people. A lack of affordable housing affects not only individuals and communities but local businesses that want to attract workers.

Very importantly, a lack of affordable housing also affects the recruitment of public sector workers. I have strong evidence of that from the Borders area of my South Scotland region. Trade unions have told me that people are not coming to work in the area or are having to travel a long distance, which sometimes involves a journey of an hour or more, to get to their work. That is not sustainable. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee has heard compelling evidence on the issue, in oral evidence and on a visit to the islands. The health boards have described the situation as a crisis for service delivery. It is a very important issue.

I have heard from my own constituents that empty second homes cause a lot of frustration in communities, particularly when people find it difficult to rent or purchase a home within their own community. We see that every day. People want to live within their community, near their network and want to bring up their own children near to the place where they grew up. Those personal stories mean that we have to take the issue seriously and take a robust approach to tackling it.

I am about to run out of time, but I reassure Mr Greer that Scottish Labour really wants to look at the issues that he mentioned in his motion. I know that you will have spoken to my colleague Mark Griffin about that. We want to see tax reforms to ensure that we can turn that around in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members always to speak through the chair.

13:10

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I join colleagues in thanking Ross Greer for bringing this debate to the chamber. During his time holding the finance brief, he has shown the fierce determination that Carol Mochan described and has worked to find ways to use tax as a tool to deliver a much fairer and more equal society. He also acutely understands the housing pressures that are faced in many areas of Scotland, particularly within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, which lies in both of our parliamentary regions and is also where I now live.

The debate is about housing but it is also about poverty and inequality. There is a need to use all possible levers, including planning, licensing and taxation, to ensure the health of our communities.

In hotspots across my region, increasing numbers of family homes are being bought up by people from outwith those communities for use as second homes or to rent out as businesses. That is not the 1950s picture that Meghan Gallacher pointed to: we are seeing increasing and intensive ownership of second homes.

Our communities welcome people who come to make their lives in permanent homes, helping to build a better future for all and committing to communities, but we are seeing more second homes artificially inflating the housing market and pricing out locals, particularly families who are taking their first steps in the housing market. Adult children often have to stay in the family home while saving for a deposit or even to move out of their community, away from friends and family, at a stage in life when support networks are incredibly important.

I also see older people struggling. They can become trapped in unsuitable housing because there are few properties available to downsize into and they sometimes end up in precarious tenancies in poorly serviced park homes. There are few options for people in many rural communities.

It is in those hotspots that we can most clearly see the impact of second home ownership. Shops close because of a lack of regular custom, schools have dwindling numbers of young people, leading to their eventual closure, and residents no longer have neighbours.

In Highland Perthshire this week, in a move that I warmly welcome, the council finally agreed to create Scotland's third short-term lets control area. That is one intervention to address just one part of the problem. There was a remarkable response to that council decision from the chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers, who said that a short-term let delivers

"three times the economic output of a private home."

That comment speaks volumes about the many people who are struggling right now, including in my community, to find a home in rural Scotland. It also raises serious questions. What is more important, a place to live or wealth generation? Who feels the benefit of that wealth? Does it stay in the community or does it go to a remote owner or to a letting agency? Who will work to clean and service those lets if there is a lack of permanent housing for local people?

There is a balance to be struck between being a place to live and simply a place to visit. Holiday

lets help to make tourism happen but, alongside second homes, their proliferation can lead to a tipping point where communities become effectively hollowed out. Members have already pointed to many examples, with Ross Greer saying that many people feel as though they are living in a museum or a theme park and Emma Roddick pointing to the impact on her community. I point to Elie and Earlsferry, an area that has the highest percentage of short-term lets in Fife, with almost one in five houses being let out—a figure that does not even account for private second homes.

I welcome the opportunity to have this debate. Every community has its own different and complex set of housing issues to deal with, but all the tools in the box are needed to create a better balance of housing, particularly in rural Scotland. We should not be afraid to give communities, councils and national parks the powers that they genuinely need to achieve that.

13:14

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Although I accept that some of what has been said in this debate is valid and that there are issues with the concentration of second homes in some parts of Scotland, I want to dwell on some of the unintended—or perhaps intended—consequences of some of the fiscal measures that have been taken in respect of second home ownership. I will give a couple of examples that the minister can take away to consider with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government how the taxes, if they are to remain, could be better applied.

There are two reasons for such taxes. One is ideological and the other is that the Government needs to get money wherever it can find it. The same goes for local authorities, which, given the power to levy a 100 per cent supplement on council tax, will do so because of the financial pressures that they face as a result of the SNP's year-on-year real-terms cuts to their finances.

The approach that the Government is adopting is a blunt instrument. It is indiscriminate and arbitrary, and it is pulling into additional tax measures people who I honestly do not believe should be caught in that trap.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I am afraid that I have only four minutes and I have some ground to cover.

The first specific case that I will mention is that of my constituent Ruth Campanile, who works at the Old Clubhouse in Gullane, which is in the minister's constituency. Ruth lives on the premises of the pub, which is owned by her brother. East

Lothian Council has now determined that the home that she will move to soon, when she retires, is a second home and it will therefore accrue a double council tax. That is something that she cannot afford. The legislation still provides for councils to give a 50 per cent discount for a job-related dwelling, but East Lothian Council is not willing to apply that discount.

I say to the minister that there are reasons why people in his constituency of East Lothian and elsewhere will require a second home. Recently, I spoke to a consultant who works in the national health service between two hospitals. Because rents have gone up in so many areas, he decided to buy a second home so that he could contribute to healthcare in two remote parts of Scotland. The consequence of that was that the property that he bought accrued the additional dwelling supplement, which is now 8 per cent. That meant considerable expenditure for him to be able to do his job in two places.

The positions that are faced by council tax payers and those who buy homes is similar in that the tax measures are indiscriminate and blunt and they are catching in the tax system people who are not traditional second home owners—that is, holiday home owners. People who own holiday homes are also being pulled in.

I will give another example of a resident of Gullane in the Minister for Housing's constituency who has owned a second home there for many years. The owner inherited the property and he and his wife are not wealthy people. They spend time in the south of England so that they can be with their grandchildren but, ultimately, their hope would be to move to Gullane. I say to the minister that, if that property came on to the market, I very much doubt that a first-time buyer in East Lothian would buy it. The couple concerned are there pretty regularly—at least once a month. The minister will know that area very well. If the couple sold the property, I suspect it would not be a to local East Lothian resident. The chances are that it would be to a wealthy American golfer who, rather than visiting once a month, might visit only once a year.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I am afraid that I do not have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Hoy is about to conclude.

Craig Hoy: Ultimately, the issue is that those who cannot afford to retain a second home are forced to sell up and they often sell to wealthy second home owners who are prepared to cough up.

If we are to maintain the taxes, I urge the minister to look at them again. They are indiscriminate and they are catching people who I believe should not be caught by them. I hope that the minister will think again when the Government reforms both ADS and council tax.

13:19

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank Ross Greer for securing the debate, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

I believe that every single person deserves a safe, secure and stable place to call home—not a commodity or an investment, or a holiday retreat, but a home. We are facing a housing emergency in Scotland. That crisis is the result of decades of political choices that have privileged private wealth over public good; property rights over the right to a home; and profit over people. Nowhere is that clearer than in the spread of second homes across Scotland—homes that stand empty for most of the year while local people are pushed out or priced out.

More than 1.5 million people are living in overcrowded, dangerous, unstable or unaffordable housing. More than 16,000 households are in temporary accommodation, including—as we have heard—more than 10,000 children. Behind each of those numbers is a human being: those are families who are split between relatives' sofas; children who are growing up without a permanent address; and people who are being pushed to the edges of communities that should be theirs.

Those families, and others, worry constantly about where they will sleep tonight, next week and in the future. Yet, across our country, homes are being bought not to house people, but to house profits—to sit empty for most of the year in order to cater for short-term stays that hollow out communities. It cannot be right that, in some places, more than half of all homes are second homes or holiday lets. That is not just unsustainable—it is unjust.

It is clearly a systemic issue. From Aberdeenshire to Angus and from the Highlands to Dundee, homes are being taken out of the hands of people who need them and turned into playthings for the wealthy, and that has just been allowed to happen. The long shadow of right to buy still looms, and housing has been treated as a market, not a human right, which is fuelling inequality and driving up child poverty.

I say in response to some of Craig Hoy's comments that the housing market is broken, and that is why the local family whom he mentioned would not be able to buy a home in East Lothian. It

is not because of anything but the broken housing market, to which his party has contributed.

Craig Hoy: Will the member give way?

Maggie Chapman: I am not going to take an intervention.

Now, entire towns and villages are becoming ghost towns in the off season, and their school shops and services are under threat because their communities are hollowed out. We must change course.

The recent increase in the additional dwelling supplement and the ability for councils to raise council tax on second homes is welcome, and it is making a difference. In 2024, 2,455 fewer second homes were bought than in the previous year, and the additional revenue—more than a quarter of a billion pounds—can be redirected to affordable housing.

However, that must be just the start: we need bolder, braver and more compassionate action. We must consider reforms such as Norway's boplikt law, which requires that homes be lived in year round. We need to rebalance ownership in favour of those who actually live and work in our communities.

Homes are not just bricks and mortar—they are the foundation of health, dignity, community and hope. We owe it to every family who is still waiting, every child who is still in temporary accommodation and every village that is watching its future slip away to act with urgency and compassion.

Housing is a human right, not a commodity. It must never be a plaything for the rich—a bolthole for the few while the many go without. Homes should be real homes—places of belonging, community and care, not investments or profit generators, and certainly not just weekend retreats for those who can afford multiple properties.

Homes are for living in, not for hoarding or speculating in, or for escaping to. Homes are for people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister, Paul McLennan, to respond to the debate.

13:23

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I am grateful to the member for bringing the debate to the chamber. Our "Housing to 2040" strategy sets out an

"aim ... for everyone to have a safe, high-quality home that is affordable and meets their needs in the place they want to be."

While it is a bold vision, we need to recognise that, fundamentally, that is a basic principle. Today's debate has highlighted a range of experiences and views both for and against second home ownership, and has emphasised the gap in our society between those with wealth and those without.

Housing is both a social and economic good. It is critical to supporting health, wellbeing, life chances and job prospects, tackling child poverty and driving economic growth. We have a strong track record on building new affordable homes, but we need to do more.

It is right to acknowledge that ownership patterns of existing housing are an important factor among the challenges that we face in achieving our aim. In recent decades, the potential to make money from residential housing has shifted and expanded, and those with disposable income have looked to opportunities with the growth of the short-term let sector and rising trends in housing markets.

That is why we have said that residential properties need to be prioritised as homes for living in, not for accumulating wealth. At the same time, we recognise that second homes, if used for tourism, may bring benefits for local economies, as not all second homes may be suitable for year-round living. We continue to work with local authorities to improve access to reliable data. That is an important point.

Ross Greer is right that 1 per cent of all homes in Scotland are second homes but, as we have heard today, there are wide variations across local authority areas, with clear concentrations in rural locations. I will touch on that in a second. We believe that local areas are therefore best placed to make decisions about how to find the right balance to ensure the availability of homes to meet local needs and community sustainability. We have delivered against commitments in our "Housing to 2040" strategy to help local authorities to do that by providing powers and tools to make the best use of the existing housing in their areas.

Of course, changing ownership patterns will not happen overnight, and doing so requires a range of mechanisms. We have delivered that through taxation by giving local authorities the power to set policy on council tax on second homes, which may involve charging a premium of up to 100 per cent in all or part of the council area.

Craig Hoy: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: Yes, if it is very brief.

Craig Hoy: Will the minister undertake to look into the issue of second home ownership and council tax for employment purposes? A briefing

from the Scottish Parliament information centre says that under schedule 1 of the Council Tax (Variation for Unoccupied Dwellings) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, councils can still apply a 50 per cent discount where the property is occupied for employment purposes. If that is the case, will the minister remind councils of their obligation to do so?

Paul McLennan: That 50 per cent discount is mandatory. I am aware of the case of Ms Campanile, which Craig Hoy mentioned, and I am engaging with the local authority on that point. It is mandatory. If there are examples of the discount not being used, I ask Mr Hoy to keep in touch with me.

Part of the revenue that is raised from the council tax on second homes must be used for affordable housing, and I will continue to press local authorities to do that.

Ross Greer: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: Again, yes, if it is very brief.

Ross Greer: I use my intervention as an opportunity to reassure Craig Hoy that the minister, the cabinet secretary and I are working on a further amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which, alongside lifting the cap on council tax, would create statutory guidance for local authorities to address the kinds of scenario that he has talked about. Clearly, for example, NHS locums should not be charged double council tax for working in a fragile community.

Paul McLennan: I thank Ross Greer for that and for his work so far with us on that point.

I mentioned the increase from 6 per cent to 8 per cent in the amount of additional dwelling supplement that is paid when purchasing additional residential property of a value of more than £40,000. That will help first-time buyers and home movers to compete with second home buyers and buy-to-let investors. On top of that, as has been mentioned, it will raise additional revenue to support Scotland's national priorities. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has estimated that it will raise an additional £32 million in 2025-26, which will take total estimated ADS revenues up to £258 million.

Local authorities may also designate short-term let control areas. Mark Ruskell spoke about the work of Perth and Kinross Council, which I welcome, to manage the concentration of short-term lets through the planning system. Those are powers that local authorities have.

I will mention a couple of key things from members' contributions. Ross Greer mentioned empty homes. This year, £2 million, I think, has been invested in the Scottish Empty Homes

Partnership to continue to reduce the number of empty homes. Investment from the Government of £3.7 million has brought 11,000 empty homes back since 2010.

Meghan Gallacher talked about the availability of new housing, and we are consulting at the moment on exemptions for such housing.

Carol Mochan mentioned key workers. We heard about the work that Ross Greer, the cabinet secretary and I have been talking about. There is also the £25 million key worker fund. Again, we are encouraging local authorities to come forward on that.

Through those measures, as has been said, there has been a reduction in the number of second homes. Together with investments in affordable housing and progress to deliver affordable homes, we are taking action on homelessness and temporary accommodation, as well as the activity that I mentioned to drive down the number of empty homes.

In concluding, I emphasise that we have just set out a programme for government commitment to remove the legislative constraint on the level of the council tax premium that can be applied to second and long-term-empty homes.

Many issues that have been raised by Ross Greer and others relate to amendments that are proposed for the Housing (Scotland) Bill. The Government is working with Mr Greer on his amendment about council tax premiums ahead of stage 3. I am also willing to work across the parties to consider ways to enable the housing market to operate fairly across Scotland, so that it provides housing options that are affordable, and choices in all communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

13:29

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions, and the portfolio is education and skills.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Responsibilities)

1. **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** How good it is to see the entire ministerial team here today for this session.

To ask the Scottish Government which of the portfolio questions taken in the chamber on 25 April 2025 raised matters that fall within the specific responsibilities of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, as listed on the Scottish Government website, in light of reported concerns about her missing the session for reasons not related to her ministerial duties. (S6O-04664)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): The question, as drafted, cites 25 April 2025, which was a Friday, and the Scottish Parliament does not sit on a Friday. However, all the education and skills questions that were taken on Thursday 24 April were answered by a minister from the education and skills portfolio.

Douglas Ross: Sorry—I asked a very specific question. On that day, there were issues in the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on teachers experiencing physical violence and verbal abuse, on vaping in schools and on teachers stuck on temporary contracts. If the cabinet secretary is honest with the chamber, she will say that she was on the stump for Scottish National Party votes when she should have been here, doing her job. Will Jenny Gilruth—not in her usual condescending way—give an apology to the Parliament for missing that session and, more important, an apology to our pupils, parents and teachers for the disrespect that she showed by missing it?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I ask the cabinet secretary to respond to that, I remind members of the requirement to treat each other in a courteous manner.

Jenny Gilruth: As is set out in rule 13.7 of the Parliament's standing orders,

“oral questions may be answered by any member of the Scottish Government or a junior Scottish Minister”.

Mr Ross had the opportunity today to raise any issue that was pertinent to the children and young

people of Scotland. What a pity—although it is not surprising—that he chose not to do so.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer—*[Interruption.]* Yes, “Here we go” for the SNP members who do not want to hear this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, if you have a point of order, please proceed with it.

Douglas Ross: I have a point of order. The question that was submitted was very specific. I asked the cabinet secretary which of the questions during a previous session—which she missed to campaign for SNP votes—she would have answered if she had been here. Does the cabinet secretary not know which questions she would have answered, or is she deliberately misleading the Parliament by not telling us?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Ross for his contribution. It is not clear that that is a point of order, because the chair is not responsible for the substance of ministerial responses. I intend to leave the matter there, because I am sure that the member is entirely aware of that fact.

I call Gordon MacDonald for a supplementary question.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary appreciate the hypocrisy of Douglas Ross questioning anyone’s attendance at Parliament, given that he previously ditched the Justice Committee to officiate a football match between Sporting Lisbon and Real Madrid and missed a universal credit debate at Westminster to be at Barcelona v Olympiacos? Can the minister remind the chamber of the process by which parliamentary questions are answered?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr MacDonald, I think that one recognises that most of that question had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the cabinet secretary’s remit. I will not suggest that the cabinet secretary respond. I hope that members might wish to ask questions that fall within the cabinet secretary’s remit.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Something that is in the cabinet secretary’s portfolio, which was raised in her absence on 24 April, is teachers being stuck on temporary contracts. In a survey that was carried out, 97 per cent of respondents said that they believe that a lack of permanent jobs in teaching is harming pupils. Why on earth are there so many newly qualified teachers in a cycle of temporary contracts on her watch? That leaves them in limbo and pupils facing a revolving door on staff. Why was campaigning more important than that?

Jenny Gilruth: MSPs take decisions on a daily basis about where to be. I note that the member’s

party leader was not here earlier in the week for the debate on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill. Instead, he chose to be in Hamilton, campaigning.

Let me turn to the substantive point that the member asked about in relation to funding for teacher permanence, which is an important issue. The Scottish Government put forward a budget in which we uplifted the value that was provided to our local authorities for teacher numbers to £186.5 million, and we have provided additionality by way of £29 million for additional support needs to support extra teaching posts, because we recognise that there are challenges in that regard. I must observe that the Labour Party abstained on the Scottish Government’s budget.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): What message does the education secretary think that playing truant from the Parliament, because she believed that she had something better to do, sends to the children she is imploring to attend our schools?

Jenny Gilruth: I must point out that I sincerely missed Stephen Kerr’s presence at the meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee on the evening of 30 April, where he was due to present his own amendments on the Education (Scotland) Bill. I am sure—

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I would love to be a minister, but I am not.

Jenny Gilruth: Well, I am sure that members will recall—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Jenny Gilruth: I am sure that members will recall that, instead, Mr Briggs spoke on behalf of Mr Kerr in answer to questions, much in the same way as ministers were able to represent the education portfolio.

Stephen Kerr: I am not a minister—you are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Right—I think that it is time to move on to question 2.

Forced Adoption

2. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work that it is doing to support those affected by historic forced adoption. (S6O-04665)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): This Government issued a national apology in 2023 for the lifelong suffering that was experienced by those affected by historical forced adoption. Those practices should not have happened, and it is right that we listen to the experiences of mothers and adoptees who continue to feel the impact.

The First Minister recently met with the Movement for an Adoption Apology Scotland and committed to exploring the potential for an oral history project. That would offer a space for sharing and proper recording of personal testimonies, acknowledging the past and providing wider societal recognition and education.

Clare Haughey: Last week, campaigners for the Movement for an Adoption Apology Scotland held an event sponsored by my colleague Marie McNair. Many of those who are affected by historical adoption practices have already passed, so urgent action is imperative. As the minister said in her previous answer, one of the campaigners' key asks of the Scottish Government is to fund an oral history gathering, an issue that, as she said, they discussed with the First Minister at their recent meeting. Can the minister advise what the Scottish Government's response is to the call for an oral history gathering?

Natalie Don-Innes: Yes, of course. As I mentioned in my previous answer, the First Minister has committed in writing to the MAA to explore the oral history project. He has asked officials to work with campaign groups, including the MAA, stakeholders and people with lived experience to discuss how best to take forward the work and to agree timescales. My officials have already been in touch with the MAA on that.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): As one of the MSPs who has campaigned on this matter over the past eight years, I welcomed the national apology. However, since then, victims and survivors have lost faith in the limited progress that has been made by the Scottish Government. In Northern Ireland, for example, a truth recovery independent panel was established, which reported interim findings in May 2024. Is the Scottish Government minded to establish something similar in Scotland? Following the meetings that the First Minister held, when will the Parliament receive an update?

Natalie Don-Innes: Let me be clear that I extend my deepest sympathies to all those who have been affected by those practices. What is most important is that we listen to those with lived experience. We have listened to people with lived experience, and the Government's response is based on that engagement. That includes peer support for those who are affected, lived experience sessions, the funding of a service to help individuals and families to connect, and better information and awareness raising. That is on top of the further work that I alluded to, which the FM has requested.

Mr Briggs asked for a timescale for the work. The work is under way and I am more than happy to respond to Mr Briggs once the timescale has been finalised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stephanie Callaghan joins us remotely.

Vocational Skills Training (Onshore Wind and Solar Industries)

3. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, regarding the provision of vocational skills training, whether it will provide an update on its response to the 2025 ClimateXChange report, "Training provision in Scotland's onshore wind and solar industries". (S6O-04666)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): In June 2024, we commissioned a skills research project with the aim of quantifying the existing provision of skills development and training within the onshore wind and solar industries in Scotland. The final report was published on the ClimateXChange website in February 2025.

In the same month, the Government took part in an industry-led round-table session to consider the report's findings. We are currently working with industry representatives to implement the report's recommendations on enhancing skills and training provision across Scotland, to support the supply of skilled workers who will be required if we are to meet our net zero ambitions.

Stephanie Callaghan: The report shows that meeting Scotland's 2045 net zero target will require major growth in the sector. It also highlights the need for a versatile workforce, including people with broad skill sets who can work across various energy sectors. To the Scottish Government's credit, the report recognises the

"breadth of allied STEM training provision in Scotland",

but it notes that much of it is theoretical and lacking in the more practical aspects. Given that the demand for skills is expected to peak as early as 2027, the report strongly recommends that collaboration should happen urgently across Government, industry and educational institutions, to produce a "comprehensive action plan" that will allow initiatives to launch in time for the start of the 2025 academic year.

Will the minister provide an update on preparations for the new academic year? Can he offer assurances that colleges and training providers will have the resources to enable them to deliver the practical training to ensure that graduates will be work ready?

Graeme Dey: I very much welcome the piece of work that has been done. We have been able to benefit from the findings of a similar and detailed piece of work done by Scottish Outdoor Education

Centres to assess skill shortages in the offshore wind sector. Identifying such shortages and drawing a distinction between those and labour shortages lies at very the foundation of how we can make progress. The benefit of having such information can be seen in the recent budget, in which, in conjunction with the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Greens, the Scottish Government agreed to deliver funding aimed at increasing capacity in the college sector to meet the demand for offshore sector skills.

ClimateXChange's final report will help training providers and the Government to consider how we can meet that demand. As we have seen, it has been identified as going beyond trades skills to cover aspects such as project management and finance. I noted the report's findings on the solar sector, which indicated the need for more people—or at least improved access to skilled training—rather than highlighting a skills shortage.

As for better aligning our training offer with the needs of the economy in all areas of green skills, we are actively engaged with several colleges on curriculum transformation. That will enable them to focus activity on the areas that they deem most important to their localities and to the national economy. I am also exploring an issue that the sector brought to my attention, which concerns impediments to its making fuller use of green skills training resources, particularly around solar, in order to meet changing demand from the industry.

Education (Funding and Staff Retention in Island Communities)

4. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has undertaken with the education sector in island communities, such as Orkney, which are reportedly seeing increasing pressures around funding and staff retention, particularly in relation to the provision of additional support for learning. (S6O-04667)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Although recruitment and deployment of teachers are responsibilities for local authorities, in recent weeks the Scottish Government has engaged with a number of councils, including Orkney Islands Council, to discuss education workforce planning and their plans to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels as part of our agreement with local government. This year, we are providing councils with increased funding of £186.5 million to support that commitment. We are also investing a further £29 million in local and national programmes to enable councils to employ more specialist staff and teachers and to support national initiatives for

recruiting and training additional support needs teachers.

Liam McArthur: Yesterday, the Government agreed to undertake a national review of the implementation of the mainstreaming policy and the availability of specialist additional support places across local authorities. Orkney has no specialist schools. Teachers there report increasing barriers to the delivery of ASL, especially for children with more complex support needs. Any review of the mainstreaming policy must consider the specific circumstances of island communities such as Orkney, where all children with additional support needs are provided for in mainstream education. Those schools desperately need targeted support to facilitate the delivery of effective ASL. Will the cabinet secretary agree to visit Orkney and meet representatives of the local education sector? That will enable her to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges facing teachers and staff there, as well as the support that is needed to improve access to ASL for pupils.

Jenny Gilruth: I am happy to confirm to the member that I am keen to visit Orkney. On Monday, my officials met local officials there, who highlighted the increase in the number of children and young people with identified additional support needs. I know that local officials are very much focused on supporting their teachers to develop their skills and confidence in supporting such children and young people. The Government is providing some support through the Kirkwall ASN centre in Orkney, which receives funding from the learning estate investment programme.

I will be more than happy to visit Orkney, along with Mr McArthur, to learn more about the approach in island communities.

Dyslexia (Information on Reasonable Workplace Adjustments for School Leavers)

5. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that those identified with dyslexia at school leave education with the appropriate supporting information needed to secure reasonable adjustments in the workplace. (S6O-04668)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): I am grateful to Oliver Mundell for raising that important issue, which he has championed through the cross-party group on dyslexia. We are giving careful consideration to Dyslexia Scotland's passport proposal, which it and Oliver Mundell raised with the First Minister in November last year. I would be happy to keep members, Mr Mundell and the cross-party group informed of progress on that. In addition, we will

continue to work with Dyslexia Scotland and local government partners to improve the consistency of early identification of dyslexia in schools, and we will continue to encourage employers to consider reasonable adjustments for employees with dyslexia.

Oliver Mundell: Some time has passed since November, and there is frustration in the dyslexia community about how long it is taking to progress some of the proposals and about the fact that, after years of asking, the Scottish Government still has not identified a lead official for adult dyslexia. Will the cabinet secretary look into that?

Jenny Gilruth: I am happy to do so. For Mr Mundell's understanding, I note that I met Dyslexia Scotland recently and discussed that exact issue. I am more than happy to engage with him and with Dyslexia Scotland, alongside officials, to provide an update, because he raises a hugely important point.

Mr Mundell will recognise that there is, to some extent, an overlap between the responsibilities of the health and education portfolios. It is important that they work together. In that regard, I note that a key theme of yesterday's debate on additional support needs was the need to ensure that there is a more coherent approach to how we support people. I am happy to take that approach and to offer further engagement with Mr Mundell and Dyslexia Scotland.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): It is vital that pupils with dyslexia are supported to reach their full potential. Will the cabinet secretary outline how the General Teaching Council for Scotland's dyslexia and inclusive practice professional recognition programme is supporting teachers to do that?

Jenny Gilruth: The GTCS-accredited dyslexia and inclusive practice programme supports teaching professionals to be well equipped to identify and support learners with dyslexia and to share their learning with colleagues. It is a popular programme, and a record number of teachers participated in it last year. The programme's modules have a strong focus on the dyslexia identification process and the supports that can be put in place in schools. We are also committed to building on the success of such programmes through our additional investment of £29 million this year to support the ASN workforce.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the approach that she is taking to dyslexia today. It is an important condition from which a significant number of young people suffer.

Could the Scottish Government look at situations in which dyslexia was not diagnosed during school life but a positive destination has

been recorded for the individual, and consider whether it should still be classed as a positive destination, given that the dyslexia diagnosis was missed?

I recognise that the issue crosses a number of portfolios, but concerns have been raised with me by individuals who were recorded as being in a positive destination but now, having been diagnosed with dyslexia, need additional support.

Jenny Gilruth: The member raises an important point. I give him a commitment today that I will take that issue away and engage with officials on how we might be able to extrapolate that data. We already gather data on positive destinations at the point of pupils leaving school and again around nine months later. I will take the member's issue away and engage with him and with my officials further.

Schools (Computing Science)

6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how many school pupils are currently studying computing science and how this compares to recent years. (S6O-04669)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): In 2024, there were 12,049 entries into computing science qualifications at national 4, national 5, higher and advanced higher levels. That represents an increase of 282 entries over the parliamentary session, since 2021.

Computing science is only one of the computing and information technology-related courses that are taken by young people in schools, alongside courses such as computer games development, business with information technology, PC passport and cyber security. There were 6,828 entries into those vocational and technical courses in 2024, which was an increase of 2,706 compared with 2021.

Willie Coffey: When I graduated in computer science years ago, in 1980, we had some idea of the power of computing and software to change the world for the better. However, we still seem to struggle to attract the numbers of young people—especially young women—that the industry needs to study computing science and become software developers.

Can the cabinet secretary offer some insight into how the Government can help to address that issue and raise awareness among young people of the fabulous careers that are available in software development, the opportunity to work internationally that those careers offer and the very high salaries that can be earned in an industry that is truly world changing?

Jenny Gilruth: The member raises a pertinent issue in relation to the gender divide in subject choice in our schools. We have a range of activity under way to support more girls to choose computing science. Education Scotland is working with national organisations, including Tech She Can and Code Club, to promote female role models through live lessons and professional learning for teachers.

A successful women in computing event was run last year by St George's school, which I was pleased to attend. It was held in collaboration with industry partners and involved 500 pupils. We are exploring whether similar events could be offered all over Scotland.

In addition, the Government has provided £800,000 to Scottish Teachers Advancing Computing Science to support that organisation in promoting computer science.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It was touching to hear how much the cabinet secretary missed me at the Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting on the Education (Scotland) Bill on 30 April.

There is a problem with the number of computing teachers. It has been pointed out repeatedly that there is a ticking time bomb when it comes to the ageing demographic of those who are currently teaching, and there is no apparent pipeline to replace them. With only three universities offering postgraduate diplomas in education for computing—two in Glasgow—why has the Government failed to expand access to training? Will the cabinet secretary act now to address the recruitment crisis before it fatally undermines Scotland's digital economy?

Jenny Gilruth: I do not know whether the member is aware of the pilot that we are supporting at the University of Aberdeen that speaks to the essence of his question. It is focused on expanding the profession in relation to computing science, where we know that there are challenges. It is a two-year MA secondary course that has been designed to allow students with the relevant higher national diploma qualifications to convert to teaching. The first cohort is due to start in September 2025, and it will complete the course in 2027. The course is still open for applications via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service website, so I encourage members, including Mr Kerr, to help to raise awareness.

We have provided funding for that from the economy portfolio, recognising the point that the member makes about wider workforce challenges and ensuring that there is a pipeline of talent feeding into the system.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Stephen Kerr is right that there is a significant challenge

with the number of computing science teachers. It is down at a record low of 550, and there has been a drop of 28 in the past year. Some incentives are in place to encourage people to switch careers, but they are clearly insufficient. Is the cabinet secretary considering other measures to encourage more people into computing science, because it is essential?

Jenny Gilruth: I agree with the essence of the member's point. Again, it links to wider challenges, not least in computing. Across the curriculum, there are a number of skills gaps in certain subject areas.

We fund the teaching bursary scheme, to which the member alluded. The scheme is worth up to £20,000. However, the success of that programme has dwindled in recent years, and we are reflecting on how it might be able to better support those subject gaps in future. I can confirm to the member that I have asked my officials for more advice on that, because it is important that our programmes to encourage people into teaching are helping to drive recruitment, particularly in areas where we know that we have subject gaps, such as computing science.

Violence against Teachers and School Staff (South Ayrshire)

7. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle any violence against teachers and school staff in South Ayrshire. (S6O-04670)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Violence towards pupils or school staff is completely unacceptable. Specific responsibility for addressing concerns rests with local authorities, which are the employers of school staff.

In August, we published our action plan on relationships and behaviour in schools, jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The plan set out 20 actions to be taken by 2027, including actions to reduce violence in our schools. Last week, I updated Parliament on the positive progress that has been made so far, including our intention to publish in the coming weeks new guidance to support school staff in responding to behaviour, including the use of consequences.

Sharon Dowey: The number of reported assaults and verbal abuse against teachers and support staff in South Ayrshire has nearly tripled since before the pandemic. That violence is disrupting learning, demoralising staff and driving experienced teachers out of the profession. At January's cross-party summit, young people made it clear that, too often, there are no real consequences for those who are responsible.

What immediate action is the Scottish Government taking to protect school staff and ensure that there are real consequences for violent behaviour in our classrooms?

Jenny Gilruth: Ms Dowey and I attended the first summit, which was held earlier this year. I found the evidence that we heard from young people and their parents extremely harrowing. We also had a very helpful cross-party discussion about the route forward.

The issue of consequences continues to be challenging in our schools. There is a variety of measures and action that teachers can take, but, at the extreme, there is the opportunity for teachers to exclude. The pertinent issue that Ms Dowey raises is about the challenge between, on the one hand, an increase in challenging behaviour in our schools, and on the other, exclusion rates that seem to be falling. I have been very clear in my communication in the chamber and in my engagement with schools that we encourage teachers to report incidents as and when they happen and to use exclusion if they see fit.

The national action plan, which was updated a few weeks ago, sets out the range of actions that we have taken, but in my statement to Parliament last week, I said that I would come back to Parliament to provide a further update on consequences. I hope that that reassures the member.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns about the experiences of female teachers and support staff who are subjected to misogynistic abuse? Will she outline what steps the Government is taking to tackle that?

Jenny Gilruth: Female teachers, like female politicians, face misogyny, which I think reflects changes in our society more broadly. In March last year, we published a national framework for schools to help tackle sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Misogynistic behaviour has been identified as an emerging concern in schools, and that framework demonstrates our commitment to taking swift action to respond to current concerns.

The programme for government also commits us to supporting the digital discourse initiative, which provides support and advice to navigate digital media and counter the impacts of disinformation and online hate. I am delighted that we have been able to support the first stage of that work to help teachers and learners with skills to tackle the issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has not been lodged.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I acknowledge that you said in response to my earlier point of order that you are not responsible for the cabinet secretary's answers. However, later on, on the same question, you ruled out a supplementary question as inadmissible because it was not linked to the first question.

Therefore, if you are able to control questions that are asked but not answers, what avenue is available to MSPs to get a response to a lodged question? As the cabinet secretary refused point blank to tell me in response to my question which questions she would have answered when she was absent on 24 April, I have now lodged a written question to seek that information. What can you do from the chair to urge the cabinet secretary to urgently answer that written question?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Ross for his further contribution. I am here to ensure that proceedings can continue. If it is a portfolio question, I am here to ensure that questions can be asked and supplementary questions can be taken. Obviously, as all members know, the supplementary question must be supplementary to the question in the *Business Bulletin* and within the remit of the cabinet secretary's portfolio. I hope that that deals with the point. I did not think that I needed to explain that.

On the member's other point, I have said repeatedly, and the member will know, that the nature of a minister's response is not up to the chair. The minister has responded, and if the member feels unhappy with a minister's response, he is well aware of the number of different ways in which he can pursue the substantive issues, should he so wish.

I hope that that clarifies the matter.

That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Secure Care and the Wider Care System

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Natalie Don-Innes on secure care and the wider care system. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:29

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): I acknowledge the current capacity constraints in secure care. Alongside partners, we are taking a range of actions to address those challenges, and I have been updating the Parliament regularly since the beginning of the year. I highlighted those actions during my most recent statement in late March and, at the end of April, I wrote to the conveners of the Education, Children and Young People Committee and the Criminal Justice Committee.

Today, I will set out again the work that we are doing to bolster our secure care estate, to develop preventative alternatives to deprivation of liberty, and to improve the wider care system. In doing so, we aim to maintain an integrated, equitable approach to children who may require secure care. Decisions around the placement of children in secure accommodation—and the appropriate continuation of placements—remain with the relevant decision makers, including the independent courts, children's hearings, chief social work officers and secure accommodation providers. Every appropriate action is being taken to protect capacity across the secure estate and, as of 10 am, four secure places were available.

On capacity, I am pleased to confirm that the new national contingency resource opened in Rossie last month. Those beds are now available and are being used to care for children. That represents a significant Government commitment, but we expect to take further capacity restoration action in the months ahead. I am very grateful to providers and other partners for their continued agility as we consider options.

One key factor that will directly inform the extent of capacity restoration action will be the continued recovery at St Mary's Kenmure. St Mary's is currently actively augmenting staff capacity and wishes to support an incremental, sustainable and increased capacity as soon as is safely possible. I understand that some key appointments have been made and others are in train.

Our primary focus has been on stabilising and restoring capacity within secure accommodation. This is essential to ensuring that children have

continued access to the care and support that they need to keep them and others safe in environments that are best suited to their individual needs. I assure the Parliament that we are approaching that work with urgency and care. Indeed, each action must be implemented in a way that upholds the highest standards of safety and overall equity of access.

By funding a dedicated professional lead at Social Work Scotland for the next 12 months, we are supporting improved awareness and confidence among professionals who work in Scotland's placing authorities. The policy and practice adviser will work alongside officials in Scottish Government. The recruitment process is now well under way, and the interviews have been held in the past week.

My late April correspondence to committees confirmed that I had intended to deliver a further statement next month, at which point we would be able to confirm other elements of our contingency actions, alongside our response to the "Reimagining Secure Care" report. That said, I assure members that the Scottish Government has been active across the three key domains of the challenge—looking at possibilities before, during and after secure care. All three are essential aspects of a comprehensive response.

In order to be as helpful as I can to Parliament, I will summarise some options that have been generated over recent weeks, although I emphasise that not all of these leads will be realised. I will say as much as I can without breaching potential partners' confidence or risking child confidentiality. I am grateful to everyone across the sector who has generously supported that activity. At each stage, we have benefited from advice and support from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Social Work Scotland.

We hope to confirm shortly the offer of another Government-funded national contingency resource. Officials have also contacted and visited former secure accommodation and residential childcare sites in Edinburgh and North Lanarkshire, to see whether those sites could be brought back into service to support restored capacity. We have also asked each current secure provider how they might be able to assist with restoring capacity. We might even consider new-build flexible secure provision, in line with what is set out in the Promise and the "Reimagining Secure Care" report. Beyond direct secure capacity, officials have reached out to NHS Lothian colleagues to learn about multidisciplinary health-led teams that offer trauma-informed alternatives. Officials have spoken with a range of potential third sector partners.

I have been clear that secure accommodation should be used only when absolutely necessary. That is why we are also working closely with third sector partners to identify and develop high-intensity, wraparound services that offer credible, safe alternatives to the deprivation of liberty. These services will help to improve outcomes, reduce reliance on secure care and deliver the ambitions of the Promise. Further information will be included in our response, which will be published next month, to the “Reimagining Secure Care” report.

Members are aware of how crucial early help and support is in preventing families from reaching crisis in the first place. To ensure that holistic family support is available in our communities and to help families thrive and prevent crisis, we have increased funding for children’s services planning partnerships, through the whole family wellbeing fund, to £38 million this year. I am pleased that the latest social work statistics, which were published in April, suggest that progress is being made. There has been an 18.1 per cent reduction in the number of children and young people who are in care since the Promise was made in 2020. Although that only tells part of the story, it is encouraging progress.

This activity will continue to be informed by the next stages of “The Promise Progress Framework”, which was published jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and The Promise Scotland last year. It will also be informed by the work that is being led by The Promise Scotland in the year ahead to further develop “Plan 24-30” and the route maps for change.

Children’s care services also rely on a skilled and specialist workforce. That is why we continue to focus on ensuring that a sustainable supply of graduates are entering into the Scottish social work profession. I am pleased to announce today that the Scottish Government will be uplifting the value of the postgraduate social work bursary that is administered to eligible students by the Scottish Social Services Council to £11,000 per year from the 2025-26 academic year.

Another part of our unwavering commitment to Scotland’s children is our continued support for the development of bairns’ hoose, which includes £10.5 million in additional investment for 2025-26. With 10 pathfinder and affiliate partnerships now established across Scotland, that funding will strengthen efforts to enhance care, health and justice outcomes for children and young people who are affected by trauma.

As this week marks the first week of foster care fortnight, it is important for me to be clear that foster carers and kinship carers provide safe, stable and loving homes to children and young people who cannot remain with their families. That

is why we introduced the Scottish recommended allowance in August 2023, which will help to ensure that all eligible foster and kinship carers receive a consistent minimum level of financial support. While we consider the findings of an independent review of the SRA, which will be published later this month, we will increase the SRA in 2025-26 with an additional £1.9 million.

This week, we also launched a national marketing campaign aimed at recruiting more local authority foster carers, and, by the end of 2025, we will publish a new vision for kinship care, reaffirming its central place in the care system. These broader measures aim to support children before they come into crisis and before they may need interventions like secure care.

As confirmed in the programme for government last week, I will introduce legislation ahead of the summer recess to further advance the changes that are required to keep the Promise to Scotland’s children and to our care-experienced community. Following the bill’s introduction, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with members from across the chamber.

I hope that this statement reassures members of our continuing focus on secure accommodation capacity and that we are maintaining our commitment to the highest standards of care across the entire system. I am aware that members will have further questions, which I will be pleased to answer now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak buttons now, if they have not already done so.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

I note that the purpose of today’s statement was to reassure members of the Scottish Government’s focus on secure accommodation capacity and to maintain the commitment to the highest standards of care across the system. However, I am not convinced that the statement has done either of those things.

There are so many things in the statement that worry me. There is a reliance on the whole family wellbeing fund, which varies per local authority. There have been minimal changes in the court process. There has been a reduction in the number of children who have been taken into care, which is said by many to be delaying proper support. Despite a drive last year, there has still been no substantial change in the number of

foster carers. The four-bed national contingency resource in Rossie was supposed to alleviate the pressure on the system—there are four beds, but there were four places available this morning. We were told that St Mary's Kenmure will be returning to increased capacity, but that there are still staffing issues.

This is now the third statement on the matter in a few months, and we are stuck in exactly the same position as we were in at the beginning: a secure care system that is bursting at the seams and is unable to deliver what was promised during the passage of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. My questions are simple. Will the minister finally confirm to the chamber, at the third time of asking, how many children in the past six months have been unable to be placed in secure care? Is she still of the view that overprovision would run contrary to the Promise? Will there be tangible change in the statement that we are getting next month?

Natalie Don-Innes: I thank Roz McCall for her questions. I do not agree with the sentiment that we are in the same position that we were in when I delivered my first statement on the issue. I have been very open and transparent with the Parliament. I have recognised the issues, and we have taken direct action. I have laid out progress in every single statement that I have made to the Parliament. Although I appreciate that there are still on-going issues, I am committed to laying out, and have been very open and honest with the Parliament in doing so, the routes that we are exploring at the moment. They might not all come to fruition, but this Government is taking action.

On how many children are placed in secure care or have not been able to get a place, the Scottish Government does not routinely hold case-specific information on that—I believe that I gave the same answer to Roz McCall in response to her question on my previous statement. However, I assure her that every single child's case is assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of that child and of the other children in the secure care estate. That will continue as we go on. I highlight that we have four spaces, and I am looking to augment that further.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

We are in a really challenging position with regard to secure accommodation. We have talked about the availability of four beds today. That is, in fact, three beds plus one emergency bed, which fulfils a different role in the system. In the previous statement, when we talked about Rossie, those four beds were offered as a contingency resource. If not for that resource, we would be completely full today.

On 4 June, it will be one year since the bill received royal assent, and we are having the same discussions again and again. Does the Scottish Government recognise that the lack of forward planning, in the face of all the evidence that is coming, is continuing to fail some of our most vulnerable children in Scotland?

Natalie Don-Innes: I recognise the concerns that members are bringing to me. I disagree that there was a lack of forward planning. I was very clear during the passage of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, and in each of my previous statements to the Parliament, that a huge amount of planning had taken place to ensure that we were ready for the changes that were introduced as a result of that bill. At the time, there was ample capacity in the secure care system, but it is an evolving matter. As I said, I have laid out the additional capacity. We have four beds currently, and we are looking at implementing other measures to increase that further.

I point to the “Reimagining Secure Care” work. There are complexities in relation to the placement of a child in secure care, which I am sure that we will get into in other members' questions. I believe that our work on reimagining secure care for the future will continue to help with the issue.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I welcome the minister's statement and her consistent engagement with the Parliament and the Criminal Justice Committee on the issue. She has been clear before that the issue is not unique to Scotland and is complex. Will the minister therefore set out how our multi-agency approach in Scotland is bringing partners together in supporting the principles of getting it right for every child?

Natalie Don-Innes: That ties in entirely with our preventative approach. I hope that the statement reflects that the key to making the best use of secure care and to preserving space for the children who need it most is to deliver on GIRFEC—lately, The Promise Scotland has helpfully communicated with us on that exact point. It means getting the right preventative and de-escalatory interventions in place at the right time. The aim should be to support children in the right way and at the right time to prevent concerns from developing to a point where a child is in crisis and may need those high-intensity services and interventions. As I have already said, we will reinforce that in our upcoming response to the reimagining secure care report.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): It is in the interest of the whole of society for there to be an effective and compassionate system for young people who require secure care. I know, from my area, that the current system of merely tagging known troublemakers is completely ineffective.

There have been a number of disturbing violent examples, particularly around retail, where a tagged young person has been free to wreak havoc and misery and clearly has not feared the consequences. What firm plans does the Scottish Government have to tackle that problem and when will they take effect?

Natalie Don-Innes: The provisions that are placed on a child as a result of an offence would be a matter for the children's hearings system and the reporter. I cannot comment on individual cases. If Ms Dowey has recognised an issue that is increasing in her constituency, I am more than happy to discuss it with her. However, as I said, I cannot necessarily comment on specific cases.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I note that the programme for government outlined plans to introduce the children and young people (care) (Scotland) bill. Will the minister outline how the bill will make changes to several key areas in the children's care system, particularly in taking on board recommendations from recent consultations?

Natalie Don-Innes: I recently confirmed to the Education, Children and Young People's Committee my intention to introduce a bill to the Parliament prior to the summer recess. That was also set out in last week's programme for government. Members know the parliamentary procedures for the introduction of legislation and will appreciate the fact that I am not able to give any further detail on the content of the bill ahead of its introduction.

However, I note that we have carefully considered the views that were gathered through the numerous consultations that were undertaken last year, including on the next stages of reform of the children's hearings system, the future of foster care, the definition of care experience and the support that is available to those who are moving on from care.

I look forward to introducing the bill in the coming weeks and strongly welcome the opportunity to engage with members on it, as I said in my statement.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The Scottish National Party Government has failed yet again to implement its own legislation, which was predictable. Indeed, during scrutiny of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, I warned the minister that

"you cannot expect members across the Parliament to vote for a bill that relies so heavily on social work without any reassurance from you that support will be in place ... to meet the demands of the bill".—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 1 November 2023; c 6.]

Thirteen months have passed since the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 was passed, and it is clear that that support is not in place. With three statements on capacity in five months, it is also clear that, despite what the minister says, the response is not one of urgency and care; it is more one of panic and chaos. Will the minister finally admit that it is not the system that is failing young people this time but her Government?

Natalie Don-Innes: I disagree entirely. This has not been hashed together in the form of some rash decision. Concerns about capacity arose just prior to Christmas 2024. Since then, I have been working on the matter continuously, and officials, COSLA and all the relevant partners have been focused on the matter up to today, and that continues. As I have laid out in my statement, a number of actions are being looked into, considered and worked on to improve the situation.

Ms Duncan-Glancy refers to workforce issues. We are taking a number of actions to support our social work workforce, because we understand that a strong, qualified and experienced workforce will be absolutely fundamental to the delivery of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 and the delivery of the Promise.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I once supported young people with experience of secure care, and I understand just how vital early access to support is. Children in secure care often require multiple services, such as mental health support, education and vocational training, among others. Will the minister outline how the Scottish Government will work to foster greater collaboration between health services, local authorities, education providers and, importantly, the third sector to ensure that the wider support needs of these young people are met with a person-centred approach?

Natalie Don-Innes: Absolutely. Again, that needs to be considered in our response to "Reimagining Secure Care" and in our prioritisation of a preventative approach. As I said in my previous statement, I do not necessarily always agree that secure care is the appropriate place for a child. I believe that those conversations and access to alternatives are absolutely fundamental. I strongly support the need for the effective partnership working that Elena Whitham refers to across all relevant sectors, whether that be health or education, to optimise the outcomes of secure care placements and, as I said, to ensure access to appropriate alternatives. It is an area that we are considering as part of that work, and I will be more than happy to provide a further update on that as it continues.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): When the minister gave her previous statement, I asked whether she could provide an update on the development of regulations on secure transport provision for children in secure care. We included that in the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill because of evidence of the totally inappropriate use of restraints such as handcuffs. At that point, the minister said that she would write to me with an update. I am happy to correct the record if I have got this wrong, but I do not believe that I have received that. Will she provide that update at this point?

Natalie Don-Innes: Absolutely. Mr Greer is correct—he has not yet received that update. I will be writing to him shortly with more details.

I can confirm that we laid the commencement regulations on 24 April to set that in motion. The first set of national standards on secure transport will be prepared, published and laid in Parliament within one year of those regulations coming into force. The regulations will come into force in September 2025, so the secure transport standards will be laid in Parliament by September 2026.

A working group has been set up to consider the development of those standards. As I say, I will be writing to Mr Greer, and if there is anything else that he would like me to include in that communication, I am more than happy to do that.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): If the minister does not know how many young people have been denied secure care, how does she know how many extra secure beds are required?

Natalie Don-Innes: It is not a static process so it is not a case of saying that on a certain day, X number of secure care beds are required. It is an evolving process. Children require entry into secure care for a number of different reasons. As I have said, there can be a multitude of reasons why a placement cannot be found or why that can be difficult.

I cannot emphasise more the work that we have under way to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in the system and that every child's case is considered individually and in a way that is in the best interests of all children involved. I am confident in the Government's response because, as I have said, the process is evolving and can change daily.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): St Mary's Kenmure is in my constituency, so I welcome the minister's continued focus on the issue. It is very welcome to hear that capacity in the secure care system has increased, but, as the minister says, it fluctuates daily. Will the minister reiterate how capacity has increased since the end of last year?

Natalie Don-Innes: The annual social work statistics confirm that between July 2023 and July 2024, there were an average of 60 children in secure care, against an average overall availability of 71 beds. The placement embargo was imposed at St Mary's in October 2024, following the Care Inspectorate's improvement notice, which, as the member is aware, confined St Mary's to offering nine beds to children who were already in its care.

St Mary's made sufficient progress by March 2025 to enable it to open up a further three beds. Four new secure beds in Rossie have now been fully funded by the Scottish Government and they opened up last month.

Updated guidance has been issued by the Care Inspectorate this year, enabling providers to have more flexibility over the use of emergency beds.

As my statement indicated, we expect to take further capacity action in the next short period, and we are looking at a range of measures to support that.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): The statement tells me that the Scottish Government is not confident in delivering the outcomes and targets that have been announced by the minister. If the new national contingency resource facility had not been opened last month, there would be no beds available for children who require secure accommodation. That is not progress.

Members have asked about data in relation to young people who have not been able to be placed into secure accommodation because of the lack of beds. It is simply nonsense for the minister to respond by saying that the Scottish Government does not hold any data on that whatsoever. The minister has known that we need such data in order to scrutinise the work of the Scottish Government. Why has she not looked into that?

We are talking about matters relating to the Promise, so why has it taken the minister so long to introduce the bill, given that her party gave its word to care-experienced young people that it would be introduced before the end of this parliamentary session?

Natalie Don-Innes: I am interested in understanding how Meghan Gallacher believes that the statement shows that we have no confidence in our response. I have been very clear that I have confidence in our response. It is a difficult issue, and nobody is backing away from it. Meghan Gallacher is bringing to me hypotheticals about what would happen if Rossie was not available. Rossie is available, as a direct result of Scottish Government funding and Scottish Government priority.

I do not want to deal with hypotheticals; I want to deal with fact and reality, which is exactly what I have laid out in my statement.

In relation to the Promise bill, I was clear in committee, and I have been clear today, that the Promise bill is coming, and that it will come in good time to ensure that the committee can scrutinise it. I want to make sure that the bill is as strong as possible so that it can deliver on the Promise that was made to care-experienced children and young people, and I am sure that, when the bill is introduced, it will do just that.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): On Monday, the First Minister launched a new national campaign on fostering. Will the minister outline what the message of the campaign is, what it will do and how MSPs across the chamber can help to support it?

Natalie Don-Innes: As I noted in my statement, on Monday, to coincide with the start of foster care fortnight, the Government launched a national recruitment campaign. The focus of the campaign is that ordinary can be extraordinary for a child in foster care, which will involve showing that everyday moments can change lives.

Fostering is open to people from all walks of life. No specific qualifications are needed, and people do not need to have children of their own. The campaign will run for seven weeks across television, video, on demand, radio and press. I hope that MSPs will support the promotion of the campaign in their local constituencies and online.

On Monday, I wrote directly to all MSPs to provide details about the campaign. Together, we can help to ensure that every child has the stable and nurturing home that they deserve.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The minister needs to understand that we do not have confidence in her statement. She is the minister who is responsible for the system, and what she has brought to Parliament today is another set of maybes aye, maybes no. That is not the way to run any aspect of Government, especially when we are talking about some of the most vulnerable young people in our country.

I will give the minister an opportunity to be a little bit more precise about the issue of operational capacity. First, can she please define, for the purposes of this Parliament's information, what full operational capacity is? Secondly, can she give a specific guarantee on the timeline by which that capacity will be in operation?

Natalie Don-Innes: I am not quite clear that I understand the basis of Mr Kerr's question, so if I do not answer it in my response today, I am more than happy for him to write to me, and I will respond in writing.

I am sorry that members do not have confidence in the statement, but I do not believe that we are dealing with ifs and buts. My statement delivers real action to restore capacity. I have tried to be open and honest with members, and to share with them the range of measures that are available. I would have preferred to have made the statement in June, when I would probably have had more concrete progress to advise on, but I wanted to be as open and honest as I could be.

Not all the measures that I have announced today will be fulfilled, but I am confident that the Government is taking the action that is needed, and that we will deliver for the children and young people who need it most.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes that item of business. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow front-bench members to change places.

Scotland in Today's Europe

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17539, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland in today's Europe. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

14:59

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): This year, we mark 75 years since the signing of the Schuman declaration on 9 May 1950. Last Friday, I and others in the chamber celebrated Europe day and the shared values that underpin the European project. Poignantly, last week, we also marked 80 years since victory in Europe day on 8 May 1945 and the liberation of Europe by the allied forces that ended the second world war in Europe. I had the privilege to mark the day, on behalf of the Scottish Government, at a memorial service at Westminster Abbey in London.

Out of the ashes of the second world war grew renewed ideas about international unity and co-operation between nations, about building trust and about basing the world order on the rule of law. One of those ideas was the European Coal and Steel Community, which paved the way for the European Union. The six original signatories of the Schuman declaration agreed to put the production of key defence materials under common control, thereby building trust through transparency and, ultimately, through economic interdependence. Erstwhile bitter rivals became partners and lasting peace and prosperity became a shared reality for members of the EU.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The Liberal Democrats will support today's Government motion. The cabinet secretary is right to refer to the European Coal and Steel Community, the establishment of which meant that the nations of Europe could never again build a war machine without others being aware of that. Does he recognise that, in the straitened times in which we find ourselves, with global strife, the threat of war and an existing war in continental Europe, our relationship with Europe has never been more important?

Angus Robertson: I thank the Liberal Democrats for their support for the Government's motion. It has been drafted in a way that has received a welcome from other parties, which is a good thing.

Mr Cole-Hamilton's raising of defence and security issues is also relevant for us all. We have

tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Scotland, and the Scottish Government supports the United Kingdom Government's interventions in helping to secure a just peace for Ukraine. As I will come on to later in my speech, we are approaching a United Kingdom-European Union summit next week, at which defence and security will be important parts of the discussion. We support the UK Government's position on those issues, but there are others where things are a little more challenging. I will come to those later and, if Mr Cole-Hamilton wishes to intervene at that point, I will be happy to take an intervention from him.

The ideals that led to the founding of the European Economic Community and then of the European Union will be at the forefront of our minds—and, I hope, at the forefront of the minds of those in the UK Government—when, on Monday, the Prime Minister will meet the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council for what UK ministers are calling a “reset” summit on UK-EU relations. Tragically, that summit takes place as war has returned to our continent, our international institutions are under threat, the far right is rising across the globe and many people sense that we live in an increasingly divided and polarised world.

On Sunday, I chaired a Festival of Europe Scotland event held by the Scottish Council on Global Affairs entitled, “Beyond the UK, beyond the EU—what in the world lies ahead?” It was a fascinating and sobering discussion about the challenges that we are living through, but it was also about how to use these times to offer hope and optimism for the future. We have long known that the major challenges of today, such as humanitarian emergencies, climate change and resource insecurity, can be addressed only by working together as a global community.

The Scottish Government of course supports closer partnership between the UK and the EU on defence and security challenges, including on our shared and unwavering support for Ukraine and on condemnation of Russia and the threat that it poses, which we cannot underestimate. Global instability, particularly the on-going threat of a trade war, is having economic impacts everywhere, including here in Scotland and in the rest of the UK.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I agree with the sentiment that the cabinet secretary expresses, but does he agree that that sentiment would be given fuller expression if the UK and the EU were to agree that Russian fossil fuel trading must be included in the sanctions regime? A company that is based in Glasgow is still making a profit from trading in Russian liquefied natural gas, which is within the rules of the current sanctions

regime. Surely such a lethal business should be added to the sanctions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, cabinet secretary.

Angus Robertson: I certainly agree that sanctions should be respected and that any evidence of companies trying to get round those should be brought to light. *[Interruption.]* I hear Mr Harvie speaking from a sedentary position. If he is asking me whether I would support the strengthening of sanctions, the answer is simple: I would.

I move on by borrowing from Germany's former Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who said that we are living through a *Zeitenwende*—a turning point or crossroads. We have been here before. Relatively recently in our lifetimes, in 1989, change was under way after the fall of the Berlin wall. However, we have to be honest. That was a time of great hope and opportunities, but it was also a time of deep uncertainty about the future in Europe and internationally after the cold war. The experiences of the previous decades created fear about what the reaction to the communist dominoes falling in eastern Europe would be and what it would mean for the world.

Once the dust had settled, great challenges lay ahead in Europe, which were: supporting the development of democracy in a great number of different countries; rebuilding and transforming economies; and making European neighbours who had been cut off from the European integration process partners and, ultimately, ready to become EU members.

The European project, too, evolved greatly during that time. In 1992, the EU as we know it today was founded through the Maastricht treaty. In 2004, enlargement marked a watershed moment for post-1989 Europe with 10 new members joining the EU, and they have been followed by several more since then.

I turn to the contributions that have been made to our country by people from those European accession states and, indeed, all those from overseas who have chosen to settle here and make Scotland their home.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: If the member does not mind, I will not take the intervention now as I want to make a bit more progress.

It is important that we understand and respect that the people who have come to Scotland from the European Union and the rest of the world are just that—people. That is their defining characteristic. They are not just migration statistics, but people with the same dreams and

aspirations as everyone else, and they deserve to be treated with the same dignity and respect as everyone else.

Back in 2005, the then First Minister and Scottish Labour leader said:

“The way to preserve schools and hospitals and services in this country and the way to have a strong economy in the years to come is to have more fresh talent in this country.”

Commendably, Jack McConnell also noted that immigration goes beyond the economic benefits, vital though those are for Scotland. He said that it is about our values and our place in the world, and he was right.

How far Labour has fallen since then. On Monday, instead of echoing that hopeful, optimistic, welcoming and inclusive message, the Prime Minister engaged in ugly, damaging and disgraceful rhetoric. Instead of standing up to the far right, he chose to lie down in front of Nigel Farage. For Keir Starmer to use words such as “squalid” and “strangers” and to describe those who have come to the UK as being part of “a lab experiment” was truly a new low for Labour.

Let me reassure all those from Europe and beyond who have made Scotland their home and who may well be feeling bruised and uncertain today. I say to them: the Scottish Government values what you do. Your contribution to our health service, our care homes, our businesses and our communities is immense. You are part of us. You will always be welcome, and we thank you for making Scotland your home.

Freedom of movement has been one of the European Union's greatest achievements. The opportunity for people in Scotland to live, love and work in 27 other countries should have been celebrated, not denigrated. Like all great partnerships, the EU will of course have its moments of discussion and disagreement. However, like all good relationships, it has established mechanisms to come to agreements and make them work.

When the EU's founding values such as equality, democracy and the rule of law can seem under threat even from some within the union, now is the time to proclaim those values even more loudly.

Stephen Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I will.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary. I wanted to intervene earlier, when he talked about the forthcoming UK-EU summit in London. He will have seen, as I saw, the front page of this morning's *Financial Times*, which discloses an internal EU document that sets out

some terms and conditions. Particularly given the things that he has said in his speech about the situation on the continent of Europe, does he think that it is right that the EU should conditionalise co-operation on security on the basis of unlimited, far-reaching access to UK fishing waters?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I can give you the time back for the intervention.

Angus Robertson: I will come to that specifically in a moment, and, indeed, in my summing up; I will answer that in full in the course of the debate, for reasons that will become obvious.

Last week, we marked Europe day, on which we remember the circumstances in which great institutions were founded and recall the ideas about international unity and co-operation between nations that we might learn the lessons of the past, base the world order on the rule of law and build trust over division. We need those institutions so that we can find common ground, tackle challenges by working together and, above all, rebuild trust. That common good is eroding globally today.

Nearly nine years ago, the Scottish people overwhelmingly voted to remain in the EU while the UK made the regrettable choice to leave. Scotland stands steadfast behind the European idea and project, which are the founding principles of the European Union today. We uphold our shared values. Scotland is a proud European nation with a strong internationalist tradition and outlook.

That vote, and the Government's commitment since then, leaves no doubt that Scotland's place is in the EU and that we are committed to rejoin the EU as an independent member state. We welcome and support the UK Government's intent to seek improved relations with the EU. We have tirelessly called for better relations. If the UK Government is serious about economic growth, it will drop its red lines and get back into the single market and the customs union. There are many areas in which a closer partnership with the EU could at least lessen the damage of Brexit.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): During your discussions with the UK Government, has there been any detail about an agreement that was sought involving the potential fisheries arrangements—a policy that is devolved to the Scottish Parliament?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Angus Robertson: I confirm to Clare Adamson and to the Parliament that the United Kingdom Government has had no detailed discussion with

the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Government or the Welsh Government on that issue, which is, of course, devolved. More than that, the interministerial group that would discuss environment, fish and rural affairs issues has been cancelled the last three times that it was due to meet. The last time, only two hours' notice was given.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I will give way to Mr Bibby. He might be able to explain that.

Neil Bibby: Well, I will explain to the cabinet secretary that if we rejoined the EU—as is his position—we would be rejoining the common fisheries policy.

On economic growth, does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that, during the first three months of this year, the UK was the fastest-growing economy in the G7?

Angus Robertson: I always welcome economic growth, but I will not welcome holding discussions on behalf of the Parliament, the Scottish Government and the country but not involving its institutions. The European Union is sharing the text of the potential outcomes of next week's discussions with its member states. The UK Government is not doing so with devolved Administrations. There are a few days for that to be changed. Perhaps Mr Bibby will pick up the phone to speak to his colleagues in London and ask why it has not done that.

In advance of the leaders' summit, which will take place in London on Monday, we have outlined our position in recent publications on a youth mobility agreement, Erasmus+, creative Europe, closer energy and climate co-operation, and core needs for a veterinary, food and drink agreement with the EU. We also strongly support closer working with EU partners on defence and security.

At all times during the build-up to the summit, we have offered to be constructive partners with the UK Government, and although a number of meetings have taken place, it is unacceptable that today—only a few days from the summit—no draft text has been shared with us or other devolved Governments. That is in stark contrast to the way the EU treats its member states.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The cabinet secretary kindly invited me to intervene at this stage in his remarks, and I am gratified to hear that a number of the clauses that were in the Liberal Democrat amendment—which was not selected for debate—on a youth mobility scheme, a comprehensive defence pact and the removal of red lines that

prevent us from getting back into the customs union are all part of his Government's priorities.

Angus Robertson: Indeed, they are, and there is largely consensus on that. At least, perhaps there is consensus—I am not entirely sure what the position of the Scottish Conservative Party is on measures that would boost our economy, support our care sector and national health service, give young people the opportunity to live and work throughout Europe, and, indeed, support continental European young people coming to this country. There is a shared agenda, and I think that there is a majority in the Parliament for it.

I hope that the UK Government is listening, and I hope, with some days to go, that it chooses to conduct its business with the devolved Administrations in the UK with the same dignity and respect that the European Union does with its member states.

Let me finish by reiterating a core point: the best relationship that Scotland and the UK can have with the EU will always be as full member states of the European Union. That is what we hope that Scotland can look forward to in the future.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the best relationship that Scotland and the UK can have with the EU is to be a member of the EU; calls on the UK Government to drop its red lines on the single market, customs union and freedom of movement; further calls on the UK Government, at its forthcoming summit with the EU, as a first step, to negotiate an ambitious veterinary, food and drink agreement, closer energy and climate co-operation, greater freedom of movement, including opportunities for young people, and further measures to lessen the ongoing economic, social and cultural damage of Brexit, and believes that it is unacceptable that the UK Government has not shared any draft summit texts with the Scottish or other devolved governments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I call Stephen Kerr to speak to and move amendment S6M-17539.4. You have a generous eight minutes, Mr Kerr.

15:14

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I do not think that the cabinet secretary actually answered the question that I asked in my intervention. I am happy for him to intervene on me to answer the question: does he think that it is right that the European Union is making security co-operation contingent on long-term access to UK fishing waters? He did not answer that question, and maybe he would like to take a moment to do so.

Angus Robertson: I am happy to make an intervention. No, I would not be pleased to see defence and security co-operation being conditional on any other consideration. I believe

that defence and security serve us all, and they should be key priorities. However, I hope that the member recognises that it is a hugely deficient situation that, with only Friday, Saturday and Sunday—three days—to go until the summit meeting in London, and when he is able to read about the issues on the front pages of UK newspapers, Government ministers in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Northern Ireland have not been informed by the UK Government about any of the detailed discussions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: The relationship between the Scottish Government and the UK Government is a long-running story. On taking office, the Labour Party thought that it could reset the relationship with the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Government was full of similar sentiments. I think that the cabinet secretary perhaps has the answer to the question that he is asking at his own fingertips.

Let me be absolutely clear that I actually agree with the cabinet secretary: it is wrong—plain wrong—for the European Union to make security co-operation conditional on anything. Such is the nature of the threat that we face on our shared continent that there should be no conditionality with regard to our working together to thwart the efforts of Vladimir Putin or anyone else who would seek to undermine the European nation states, which should be working together in what Keir Starmer, I think, has rightly called a coalition of the willing.

Where are we on this wonderful Thursday afternoon? Here we are again—in a packed chamber, as we can see—being asked again to indulge the SNP's constitutional obsession, which we have already had a good introduction to from the cabinet secretary, as if the solution to Scotland's economic challenges is always the same: break up the UK, rejoin the EU and pretend that sovereignty is a burden rather than a prize.

Angus Robertson's motion—I hope that he will forgive me for saying so; he might even take this as a compliment—looks as though it could have been written in Brussels. It calls on the UK to abandon the basic pillars of our post-Brexit independence, to drop the so-called red lines of leaving the single market and the customs union, and to re-adopt freedom of movement. However, those are not just red lines; they are the democratic instructions of the British people. We did not vote to leave the EU in name only; we voted to take back control of our laws, our borders, our trade policy and our money, and that is what we have done.

In the past few days, we have seen the evidence of the fruits of an independent trade policy. That is something that Angus Robertson and the SNP would freely and willingly give up, but it is an advantage and a benefit that has come about because we left the European Union.

Since Brexit, the United Kingdom has signed more than 70 trade deals and we have joined the CPT—I always get this wrong. We have joined the CPTP—the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. We are also negotiating the detail of free trade agreements with India and the United States.

In particular, the trade deal with India has been widely welcomed, especially by the Scotch whisky industry, because, behind that deal, there will be prosperity for the sector and jobs in some of the most remote parts of Scotland. That is one sector that can take advantage of trade between the United Kingdom and, for example, India and the United States, but there are other sectors, too. This is Brexit delivering and yet, now, amid the debate on this motion and in the light of today's front page-story in the *Financial Times*, we must face a new risk: not just the SNP's fantasy of rejoining the EU but Labour's quiet attempt to reverse Brexit by stealth.

The *FT* reports on a so-called “reset”—although we all know that the European Union does not like the use of that word, as was made clear to our colleagues who took part in a committee visit to Brussels. The report says that the Labour Government wants a reset of UK-EU relations, which is being driven by EU demands for British concessions on fishing rights and youth mobility because Brussels wants long-term access to UK fishing waters. The Scottish Conservatives will stand with Scotland's fishermen in refuting the European Union's demands for such concessions. That is not the way in which such matters have been done in the past, and it should not be how they are done in the future.

Brussels also wants our students—through our Government, here in Edinburgh—to subsidise European students. It wants its students to have cheap access to United Kingdom universities. Crucially, it also wants a role for the European Court of Justice in overseeing the UK's compliance with any future agreement that is discussed, starting on Monday.

Let us be in no doubt about what that means. It is not about having a partnership of equals; instead, it illustrates a creeping return to EU control. However, Labour seems only too ready to sign us up to that, behind closed doors. There is talk of a “dynamic alignment”, which is code for accepting new EU laws without having a say in making them. There is talk of a “youth mobility scheme”, but with permanent obligations and no

clear limits. There are whispers of effecting “regulatory harmonisation” in return for marginal gains in trade.

That is not co-operation; it is capitulation. The British people did not vote for Brexit only to have it reinterpreted in secret summits and quiet deals. The Labour leader might claim that he is not interested in the “battles of the past”, but if he trades away our fishing grounds, our borders and our legal autonomy, he will not just be fighting yesterday's battles—he will surrender them. Meanwhile, of course, the SNP cheers him on, because anything that weakens the United Kingdom suits its separatist agenda. Surely we have heard enough grievance in the cabinet secretary's opening statement alone to convince the neutral observer that that is the intention of the SNP Government here at Holyrood.

Let us be clear that this is not about strengthening—

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)
(Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr: Of course I will.

Douglas Lumsden: Does Stephen Kerr agree that the motion does not illustrate the SNP's obsession with Europe; rather, it simply highlights its obsession with independence? The SNP will use any topic to further the cause of independence, whether it be Brexit, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine or even the policies of Nigel Farage. It will use anything to try to get its way, but it never will.

Stephen Kerr: Douglas Lumsden is correct. Everything that happens—anything that the SNP sees on the 6 o'clock news—becomes a reason for breaking up the United Kingdom and an excuse for holding another referendum. Let us be clear that the SNP's approach is not so much about strengthening ties with Europe as it is about weakening the bonds of Britain.

All of that comes wrapped up in staggering hypocrisy. The motion speaks of “closer ... climate co-operation”, while the SNP Government has no energy strategy, blocks nuclear power, sabotages oil and gas, and presides over wind farm developments that are collapsing under its own broken planning regime. It also talks of food and drink agreements, but it is the United Kingdom Government—not the EU—that is out there, fighting for Scottish exports. It is UK trade deals that are promoting around the world the Scotch whisky and Scottish salmon produced in our fantastic food and drink sector.

The motion laments that devolved Governments have not seen the draft EU summit texts, but it seems that the *Financial Times* has. Its report reveals that the EU is back to its usual ways of

doing business. Let us not pretend that the SNP would use that information in good faith—even if it had access to it, which it apparently does not. It does not want a good deal for Britain—it wants a bad one, because it exists on a diet of political division and grievance. That is entirely why, this Thursday afternoon, we are here, taking up the Parliament's time. The debate simply offers another opportunity for the SNP to fester that grievance.

I know that Brexit is not a finished job. However, the answer is not to go backwards but to defend and deepen our sovereignty, to use our freedoms to grow enterprise, to cut red tape and to secure the best deals for the UK on our terms. We cannot afford to drift back under the orbit of Brussels by stealth, nor can we allow an unelected European court to stand above our Parliament, our judges and our voters.

Scotland's future lies not in surrendering our sovereignty to the EU or in surrendering our prosperity to nationalist ideology; it lies in standing proud as part of a strong, globally trading, forward-looking United Kingdom. This Parliament should reject the motion, it should reject the SNP's dream of dependency, and it should reject Labour's quiet sell-out of Brexit. Let us instead build a confident Scotland at the heart of a sovereign United Kingdom, looking not to Brussels but to the rest of the world.

I move amendment S6M-17539.4, to leave out from "agrees" to end and insert:

"recognises that foreign affairs, including the country's relationship with the EU, trade and immigration are reserved matters, and calls on the Scottish Government to dedicate more parliamentary time towards tackling the issues that matter to most people in Scotland, such as improving NHS waiting times, raising Scotland's falling attainment standards, addressing school violence and bringing down bills for taxpayers."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise the chamber that, at this stage, there is a little time in hand, so members will get the time back for any interventions that they take.

15:25

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Last week, when Anas Sarwar responded to the SNP's latest programme for government, he asked, "Is that it?" It was an important question, because, after nearly two decades of SNP rule in Scotland, the legislative programme was a weak and meagre one. It was symbolic of the SNP's term in office: all spin and no substance. It was a failure to meet the needs of the people of Scotland and to concentrate on what the Scottish Government is responsible for.

Here we are, just a week later, with a Scottish Government debate on Scotland's place in today's Europe when we should instead be debating what is happening in today's Scotland. I am content to debate important international issues from time to time, as we did relatively recently, and it is, of course, right that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee considers in detail issues relating to the trade and co-operation agreement with the European Union. However, today's debate is about deflection and grandstanding ahead of the important UK-EU summit on Monday.

There is a growing disconnect between the Scottish people and Scottish politics. That is because this Government and this place are not doing their job. We could be debating the First Minister's inadequate plans for new general practitioner appointments; the challenges that our education sector faces, although that would rely on the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills turning up; or a plan to solve our housing emergency. However, those issues are being sidelined in favour of SNP grandstanding on Europe.

The SNP opposed European Union membership in 1973—a fact that seemed to be missing from the cabinet secretary's history lesson earlier. It spent more on the 2019 Scottish Parliament by-election than it spent on the 2016 referendum campaign. It failed to vote in the House of Commons for membership of the customs union in the 2019 indicative votes. Further, when the SNP cabinet secretary who opened today's debate was in the House of Commons, he described the Lisbon treaty—one of the foundational documents of the European Union—as "unacceptable" and "a travesty". The SNP can try to claim consistent support for European Union membership today, but the record suggests otherwise. This debate is not just opportunistic, it is performative.

Patrick Harvie: I may be mistaken, but I do not recall Mr Bibby voting against the business motion when Parliament agreed that we should have this debate.

If Mr Bibby wants to use the debate to criticise others for inconsistency with a position from decades ago, can he explain why Labour's position now is inconsistent with the position that it was arguing less than one decade ago, which was that Brexit would be a catastrophic decision for the United Kingdom to make?

Neil Bibby: My point is that we should be focusing on the issues that matter to the people of Scotland and for which we are responsible. Our position is in line with the mandate that we received at the general election, and we will be progressing that in the months and years ahead.

We accept that Brexit has been costly and damaging, and we know—because Kemi Badenoch has told us—that the Conservatives left the European Union without a plan for growth. That and the Liz Truss budget have significantly damaged our relationship with the European Union, economic growth and living standards. People now expect us to fix that mess, and that is exactly what they gave the new United Kingdom Labour Government a mandate to do.

Angus Robertson: Does Mr Bibby agree that fishing is devolved? If he does, can he explain why the United Kingdom Government has had no detailed discussions with devolved Administrations about potentially making a deal around fishing as soon as next week? Does he find that acceptable?

Neil Bibby: What is acceptable is that the UK Labour Government is getting on with the job of fixing the mess that the Tories left in relation to Brexit. I have said to Mr Robertson—I will say it for a second time—that his policy is not for fishing to be devolved. He wants to rejoin the European Union and the common fisheries policy. I think that the context of his comments about the Lisbon treaty, when he called it “unacceptable” and “a travesty”, was in relation to fisheries.

The UK Labour Government is getting on with the job of resetting our relationship with the European Union. To support Scottish businesses and jobs, it is negotiating trade deals with the United States and India. To protect our citizens, the UK Labour Government is increasing defence spending.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Neil Bibby: I want to make some progress.

The UK Labour Government is also growing the economy, with figures announced today showing that, for the first three months of this year, the UK had the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Meanwhile, what have the SNP Government and the cabinet secretary done to deal with the mess that we have been left in? I would say that they have done nothing but complain from the sidelines. The SNP has done one thing, at least, in rebuilding relations with our EU neighbours, but, yes, it has overlooked Scottish jobs and Scottish industry by sending ferry contracts to Poland, which is hardly the action of a nationalist Government. What is the SNP's solution? We have heard it already. It is full fiscal autonomy and independence, which would cost Scotland £12.8 billion. That is only going to damage economic growth and living standards. Sixty-one per cent of Scotland's exports—around £50 billion of goods—go to the rest of the UK. Independence would make Brexit look like a cakewalk.

Stephen Kerr: I respect Neil Bibby, but I am interested to know whether he thinks that it is right

that the EU would make security conditional on access to our fishing rights. According to the front page of the *Financial Times* and internal EU documents, the UK Government has already offered extensive long-term access to UK fishing waters to the EU. Does Mr Bibby know whether that is true?

Neil Bibby: I am afraid that I do not know, Mr Kerr. What I do know, though, is that the UK Labour Government will be working to progress our national interests. We are also seeking co-operation with the EU where we can and where that is appropriate, in line with our manifesto. That is the position that we have set out.

I welcome the fact that the new UK Labour Government is seeking to enter a strategic partnership between the UK and the EU on trade, security and defence. The situation with the EU requires work, and we are focused on that. Next week, the UK Government and the EU will hold a summit that is part of a wider plan to reset relations. The EU provides a fantastic opportunity to support and strengthen Scottish businesses and industries, and the UK Government is hoping to agree a veterinary and sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, as we put forward in our manifesto last year. That would allow agricultural products—

Clare Adamson: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Bibby: I am sorry, but I have already taken three. Oh—okay, if the member is very brief.

Clare Adamson: I listened to what Mr Bibby said about the UK Government having Scotland's best interests at heart. When we have a falling population and we are constantly crying out for people to come and work in our care sector and other sectors, how on earth does the rhetoric coming from the UK Government and Keir Starmer act in any way in Scotland's best interests?

Neil Bibby: If we want more people to work in the care sector, we need to start paying care workers more money. The trade unions in the care sector have been demanding £15 an hour from the SNP Government, and the Government has come nowhere near meeting that demand. If we are serious about investing in and retaining staff in the care sector, we need to pay our workers more.

To protect Scotland's interests, we want to ensure that we have a veterinary and sanitary and phytosanitary agreement that will boost support for agricultural products and allow food and drink to be traded more cheaply between the UK and the EU. Removing those barriers would also improve exports. A study by Aston University estimates that an agreement could increase agri-food exports from the UK to the EU by at least 22.5 per cent. Other issues will be discussed, including youth mobility, energy co-operation, defence and

security and, in particular, our support for Ukraine. The UK and the EU will have different priorities, as we have heard, but I welcome the UK Labour Government's statement that it will work in the national interest as well as seek co-operation with our European friends and neighbours on key issues, in line with the manifesto on which Labour was elected.

This is a serious approach from a UK Government that is serious about rebuilding our economy and our relations with the EU. As I said at the start, the SNP Government should focus on its responsibility for improving living standards and economic growth, using its powers and the record funding settlement that it has had from the UK Government. However, the SNP Government's ultimate policy position—for as long as that lasts—will run counter to that objective.

I move amendment S6M-17539.1, to leave out from “agrees” to end and insert:

“welcomes the UK Government resetting the UK's relationship with the EU following the chaotic and damaging approach of the previous UK Conservative administration; further welcomes the summit to be held on 19 May 2025; welcomes the commitment by the UK Government to create a strategic partnership between the UK and the EU to agree a path forward on trade, security and defence; believes that economic growth, raising living standards and defence and security must be the highest of priorities for the Scottish and UK governments; welcomes the UK Government's specific commitment to negotiate a sanitary and phytosanitary veterinary agreement so that agricultural products, food and drink can be traded more cheaply between the EU and the UK, which could boost agri-food exports to the EU by up to 22.5%; further welcomes the commitment by the Prime Minister to improve security co-operation with the EU and to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP from April 2027, which will benefit jobs and industries in Scotland; welcomes the UK Government's newly negotiated trade deals with the United States and India, noting the importance of the latter for Scotland's whisky industry; calls on the Scottish Government to support the UK Government's efforts to rebuild the relationship with European friends and neighbours, and further calls on the Scottish Government to set out what actions it will take to improve economic growth and living standards in Scotland, including whether its public procurement processes will emulate those in other European countries in driving place-based industrial development, using the powers that it has and the record funding settlement that it has received from the UK Government of £47.7 billion this financial year.”

15:34

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is inevitable that a debate such as this will, to some extent, rehearse arguments from the run-up to 2016 and everything that has happened since. Some of us argued against Brexit back then and have not changed our position. We are very clear that the damage that we predicted has happened. We can point to it, see it and feel it in our economy, in our communities and in the rights and freedoms of our citizens having been reduced.

Then there are those who argued for Brexit and are currently having to go through extraordinary mental gymnastics in order to deny the reality of that harm. With the best will in the world, Mr Kerr might as well have stood up and sung “Rule, Britannia!” for 10 minutes—it would have made as much sense as the speech that he just gave.

However, there is an additional dimension now, nine years on from that referendum. We do not just have Brexiteers and pro-Europeans. We now also have a cohort of politicians who argued just as vociferously as the rest of us that Brexit would be harmful, and, indeed, catastrophic for the UK and for Scotland, but who are now, let us be generous, merely resigned to it. They are simply not willing to be consistent with the position that they set out just nine years ago. I remind Mr Bibby that he was criticising others for inconsistency with a position from 50 years ago, but that is inconsistency with a position from just nine years ago.

I am very happy to restate the case for membership of a modern democratic family of nations in the European Union in relation to the economic heft that comes from the size of the EU. We would probably not have predicted then the unilateral trade war that has been sparked off by the US, but it is very clear that a trading bloc on the scale of the European Union has a degree of heft that the UK no longer has on its own. I am also happy to restate that case in relation to the voice of the EU on the world stage. In 2016, we were part of what had been for a long time one of the most progressive voices in the global climate debate, but we are no longer part of that. Whether one believes in a deregulated free market or a well-regulated, balanced market, having shared regulation across a larger market brings many advantages.

I think that the strongest argument is the value of freedom of movement, because, as I have said before, for not just generations but centuries, the young people of the countries of Europe grew up knowing that their best chance of seeing another part of Europe was if their own Governments rounded them up, marched them into fields and ditches and made them slaughter one another in the service of a ruling class—very often the same ruling class across different countries on different sides of the various wars. After the horrors of the second world war, the countries of Europe began to build the institutions that turned into the EU and created a different future for young people, one in which they could decide on their own terms and at their own time whether they wanted to travel to learn, to work, to play and to build a life and be part of a community together.

Freedom of movement was one of the most astonishing political achievements in the post-war

era, and it is a betrayal of the rights and interests of the next generation that they have had those freedoms taken away. In fact, they have had those freedoms—those liberties—taken away by people who, in many cases, have the nerve to call themselves libertarians. Those freedoms have been removed from young people.

The case for rejoining the EU is very clear and, in my view, urgent. That case for rejoining applies whether we focus on Scotland's future, the future of the rest of the UK or the future of the UK as a whole. In addition to that case for rejoining, we are faced with a new and very dangerous dynamic. For a long time, the UK has sought to face both directions—towards Europe and across the Atlantic. It has sought to be part of Europe and to treat the US as one of its most trustworthy partners.

Under its new fascist Administration, the US can no longer be treated as a reliable, trustworthy partner. It is unleashing unilateral economic attacks on previous allies and direct security threats, and it is not treating a country such as Russia as the security threat that it is. It is actively promoting far-right politics in European countries, and it is a threat to democratic countries that it previously treated as allies.

In short, the UK can no longer afford that dual approach to the world—the idea that it does not need to choose between a democratic, peaceful family of nations in the European Union and an anti-democratic, anti-environment and anti-social justice threat from the US. The UK Government must make that choice. I deeply regret that, at the moment, we have a UK Government that is refusing to make that choice, is kowtowing to the US Administration and appears unwilling to commit to what it calls a reset. I would love a reset of our relationship with the European Union, if that reset means restoring the rights, freedoms and opportunities of young people to move on their terms, when they choose and for their purposes, or, indeed, the right for economic integration with our European family of nations. That level of reset does not seem to be on offer from the UK. If we want it, the only way to get it will be to do it for Scotland, as an independent member of the European Union.

15:41

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): As an ardent European, it gives me great pleasure to speak in any such debate, and I am grateful to the Government for making time for it.

As we have heard, last Friday marked Europe day, when European nations across the continent marked and, indeed, celebrated the legacy of a Europe that was rebuilt from the ashes of the

second world war—not through rivalry or conquest, but through co-operation, solidarity and, of course, peace.

The cabinet secretary was absolutely right to reference the Schuman declaration—a bold, hopeful vision for a future in which countries work together to solve common challenges. That was particularly profound in a part of the world that had been ravaged by war for centuries, and a continent that, until then, had, all too often, been defined by those conflicts.

It was right that the first treaty of the European Union established the European Coal and Steel Community, which gave a collective assurance that no member country of—or signatory country to—that treaty could ever again build a war machine, and the signs of rearmament that led to the second world war could never again be manifest.

That legacy is now all the more important in the context of the tragic situation that has been unfolding in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion in 2022—indeed, since the initial invasion in 2014. War has returned to continental Europe. It is a reality that has been brought home to me in visceral clarity, not just in the testimony of the Ukrainian refugee who shared our home for nine months, but in the convoy that it was my privilege to take part in with Paul Sweeney over the Easter break, when we drove five ambulances to Lviv. In downtown Lviv, there is a city park that is not dissimilar to Princes Street gardens—or at least it was until the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. It is now known as the field of Mars and is a cemetery for the glorious defenders of Ukraine. City officials hold funerals there every day, and there were three on the morning of our arrival alone. That speaks to the reality that war is never far away. The Treaty on European Union has kept this continent safe, but we need to safeguard it in other ways, too. That war—the Ukrainian defence of Ukraine—is just three tanks of diesel away.

Stephen Kerr: I respect the fact that Alex Cole-Hamilton is a strong supporter of the European Union, but, as he might have predicted, I will ask him the same question that I have asked other colleagues. It is not right that the European Union hinges security co-operation on issues such as long-term access to UK territorial fishing waters. Surely, when we are facing what we are facing—and he has, rightly, been eloquent and articulate on the subject—we should come together without terms and conditions.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The member speaks the minds of many members in the chamber. In many ways, we face an existential threat to the freedoms that we enjoy. In the teeth of such a threat, we should not be playing politics with other aspects of state interests or multistate interests. I have some

sympathy with his remarks on that. We have yet to see the exact detail of such proposals, but I would take a dim view—as, I am sure, would other ardent Europeans—if security co-operation were to be linked to other side-show issues, as important as those may be.

The Liberal Democrats are internationalists and unapologetically pro-European to our fingertips. The advent of Brexit and the Brexit referendum nine years ago causes us pain to this day. We believe in a Scotland that is at the heart of Britain and a Britain that is at the heart of Europe. We consider the four freedoms that were first espoused in the treaty of Rome—the free movement of goods, people, capital and services—as underpinning the most important charter for freedom that the world has ever seen. Brexit was a body blow to that vision—there is no question about that.

Let us be honest about the consequences that we all still face as a result of Brexit. The trade and co-operation agreement has now been in force for four years. It removed tariffs and quotas but left enormous friction in the form of red tape and bureaucracy, which is holding back our exporters, artists and service industries and is stifling growth in our economy. Our young people have lost the opportunities to live, learn and work across Europe, experiences that were so formative to those of us who benefited from them in our youth.

I welcome the UK Government's commitment to reset our relationship with Europe. However, words alone are not enough. We need a tangible youth mobility scheme; our young people are still missing out on the EU Erasmus scheme. That scheme could not only provide experiences that are sometimes life-changing and formative for our young people, giving them the opportunity to live, study and work in Europe; it could also benefit our economy and enrich our academic institutions, particularly in areas such as the hospitality sector.

There is low-hanging fruit and little steps that would mutually benefit us and our European neighbours, such as mutual recognition of professional qualifications to open up labour markets or participation in EU research programmes.

Angus Robertson: While we are talking about the potential areas of agreement in next week's summit, does Mr Cole-Hamilton agree that the creative Europe programme, in addition to Erasmus+, is something on which the UK Government should seek agreement with the European Union? Rejoining creative Europe would be transformational for our cultural sector and for our screen sector in particular. Will he take the opportunity of highlighting not only the advantages of rejoining the Erasmus+ programme but of rejoining the creative Europe programme as well?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The cabinet secretary speaks my mind. One of the untold tragedies of Brexit is the massive impact that it has had on our creative sector. I absolutely support his remarks and I associate myself with them.

Liberal Democrats also want those first baby steps to be steps towards tangibly rejoining the single market and the customs union, as part of a longer road map back to our future with Europe. We are not naive; we know that it cannot happen tomorrow or overnight. However, by taking those steps now, closer integration can be achieved.

We are stronger when we work together in this Parliament, across this island of nations and with our closest European neighbours. Patrick Harvie was right: we can depend less on the United States today than we perhaps could as little as three months ago. In that reality and realignment of national alliances, we must look to our nearest European neighbours.

The UK's place is in Europe; it is part of Europe. That is the Liberal Democrat vision, and it is one that we will continue to fight and work for in chambers such as this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:49

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is disgraceful that the UK Government is yet again completely ignoring the devolved nations on something as fundamental as engaging with the EU. I am not surprised that Stephen Kerr is getting tired of listening to the Scottish Government object to this country and its elected representatives being overlooked, overridden and obstructed by the UK Government, because we are all tired of that happening. It happens all the time, and it happened just as much when his party was in charge. It is no surprise that the Tory amendment boils down to "Wheesht and know your place, Scotland."

However, it is very sad that Labour's amendment launches into a full welcoming of the UK speaking to the EU without bothering to acknowledge that the same UK Government is not speaking to Scotland. I found the tone incredible, so I counted, and the amendment contains the word "welcomes" six times. Labour MSPs are still MSPs, and it is frankly embarrassing how content they are with their own party treating this place with no respect or consideration. It must be a great comfort to Keir Starmer that, in the midst of so many different groups being utterly furious and gutted by his performance so far as Prime Minister, no matter how blatantly or publicly he disrespects Scotland, his MSPs will be there to warmly welcome it.

Angus Robertson: Does Emma Roddick agree that it is odd, to say the least, that, although the Welsh Labour Government is prepared to raise the same concerns with the UK Government about how it is conducting its business and how it is not informing the devolved Administrations, the Scottish Labour Party has lodged an amendment that welcomes everything and is unprepared to criticise the UK Government on those points? Frankly, it is pretty embarrassing. If it is possible for Welsh Labour colleagues to do that, why will Scottish Labour members not do it?

Emma Roddick: Absolutely. I am embarrassed for them, and I hope that they will address that point later in the debate.

Neil Bibby: Our amendment welcomes the UK resetting relations with the EU, welcomes the summit that is to be held, welcomes the UK Government's commitment to create a strategic partnership between the UK and the EU, welcomes the UK Government's specific commitment to negotiate a sanitary and phytosanitary veterinary agreement and welcomes the Prime Minister's commitment to improve security co-operation with the EU. Does Emma Roddick welcome those things, too?

Emma Roddick: There are six "welcomes" but not one mention of the fact that Scotland has not even been invited to the table. Labour MSPs have not been invited to the table. It is incredibly embarrassing.

When I look at the news, I often see coverage of movement at Westminster, in Whitehall and in the European Parliament and the European Union, but I do not feel connected to what is being done on our behalf in London right now. I do not identify with the anti-migration, anti-equality and anti-welfare rhetoric that is coming out of the mouths of Keir Starmer and those in his Cabinet, and I do not believe that Scotland on the whole does, either.

I often identify with progress that is being made at a European level, such as the protections that the European Parliament has introduced to ensure that people's data and safety are not compromised by poor use or misuse of artificial intelligence, as well as efforts to work together to tackle climate change and restore peace in Europe and across the world. Our values align with those of the European Union and, more and more every day, they do not align with those of the United Kingdom.

We still do not know, and might never appreciate, the full impact that Brexit will have economically, socially or culturally. Back in 2016, I campaigned for remain. I believed that it was the right thing to do and was saddened by the result, but I admit that I did not consider EU membership to be core to my political beliefs or necessary for

the furtherance of them. I do not think that way now, as I see war and climate catastrophe inch closer and watch as the UK fails to act on shared crises such as climate change, artificial intelligence threats and human rights violations. Scotland needs to be back in with our neighbours and to work with other nations on shared challenges, and it needs to do so as an independent country. There would be times when we would disagree with other countries, but we would be doing so on an even footing, in stark contrast to how we are being treated in the local union, where our English counterparts do not even see fit to share information with Scotland ahead of engagement with the European Union on our behalf.

Closer energy and climate co-operation with the EU is no longer an optional extra; it is a global imperative. We should be working hand in hand with our European partners to tackle the climate emergency; we should not be creating obstacles. That is what Brexit has done. It erected barriers to trade, damaged our vital industries and made it harder for people to come to contribute to this society. Young people have missed out on countless opportunities, our national health service and medical research efforts have been isolated, and people have been made poorer.

Brexit has been a profound failure, but Keir Starmer seems dead set on exacerbating it in any way that he can. Not content with Brexit's existing damage to the Scottish economy, which is estimated to be about £4 billion, he is reacting to people turning away from his party over its many broken promises by appealing to migration panic and making it even harder for people to come over here to fill our health and social care vacancies. He has made it clear that he would rather suck up to Trump than fix the damage that has been caused by leaving the single market and the customs union.

Keir Starmer's red lines on Brexit should have been top of the list when he was considering which election promises to break. At least that would have improved things for the UK as a whole, instead of hurting pensioners, disabled people, Grangemouth workers and women against state pension inequality—the WASPI women.

Dropping red lines on freedom of movement is not just about addressing the damage that has been done to freedom of movement; it is about our values. Scotland is an open, welcoming nation, and we have a history of not just accepting but valuing fully the social and cultural ties that come with migration.

We are being badly served by the UK Government, regardless of who is in power. The reaction to a rise in divisive rhetoric should not be to pander to it. It should be to remain steadfast in

our positive vision for an independent Scotland in Europe that works constantly towards upholding fundamental human rights. I am glad that the Scottish Government, at least, seems to remain committed to doing exactly that.

15:56

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I speak today not just as a member of the Scottish Parliament and an unapologetic European but as someone who knows deeply and personally the cost of disconnection—disconnection from community and kin, from opportunity, from progress and from partnership. That is the true cost that Scotland is paying as a result of Brexit—a Brexit that we did not collectively vote for, that was imposed on us and that continues to inflict damage on our communities and economy.

At one point, not that long ago, the Parliament agreed—let me be clear: it was a deeply held belief for most members across the chamber—that the best relationship that Scotland and, indeed, the entire UK could have with the European Union was to be a full member. To my deep shame, and it should be to all our deep shame, we now find ourselves in an island of strangers and a Farage-sque, inward-looking, little Britain nightmare.

I find it deeply frustrating and very distasteful that, as economic migrants to Canada, when I was six, my family were known as expats, as if we were something exceptional, which I think had a lot to do with the colour of our skin.

I do not for one moment believe that the people of Scotland truly want us to accept that there is no way back for us to become part of the EU—not just to rebuild what we had but to rediscover who we are. They do not recognise the politics of Westminster any more. The EU was never just about trade or tariffs. It was about solidarity and shared values. It was about standing shoulder to shoulder with our neighbours to face the challenges of our age: climate change, social inequality, global health crises and conflict. At a time when we see war once again raging in Europe, we should be doing everything in our power to reignite that solidarity. We will not do that by tinkering about the edges, and I do not believe that it should be contingent on access to our fishing waters.

Brexit has not delivered the sunlit uplands that we were promised—far from it. It has delivered uncertainty for our businesses, anxiety for our young people and barriers for our farmers, our fishers and the food and drink sector, which is one of Scotland's greatest economic assets.

Our creative industries, health system and universities have all been harmed by the red lines

of past and present UK Governments—red lines that have become shackles. The refusal to even entertain access to the single market, the rejection of the customs union and the ideological opposition to freedom of movement were not inevitable choices; they were political choices that were made without the meaningful involvement of Scotland's people or our Parliament. That continues to happen, and my colleague Emma Roddick highlighted how our Labour colleagues are just not able to challenge that.

When UK ministers speak of social care workers as being “unskilled”, it makes my hackles rise. Being a patient, caring, kind, compassionate and dedicated care worker takes great skill, and we should all do well to remember that.

It is time—indeed, it is past time—for the UK Government to drop its red lines. If it will not revisit its decision for the sake of principle, I ask it to do so for the sake of people: for the small business in Ayrshire that used to export cheese to France with ease but now faces paperwork delays and lost markets; for the nurse from Spain who used to work in our national health service but no longer feels welcome; and for the young person in Cumnock or Catrine who dreamed of studying or working in Europe but now faces borders, both literal and bureaucratic.

At the upcoming UK-EU summit, the UK Government has a rare opportunity—a chance to turn the page and to begin to rebuild trust and co-operation. I welcome all of that. However, that process must start with ambition.

Today, we must call on the UK Government to pursue a bold veterinary and food and drink agreement that can remove burdens from our farmers and producers, restore some measures of frictionless trade and bring immediate benefits to both sides of the channel. We must collectively call for closer energy and climate co-operation. We are in a climate and biodiversity emergency. Scotland is rich in renewable energy potential, and the climate crisis knows no borders. By aligning with EU standards and collaborating on innovation, research and resilience, we can deliver a greener and fairer future for us all.

We must call for greater freedom of movement, because people are not commodities. Our ability to live, work, study and love across Europe enriched our society and expanded our horizons. For our young people in particular, the loss of the Erasmus programme and the barriers to cultural and educational exchange are a wound that must be healed. We owe them better—we owe them the world.

I will be absolutely clear: it is not only the content of the UK Government's approach that is unacceptable but the manner of that approach.

The fact that the UK Government has not shared any draft summit text with the Scottish Government or any of the other devolved Administrations is an insult to the principles of devolution and democracy. It treats the Parliament and, by extension, the people whom we represent as afterthoughts.

We have unique issues surrounding depopulation and skills in Scotland. We should have the same powers over migration visas that a Canadian province has. I hear constantly that this is the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world, but the Quebec province that I used to live in has more powers than this place does.

We in Scotland are not afterthoughts. Scotland has a voice, and today we must use ours here to amplify it.

16:02

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I share the sentiment that has been expressed across the chamber that our European neighbours are essential for Scotland's trade, security and defence. That is why I was pleased that, as soon as Labour came into government last July, genuine and sincere effort was made to begin the hard task of resetting our relationship with our closest neighbours.

It has always been fairly axiomatic to me that the biggest determinant of trade is geographic proximity. That is quite an obvious deduction. It is easier to do trade with someone who is across the street than it is with someone who is on a different continent, and the same logic applies at a national level. Reducing the frictions and impediments to undertaking that trade is mutually beneficial for our common prosperity. If we distil it down, that is the essence of what the European project has been about since the end of the second world war.

Stephen Kerr: Paul Sweeney is making a good point about trading goods, but the UK economy is largely now a service economy. Because of the age that we live in, the delivery of services is not now contingent on proximity, because we have the means to span the world through a Zoom call or other technological means. It is not entirely true to say that trade is restricted, particularly in this economy, by geography.

Paul Sweeney: The member makes a fair point in some respects. Nonetheless, significant and important parts of our economy are contingent on the export of and trade in goods. Similarly, a lot of services rely on physical interaction—for example, healthcare provision requires physical interaction. There are instances in which that is still very important and, if we impede any of that, the net effect is that it causes problems for our common prosperity. That is why it remains logical that we

continue to remove barriers to trade, where possible, at every level, whether that is by building better infrastructure locally or improving our trading relationships internationally.

I found the whole period when the previous Conservative UK Government was in power utterly obnoxious—it frequently used hostile rhetoric about the European Union and blamed Europe in an abstract sense for the challenges of trade disruption, inflation and labour shortages that followed Brexit, which was, when we boil it down, based on an utter lie and an impossible trinity of issues.

Three promises were made as a result of the Brexit proposition: that we would leave the single market and the customs union; that we would have no border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and that we would have no border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It was impossible to achieve all those things. In effect, a border, in all but name, was put down the Irish Sea. That is how the previous UK Government cobbled together a Brexit deal. It covered its obnoxious, wrong-headed and illogical approach with hostile rhetoric about the European Union.

There is no doubt that the EU was a useful scapegoat for the previous UK Government's woeful handling of issues at home, not least the appalling and destructive austerity programme that it introduced in 2010. The Conservative Government's approach was hugely damaging—as well as being damaging for our economy and the businesses that rely on exporting to our number 1 trading partner, it led to falling living standards, a deep frustration that improvements were not possible and, in working-class communities in particular, a deep alienation that persists to this day. All parties have not been honest enough about the trade-offs that are required to overcome the challenges that this country faces.

The handling of the so-called Brexit trilemma and the cobbled-together, threadbare deal that Boris Johnson's Administration arrived at undoubtedly harmed the Scottish economy, and repairing that damage will take some time. Even today, the leader of the Conservatives at Westminster continues on the same tracks, by indulging in hostile rhetoric about the European Union to fire up the party's Eurosceptic base and vowing to rip up the forthcoming deal with the EU, even though she has not seen the detail of that, as it is at a Government-to-Government stage. I hope that further collaboration will emerge. I am just glad that those vandals are no longer in charge of what is going on.

Just as we have seen from the Conservatives, we have also seen what I feel are rather unfair

attempts to manipulate for political convenience the relationship that the Labour Government is trying to build with Europe. It is trying to forge deeper and stronger ties on a bilateral basis. I recall the difficulty that we had back in 2019, when I was a member of the House of Commons, in trying to navigate the Brexit situation. I received a very robust apprenticeship in parliamentary politics when Parliament was trying to navigate the Brexit dilemma after the country had voted to leave the EU in a very simplistic, binary way. We had to work out how to distil that down into a workable set of proposals. There were a number of indicative votes.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Paul Sweeney: I am happy to give way to Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: I commend Paul Sweeney for his work as the convener of the cross-party group on migration, of which I am the deputy convener. He makes a good point about hostile environments. In that light—I realise that he is in a difficult position—will he reflect on Keir Starmer's comments about a nation of strangers and how that creates a hostile environment for many new Scots whom we rely on in Scotland's core public services?

Paul Sweeney: It is certainly not language that I would have used. With the complexity and sophistication of the integration effort in the city, Glasgow is a very good demonstration of how we avoid people becoming strangers. In 2001, when I was 12 years old, a Kurdish refugee was murdered in Sighthill. I remember the community discord that existed at that time. There was a danger that Glasgow could become a city riven by racial strife, but the effort that the community put in to rebuild trust and to establish connection stands as a powerful example.

I hope that, across Scotland and the wider United Kingdom, we can learn a positive lesson from that experience in Glasgow. In places where settled and established relationships have been built over time, the sense of hostility to migration abates. It is important that we learn the right lessons from our experience in Glasgow. We can teach our neighbours across the UK a lot in that regard.

When it comes to what we can do around Europe, I think that our efforts must be centred on defence and security. Mr Cole-Hamilton mentioned our recent trip to Ukraine. In the context of American isolationism, the European Union is becoming critical to our common defence and security. Previously, that was an area of policy that was largely confined to NATO. It is important

that Scotland, with its defence and technological capabilities and its economic capacity, steps up and plays its role in supporting our European colleagues. I think that we can do a lot with Ukraine on a bilateral basis to build that capability. I make that constructive suggestion for the cabinet secretary's consideration.

16:09

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I will begin with Brexit, but I am not lingering there, because Stephen Kerr is too easy a target and, indeed, delights in being a target. Not only did 62 per cent of Scots reject Brexit at the EU referendum almost 10 years ago, but the percentage who reject it has risen throughout the rest of the UK, so that 55 per cent now think that Brexit was a mistake and only 30 per cent think that it was a good idea. Members do not need a PhD to know why that is the case. We face higher costs and more red tape, and we do not have £375 million extra a week to redirect to the NHS, as was blazoned on the side of a bus—and that is just for starters.

We lost freedom of workforce movement across Europe, which has had an impact across the Scottish economy and particularly in the hospitality, care and horticultural sectors, and is now exacerbated by the UK hike in the cost of employer national insurance, which is a tax on jobs if ever there was one, and by ill-considered comments and policies on legal migration from Sir Keir Starmer. We need migrants here because we know that we have an ageing population and a decreasing available workforce, so we cannot separate Scotland's domestic needs from what the UK and Europe do or from the world's wider conflicts.

Stephen Kerr: Will Ms Grahame accept an intervention?

Christine Grahame: The target arises.

Stephen Kerr: I am sure that Christine Grahame would not disagree that we have high levels of worklessness in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom and that we should not use mass immigration as an excuse for not investing in our own population and equipping them to do the jobs that we currently seem to expect migrant labour to perform.

Christine Grahame: First, the member must accept that we have an ageing population and that we do not have enough national births to provide a sufficient workforce. I certainly want people who come from elsewhere to work here to be decently paid and I do not want them to be underpaid, but we simply do not have the right population balance.

I also mourn the loss of European influence not only because we quit the EU but more broadly. It is sadly ironic that, just as the UK commemorated the 80th anniversary of VE day, which was celebrated on 8 May 1945 and marked the end of the second world war in Europe, we see a European nation—Ukraine—still being bombarded by Russia in an illegal occupation that is now in its third year. That is referred to as a war in this new world order, but it is an occupation. It is also being suggested that Ukraine must surrender part of its sovereign territory to Russia and that, in order to secure military aid from the Trump regime, it must surrender some of its minerals to the United States. That is termed “contractual politics” and I want nothing to do with it. That is the new world order for you.

I see President Trump as symbolic of that order, but he is not the cause of it, although he is giving it his blessing with a scratch of his Sharpie. His bizarre, fractious and fluctuating politics has at last woken up Europe and NATO to the chaos and fragility around them.

I move from Putin to Netanyahu, because the issue extends beyond Europe's boundaries to Gaza. Too many have apparently accepted Netanyahu's genocide, even if tacitly. I can do no better than refer members to the extraordinary and heartfelt submission that was made just days ago to the United Nations Security Council by the UN emergency relief co-ordinator, Tom Fletcher, who said that Israel is

“deliberately and unashamedly imposing inhumane conditions on civilians”

in Gaza and the West Bank. For more than 10 weeks, nothing has entered Gaza: no food, medicine, water or tents. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been forcibly displaced and confined to ever-shrinking spaces, because 70 per cent of Gaza's territory is either within Israel's militarised zones or under displacement orders. Every single one of the 2.1 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip faces the risk of famine and one in five risk starvation. The few hospitals that have somehow survived bombardment are overwhelmed, and the medics who have somehow survived drone and sniper attacks cannot keep up with the trauma and the spread of disease. Appalling violence is also increasing on the West Bank, where the situation is the worst it has been in decades.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member accept an intervention?

Christine Grahame: Yes, certainly, if I may have my time back.

Patrick Harvie: I am strongly pro-Europe, as I have made clear, but does Christine Grahame agree that this is an area in which the European

Union has failed? It took a strong position on sanctions against Russia following the occupation of Ukraine, but the same strong position should have been taken against the occupation of Palestine and has not been.

Christine Grahame: The member has pre-empted where I am going with this narrative. Entire communities have been destroyed in the West Bank and refugee camps have been depopulated. The world's press is banned—that is no wonder.

What is Europe saying? On Ukraine, we have the “coalition of the willing”. That is better than nothing but, in the meantime, Russia's occupation creeps further into, and embeds itself deeper in, Ukraine's sovereign territory. On Gaza, the European Council has called for

“an immediate return to the full implementation of the ceasefire-hostage release agreement”;

it cites

“the importance of unimpeded access and sustained distribution of humanitarian assistance at scale into and throughout Gaza”

and calls for a “two-state solution”. Is that enough? I do not think so. It is better than nothing, but it is certainly not enough.

Brexit was not just bad for the UK and Scottish economies; it reduced the UK's and Europe's status and influence in world affairs. We need a strong European Union, with an independent Scotland as a partner and member state, not simply for economic reasons but as an international political force in order to counterbalance and challenge the new world order. We cannot leave it to contractual politics—to Putin, Netanyahu and Trump, to name but three international villains. It is not just about economics.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): George Adam is the final speaker in the open debate.

16:16

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): It is never good to start with an apology, but I apologise for having not been here for the start of the cabinet secretary's speech. It is becoming difficult for Stacey and I to get from one end of the campus to the other since my speech the other day, now that we are the middle-aged Posh and Becks of the Scottish Parliament.

I will start with something that has already been talked about. This week started with a Labour Prime Minister talking about us being “an island of strangers”. In Scotland, we are a nation that has, over the years, welcomed people in to make our nation, our home and our communities better. We

are a nation that has constantly looked to others to come here and be new Scots.

We are living in a world in which, as Christine Grahame said, we have Donald Trump, with his marker pen and his big billboards, making sure that penguins are getting tariffs, too. We are constantly dealing with what seems almost to be an alternate version of the world. If someone had written it into a dystopian science fiction book, we would think that it was too unrealistic.

Unfortunately, that is what we are living in at the moment. We are living in a place where Nigel Farage is seen as some kind of saviour by some and as not being on the far right. Well, he is on the extreme far right. The situation is not helped by those in the Labour and Conservative parties who are trying to become pound-shop Farages. That does not help us in the least.

This afternoon, we have heard versions of that. We have heard Stephen Kerr doing his best impression of Al Murray's Brexit-loving, offensive pub landlord, although he stopped short of saying "Back off, Brussels", which is Al Murray's tagline. One of the things about that character is that it is a caricature—it is hysterical, and Stephen Kerr is predictable.

We have heard talk of "the bonds of Britain" and of how they keep us together, but Westminster forgets my community. All my life, Westminster has forgotten the people of Paisley and my community. All my life, those I love and hold close to me have been forgotten by Westminster. We are but pawns to them as we sit in the Westminster waiting room, waiting for a meeting to try to sort something out.

This debate is about Scotland, which seems to be the forgotten part of the United Kingdom. That is what my constituents feel, and maybe we are in a situation where people are getting disillusioned with politics because some politicians—although not all of us—do not speak the language that they speak and do not speak about their world in a way that they can understand.

Here is a perfect truth: the people of Paisley, and people across Scotland, feel every single day that Brexit was never Scotland's choice. I know that the Opposition hates hearing this, but it was never Scotland's choice. We voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. Every local authority and every area in Scotland said no to Brexit, yet it was forced on us by a Westminster Government that we did not elect, and now we are living with the consequences. The hard Brexit harmed our economy, weakened our rights and cut us off from the opportunities that the EU offers. What is worse, it is still causing damage and neither of the main Westminster parties seems to want to talk about that.

I listened to a London-based news radio show not so long ago. There was a phone-in, and I noted the number of people from down south who are now getting buyer's remorse, following Brexit, because what we said would happen is actually happening and it is affecting their lives and their pockets.

This is the real world. The chamber is not some debating society where we sit, speak for our six minutes and go; this is Scotland's Parliament, and we should be talking about the issues that really matter to the people of Scotland. This debate is an example of that.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam: Yes, let us hear from our very own Alf Garnett.

Stephen Kerr: Oh, my goodness! Well, there we go—what a disgusting comment. Goodness me. I thought that that would be completely out of bounds, given the standards of respect that we are supposed to have in the Parliament.

The member is making the point of my amendment, which is that purpose of the Parliament is to address things such as NHS waiting times, falling levels of attainment, the rise of violence in schools, the state of our public finances and the incompetence of the SNP executive. That is what the Parliament should be doing. That is why the people of Scotland sent us here.

George Adam: Mr Kerr never fails to entertain.

At the end of the day, the important thing to the people of Scotland is that the Government deals with all the issues that it continually has to deal with. However, we are being held back by Westminster, and that is the problem. For us, it is not about some ideal. When we mention independence, it is about how Scotland can be a better place and how we can build a better nation. That is what I want for the Parliament. I want to listen to Stephen Kerr talking about a better, independent Scotland taking on powers and responsibilities and ensuring that we are at the table with the European Union during negotiations. That is the important thing. That is what people want. They want us to do our jobs, and we need to go out there and say that independence is the way forward. We cannot sit here any longer and listen to the foppish arguments on one side and the absolute nonsense on the other.

Labour has been in government for less than a year and it has lost control. It has no idea what it is doing. Every day, one thing or another comes out. The Tories are upset because they are no longer in government, so they have decided that they will try to out-Farage Farage. That is not what the

public want. The public need a Government like the Scottish Government, which looks to the future to ensure that we can build a better tomorrow.

Paul Sweeney: Does the member accept that every level of government has a part to play in promoting cohesion, particularly in the context of several cities in Scotland having a housing emergency and continued inward migration, which may create community tensions? It is the duty of the Government to recognise the opportunity of that, to build our way out of it and to bring people together instead of creating further discord.

George Adam: I believe that we have a duty to work together to deliver for the people of Scotland. I do not agree, in any shape or form, with using a vulnerable community that has come to Scotland looking for a new beginning as a scapegoat. That is part of the problem with the debate that we are currently having with those on the far right.

I am looking for an independent Scotland that is European. Brexit is not only a past mistake; it is a current crisis. It is a slow-motion car crash that is hurting every part of Scotland. It is harming our economy, making our people poorer, isolating our public services and robbing the next generation of their rightful place in Europe. Scotland deserves better, wants better and needs better, and—with independence—Scotland can choose better. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

George Adam: Let us return to Europe. Let us rejoin the community of nations that we were dragged out of. Let us take our place not as a region in Westminster's waiting room, but as a nation and a country in our own right.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding up speeches.

16:24

Patrick Harvie: First, I apologise to Christine Grahame. If I had realised that she was moving on to make the point that I was trying to make, I would not have interrupted her, but I have to say that she made the point extremely well.

The challenge that we have to address, as pro-Europeans, is to acknowledge that being pro-European is not to be uncritical of the EU institutions. In fact, if I have one major criticism of the campaign to remain in the EU nine years ago, it is that it was not willing enough to say that Europe could change and do better, whether on international issues, climate, equalities or anything else. It should have been willing to talk about how Europe could and should change to address people's priorities.

That also relates to some of the points that George Adam made about the impact on communities that feel that they are being poorly served. There is a reason why "Take back control" was a powerful slogan. It was a profoundly dishonest slogan. If the 2014 independence campaign had rested on something as simplistic as a three-word slogan such as, "Take back control", I would not have taken part because it would have been so simplistic and dishonest. However, the idea of taking back control was politically powerful because so many people do not feel that they have control.

That is a domestic matter—it is about the structure of the UK state and the funding of public services, in Scotland as well as in the rest of the UK; it is not the European Union that is responsible for that feeling of a lack of control. It is also to do with the power—the unaccountable power—of private interests and the privatisation of what should be democratically accountable power in our society.

I will come to some of the points that the Scottish Government has been making about the negotiating position that it wants the UK Government to strike in the upcoming summit. I agree that there would be opportunities to at least ameliorate some of the damage of Brexit with an agreement on veterinary and food and drink arrangements and high regulatory standards as well as on climate and energy. In recent weeks, we have debated net zero—from a more sceptical position in the case of the Conservatives—and we have debated hydrogen, for example. There is a clear sense that, although many of us are pointing out the shortcomings of using hydrogen in certain parts of our economy, there is a general consensus that green hydrogen can play a significant part in our wider decarbonisation and in export, and that there are other European countries that could see Scotland as a source of green hydrogen, which would also benefit our economy.

However, we need to work together with those European countries to achieve that as well as on issues such as high-voltage direct-current interconnection with Europe for electricity and the skills that are needed for net zero, including building decarbonisation. Many European countries are decades ahead of Scotland on building decarbonisation, so there is a great deal to learn from them, and we should certainly be doing more to work with Europe on that agenda.

However, I also want to question the idea of a reset. I genuinely hope that the UK Government has a reset with Europe in mind. It has used the same language in relation to a reset with the devolved Governments in the various parts of the UK. I do not see that yet; I do not yet see the flesh

on the bones of either a reset with Europe or a reset with devolution. I hope that that emerges, but, really, months and months into the new UK Administration, we should be seeing a little more detail by now.

Youth mobility should absolutely be one of the UK Government's key priorities, and it should be seen as a step towards wider free movement. I echo Elena Whitham's point that, in this week's furore around the UK Government's announcements on migration, the portrayal of care work as low skilled and therefore of low value in the broadest sense is deeply offensive and harmful to those whose dedication was being applauded on doorsteps right across the country just a few years ago, as health and social care workers kept going during the pandemic.

Quite apart from the rhetoric on "strangers", which I found uncomfortable—given Paul Sweeney's response, I think that he did, too, even if he might use more diplomatic language to criticise it than I would—is the idea that a UK Prime Minister is openly promoting the far-right conspiracy theory that there has been an open borders experiment in the UK. I know that in the chamber we are expected not to accuse anyone of lying, so I will try not to do that. However, it stretches the power of euphemism to describe accurately the nature of that claim. If there had been such an experiment in the UK, there would have been no dawn raids and no detention centres, the people of Kenmure Street would not have had to fill it to defend their neighbours from immigration enforcement action, and the bodies of children would never have washed up on the shores of the Channel. It is a falsehood to say that there has been such an experiment, and I think that Sir Keir Starmer knows it.

My final point is on the notion that we should not be debating reserved issues. The Conservatives play that card when they like, but not on other occasions, such as during yesterday's debate, in which Mr Kerr spoke on a Tory motion that was mostly about such issues. I was happy to debate that motion and explain why it was wrong, but it was largely about reserved issues such as oil and gas licensing, and a great deal more besides.

Stephen Kerr: No! No!

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: In truth, the split between devolved and reserved issues has never been a precise one, and it is less so now than it was when the Scottish Parliament was created. In much of our relationship with Europe, we see aspects that affect both types. Therefore, acting in the spirit of collaboration and openness and developing shared positions across the Governments of the

UK, which the cabinet secretary was calling for, are all the more important.

However, the UK Government is not doing that. I hope to goodness that it will change its attitude and take a more collaborative, open and democratic approach to negotiating with our European Union partners and to achieving a restoration in our relationship with them. If it will not, I come back to where I ended my earlier remarks. If the UK Government will not behave in that way, Scotland will have to take to itself the powers to restore its relationship with Europe and make those decisions in a democratically accountable way.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Harvie. Members, do let us avoid speaking over one another.

16:32

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): In a changed world, it is more important than ever that we keep relationships with our partners around the world strong, and that we work in areas of mutual interest to meet goals that benefit our security and our economies. Following years of our international standings declining under the Conservatives at Westminster, it is positive that we now have a UK Government that is working to rebuild those relationships and is open about the value of international co-operation.

Last week saw Scotland and Europe mark the 80th anniversary of VE day. Such memories of war act as a stark reminder of what can happen when we fail to work with our international colleagues. That is why I welcome the holding of the first UK-EU summit next week, when we can cement our new relationship. As the Prime Minister has said, we should "look forward, not back" and work to build a new strategic partnership with the EU to benefit Scotland's economy, defence and public safety.

On our economy, I am pleased to see consensus reached with the UK Government on the importance of an SPS agreement. Of all the parts of the United Kingdom, Scotland exports the most food and drink, and that sector is worth £16 billion to our economy. However, since the Tories' Brexit deal, we have seen our agri-food trade with the EU fall by 29 per cent for meat exports and 26 per cent for dairy. In the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's review of the trade and co-operation agreement we saw the impact that the situation is having on businesses, in that imports are taking far longer and costs are going up.

It has been estimated that achieving a veterinary agreement will increase exports by at least 22.5 per cent. That delivers what businesses

want as soon as possible—not in several years' time.

On defence, with threats to Scotland and the United Kingdom greater than they have been in previous years, co-operation is also key. The European Union has been taking a greater role in defence in recent years, following Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Formal collaboration will be key to supporting security across the continent but will also be important to Scotland's defence sector, which will be bolstered by the UK Labour Government's increase in defence spending. That investment will boost Scotland's industry and defence sector, which employs thousands of people.

The industry has told the Westminster Defence Committee that collaboration is vital to sustain capacity at home and our competitiveness in global markets. It also says that we have an opportunity to engage in a strategic conversation on defence with the EU, due to the renewed relationship that the UK Government is pursuing. That is what a positive future with the EU looks like.

Scotland also benefits from positive and collaborative relationships with non-EU countries. The trade deal with India that was announced last week will add to the £600 million of exports that we currently achieve and give Scotland unique access to one of the world's fastest-growing economies. The deal will benefit Scottish businesses by lowering tariffs in areas in which we are leaders, such as whisky. The Scotch Whisky Association said that it was "transformational", increasing exports by £1 billion over the next five years and creating jobs.

Those actions—rebuilding our relationship with Europe, improving our security and defence and securing trade deals that boost the Scottish economy—demonstrate the power of international co-operation and the fact that we are taking a pragmatic approach to tackling the challenges that we face. They show that, if we want to be successful in delivering for Scotland's people, we must look to the future and work together when it is in the best interests of our country to do so. Further, they prove the value of stepping up to deliver, not sniping from the sidelines or picking sides.

16:37

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to be able to close this debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, and I will be supporting the amendment in the name of my colleague Stephen Kerr.

Once again, today's debate could have been an opportunity to discuss how best Scotland can exist

in today's Europe. It was a chance to highlight opportunities for improved collaboration within the European Union and with our European neighbours as the trading relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union continues to develop.

However, one look at the Government's motion makes it quite clear that the Scottish Government wanted to have a debate on other topics. Indeed, the Scottish Government is rerunning debates on single market membership, customs union membership and freedom of movement. The Government knows that that shopping list is a complete fantasy. However, that did not stop it taking the opportunity this afternoon to stand up and say its piece, so it is important that we do the same.

Instead of setting out a pragmatic and bold vision for how Scotland can exist alongside the European Union, the Scottish Government wants to reopen old wounds and repeat arguments as if it were 2019 again. As usual, the Scottish Government is spending yet more chamber time debating entirely reserved matters.

We should be talking today about what is happening in our education system. We could be talking about what is happening with delayed infrastructure projects, such as those on roads. We could be discussing other devolved matters. However, that is not what the Scottish Government wants—once again, it wants to focus on constitutional grievance.

Patrick Harvie: I wonder whether the member could explain in what way the argument that he is making now is consistent with the fact that, just yesterday, the Conservatives secured a debate that reopened an issue that was settled in 2019—Scotland's 2045 net zero target. The Conservatives brought to the chamber an unrealistic wish list, or shopping list, of a nightmare fantasy of dumping net zero.

Alexander Stewart: Yesterday, we were talking about the economy of Scotland and how jobs are being lost in a sector that is vital to this country and our future economic stability.

The Scottish Government says that it is concerned about economic damage, while ignoring the fact that, if we had Scottish independence, we would have economic chaos. The centre for economic performance at the London School of Economics has said that

"disrupting trade with the rest of the UK could lower Scottish income per capita by at least 6 per cent."

Given that Scotland exports three times more to the rest of the UK than to the European Union, that is not surprising; nor is it surprising that, according to the Fraser of Allander Institute, more

than 500,000 jobs are linked to trade with the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Scottish Government wants to gloss over the problems of rejoining the European Union. It says that it would be quite an easy thing to achieve, but is glossing over many of the issues that it would face.

Earlier this month, the United Kingdom Government concluded a comprehensive trade deal with India. That is a real opportunity. The deal is the result of several years of negotiation. Although the current UK Government was able to finalise the deal, it was the previous Conservative Government that laid the foundations on which that agreement could be reached.

I know how hard the Scottish whisky industry fought to ensure that that vital sector is central to the trade deal. When I met the Indian trade minister two years ago, he told me that he had never seen a country fight so hard for one particular industry. We have all been fighting for that industry, because we know that it will bring us prosperity and opportunity and will give us jobs in our communities.

The deal will reduce tariffs on Scottish whisky from 150 per cent to 75 per cent, and will further reduce them to 40 per cent within 10 years. It could increase whisky exports by at least £1 billion in the next five years, bringing money into our economy. We should be celebrating that.

The deal will also create countless jobs and opportunities across the sector. The Scotch Whisky Association has called the deal “transformational” and “a landmark moment”. That is very much the case.

The crucial thing here, though, is that that deal would not have been possible if the UK were still a part of the EU. I want more of that—I want trade deals in other areas. It is quite telling that the SNP Government was unable to celebrate the deal, despite the significant possibilities and prospects for Scotland that it brings.

There are also many future opportunities for Scotland, as the United Kingdom engages with faster-growing markets across Asia, Africa and the Americas. I hope that the Scottish Government can at least try to welcome some of the opportunities that lie ahead in those continents, because they are immense and will give businesses and individuals opportunities to prosper.

I turn to some of the speeches that we have heard this afternoon. The cabinet secretary spoke about a reset summit that is to take place in the next week or so, and about the challenges, hopes, aspirations and opportunities that it presents. However, we must think about the defence and

security challenges. The cabinet secretary also spoke about the Prime Minister’s recent comments being “a new low for Labour.”

My colleague Stephen Kerr gave a passionate speech, as we would expect. He talked about the SNP once again wanting to break up the United Kingdom. The SNP wants to rejoin the EU, abandon processes and drop red lines. However, the biggest issue that Mr Kerr discussed was access to fishing rights and how that issue has been manipulated in the past few days. If what we are hearing is being considered behind closed doors is true, that would be a backward step for everybody.

Taking back control has been touched on. So far, 70 trade deals have been signed—those are opportunities that this country would not have had if we had still been a member of the EU. As I said, the trade deal with India will create real prosperity for the nation.

It has been mentioned that secret summits are under way in which the possibility of giving away fishing grounds is being considered. As we all know, the SNP—the Scottish nationalists—wish to split and take away many of those fishing grounds.

Neil Bibby talked about the politics of the issue. He, too, touched on the UK-EU reset that is about to take place. He spoke about the Scottish nationalists grandstanding and about how the SNP’s record on Europe has not always been as clear as it was presented today.

I pay tribute to Alex Cole-Hamilton for discussing the Ukraine war and for his recent visit to Ukraine to deliver ambulances from Scotland. That was very bold, and I pay tribute to him for that. He spoke about the freedoms that we enjoy in the United Kingdom, security issues, the fact that Scotland has a place in Europe—there is no doubt about that—and the proposed plans for a reset. He also talked about where we can work together.

Instead of our having a meaningful debate about Scotland’s future relationship with Europe, we have had the usual grievance and received lectures from many members in the chamber. We want Scotland to be part of an outward-looking United Kingdom in which we can collaborate closely with the EU while embracing the opportunities from free trade with the rest of the world. That is what we need, and that is what we want to create. That is what we need, and that is what we want to capitalise on. That is what we need, and that is what we will stand up for.

16:46

Angus Robertson: I appreciate the opportunity to sum up the debate. I have listened closely to all

the contributions—the constructive contributions and those less than constructive—and I come back to the importance of the values that we share. Europe day celebrates the common values that we share across Europe: those of human dignity, freedom and democracy, based on unity and the idea that a co-operative, interdependent Europe would never again suffer the horrors of war.

Seventy-five years ago—it is 80 years since the end of the second world war in Europe—Schuman's idea was the seed of a peace project that grew into what would become the European Union, but war and division have again returned to our continent. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and the on-going conflict in Gaza remind us that we cannot take peace or international co-operation for granted. The European project and the ideas on which it is founded could not be more important today.

If the past years and the fast-moving first five months of this year have taught us anything, it is that each country and region does not operate in a vacuum and that long-standing certainties cannot be taken for granted. The reality is that we live in an ever more interconnected world, and recent international events have reminded us of the global dimension in which we are embedded.

Let us be absolutely clear: Brexit has been a disaster for both Scotland and the United Kingdom. The impact has undermined the economy, made it harder for businesses to trade with the world's largest single market, ended free movement of people—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Angus Robertson: No, I have to finish the list. It is quite a long list, so it is important that I finish it.

The impact has ended free movement of people and made it harder for businesses that need people to grow to attract them. With a trend towards a declining, ageing population, we need new Scots from Europe and the rest of the world, whom we will continue to welcome to study, work and make their home here in Scotland. That is why we call on the UK Government and other political parties to reject the politics of populists who have sought to divide us, face reality and seize the opportunities to repair some of the damage that Brexit has done.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member give way?

Angus Robertson: Mr Lumsden did not speak in the debate, and I have very little time. I will carry on with my comments.

Those opportunities include a entering into veterinary agreement so that we can more readily trade our world-class food and drink, embracing

the European Union's offer of a youth mobility treaty and rejoining Erasmus+, so that our young people can experience what other countries have to offer and young people from other countries can experience everything that Scotland has to offer.

Stephen Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: If I can make some progress and I have some time remaining, I will let Mr Kerr back in. I have still not referred to his speech—I am coming to that in a minute.

Let us be under no illusion about that or anything else: no scheme or agreement can replace the benefits of European Union membership, and I continue to hope that the United Kingdom Government will rethink its position. Indeed, the forthcoming negotiations at the upcoming leaders summit between the UK Government and the European Union on 19 May are a critical opportunity to undo some of the damage that was done by the previous UK Administration. It is my sincere hope that the UK Government takes heed of Parliament's motion today.

I will reflect on the contributions from Stephen Kerr and other members. I will begin with the contributions of Stephen Kerr and Neil Bibby, because, in many respects they were the same. Both had little to say about the European Union-UK summit or the fact that the UK Government has not shared documentation ahead of the discussions and might be prepared to make agreements in devolved areas without consent from devolved Administrations. Neither member commented on the discussions, and I am happy to give way to either of them if they wish to put their thoughts about that on the record.

Stephen Kerr: I made repeated reference to the UK-EU summit in London, which starts at the beginning of next week, so I do not understand why the cabinet secretary says that we made no mention of it. I certainly did—in connection with his Government's grievance mongering and also in relation to the Labour Government's willingness to sell out on Brexit.

However, if I may, I will now quickly make the point that I wanted to make earlier, when the cabinet secretary would not give way. He is full of doom and gloom about Brexit. He talks about the economy. Maybe he can explain to the Parliament why the rest of the European Union countries' economies performed worse than the United Kingdom's did in the years following Brexit. That is economic fact.

Angus Robertson: Any reading of the record will show, as I pointed out, that neither Stephen Kerr—just then or in his opening speech—or, indeed, Neil Bibby, made any reference to the fact

that the UK Government has not shared documentation ahead of discussions and might be prepared to make agreements in devolved areas without consent from the devolved Administrations. That is a very important point, and it is a great shame that neither of the Tweedledum or Tweedledee parties, which, in the previous UK Government—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us be courteous and let us stop shouting from our seats.

Angus Robertson: Patrick Harvie was absolutely right to talk about embracing the UK-EU summit's opportunities, but rightly also said that the summit would only ameliorate some of the damage that Brexit caused. He was absolutely right to say that he is not yet seeing a reset. Yes, the tone has changed, but the actions of this Labour Government are exactly the same custom and practice that we became used to from the previous UK Government. That is evidenced by the lack of sharing documentation to devolved Administrations, which we are unfortunately now seeing from the Labour Party as well.

Alex Cole-Hamilton was absolutely right to talk about the prize—the opportunity of rejoining the Erasmus+ and creative Europe programmes.

Emma Roddick and Elena Whitham were right to stress why we need an ambitious reset in relations with the European Union, including on freedom of movement.

I appreciated Paul Sweeney's speech. He was right to talk about Europe being essential, he condemned the damage of Euroscepticism and, in the context of Keir Starmer's contemptible rhetoric, he said that he would not use such language. I am appreciative that a member on the Labour benches was prepared to say so.

Christine Grahame talked about the importance of the international context, and she was right to do so. George Adam was similarly correct to warn against the Farage-ism that is increasingly evident in both the Conservative and Labour Party rhetoric.

Foysol Choudhury talked about the advantages of European Union co-operation, and I agreed with him. He talked about progress in the trade agreement with India. I think that that was good. He did not mention the UK-US trade agreement, which maintains the levels of tariffs that are damaging to the Scotch whisky industry. That was an oversight.

Alexander Stewart had an interesting theme in his summing-up speech: it was a could-have-been theme. He and the Conservative Party could have taken the opportunity to stand up for the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and other

devolved Administrations in devolved areas, such as fishing, but they did not.

There are three days until the summit. The UK Government has not shared the documentation and the Conservative Party could not even bring itself to call for it to do so.

Paul Sweeney: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: I have little time remaining, so I will sum up now.

Any improved deal that the United Kingdom makes with the European Union cannot ignore that Scotland voted to remain, nor can it replace what we have lost—namely, the security and prosperity offered by membership of the European Union. That is why I continue to believe that Scotland should and must return to the European Union as an independent member state in its own right. Only by returning to its rightful place at the heart of Europe can Scotland enjoy the full benefits of and make the fullest contribution to the European Union. I believe that the light that the EU was asked to leave on for Scotland burns still, and I believe that it will continue to do so until the day of our return.

I call on the Parliament to support the Scottish Government's motion and to commit to our fellow Europeans that Scotland and her peoples remain by their side. From Ukraine to the Atlantic and from the Nordics to the Mediterranean, Scotland will be steadfast in our efforts to work with Europe as friends until we return to take our place beside them all as a member of the European Union. Together, we will continue to face the challenges of our continent and our world.

Appointment of Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-17485, in the name of Paul Sweeney, on the appointment of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland.

16:56

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Presiding Officer, as a member of the cross-party selection panel that you established under the Parliament's standing orders, I am delighted to speak to the motion in my name and invite members of the Parliament to agree to nominate Karen Titchener to His Majesty the King for appointment as the inaugural Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland. The cross-party selection panel was chaired by you, Presiding Officer, and the other members were Colin Beattie, the member for Midlothian North and Musselburgh; Emma Harper, a member for South Scotland; Gillian Mackay, a member for Central Scotland; and Brian Whittle, a member for South Scotland.

The Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland is a new independent office-holder that was established under the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Act 2023 and it will be supported by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. The commissioner will advocate for systemic improvement in the safety of healthcare in Scotland and will promote the importance of the views of patients and other members of the public in relation to the safety of healthcare. The commissioner will conduct formal investigations into possible safety issues and gather, analyse and report on information from patients and members of the public about safety concerns. It will report its findings to the Scottish Parliament.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the commissioner's office be a safe haven for whistleblowers? There are many areas of public interest that are raised by whistleblowers that, as things stand, are not being properly dealt with or even respected.

Paul Sweeney: The commissioner's job is to look at systemic issues. Nonetheless, whistleblowers will be an important factor in identifying issues of a systemic nature that can be investigated and they will possibly form a trigger for investigation. I am sure that the commissioner will exercise their judgment accordingly. I encourage any member of the public who has concerns to engage with the commissioner.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): I reassure Stephen Kerr that

very clear processes and pathways are available to people in the health service to be able to whistleblow. Each health board has its own whistleblowing champion and there is a national whistleblowing officer that people can contact. I have made it clear to boards that I expect there to be a culture of accepting whistleblowing.

Paul Sweeney: The commissioner's remit covers all healthcare providers that are operating in Scotland, including the national health service and NHS-contracted and independent healthcare providers. The commissioner will work collaboratively with other organisations to improve patient safety, adding value to the patient safety system in Scotland.

The commissioner's role will not duplicate the work of existing organisations. The commissioner will take a macro-level view of patient safety in Scotland and seek to improve overall safety rather than address individual cases.

Our nominee, Karen Titchener, has more than two decades of senior leadership experience within the national health service and is widely recognised as a national and international authority in complex care that is delivered in the home, including acute hospital-level care, palliative care and end-of-life services. Karen has been working in the United States since 2017 and is currently serving as the vice-president of hospital-at-home operations in Wisconsin. Karen's extensive experience across the United Kingdom and international healthcare systems gives her a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in delivering safe, effective, person-centred care. The selection panel therefore believes that Karen's nursing background and her patient and safety-centred approach equip her well to undertake this new role. I am sure that the Parliament will want to wish her well in her appointment.

I move,

That the Parliament nominates Karen Titchener to His Majesty The King for appointment as the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland under schedule 1 paragraph 4 of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Act 2023.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise. When I intervened to talk about whistleblowing, I should have indicated that I am the director of WhistleblowersUK, which is a not-for-profit organisation that advances the case for a change in the law in order to protect whistleblowers.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. Your comments are on the record.

The question on the motion that we have just debated will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Stephen Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Neil Bibby will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-17539.4, in the name of Stephen Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17539, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland in today's Europe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:01

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-17539.4, in the name of Stephen Kerr. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-17539.4, in the name of Stephen Kerr, is: For 27, Against 87, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-17539.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17539, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland in today's Europe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)

Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-17539.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 15, Against 96, Abstentions 3.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-17539, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland in today's Europe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-17539, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland in today's Europe, is: For 70, Against 45, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the best relationship that Scotland and the UK can have with the EU is to be a member of the EU; calls on the UK Government to drop its red lines on the single market, customs union and freedom of movement; further calls on the UK Government, at its forthcoming summit with the EU, as a first step, to negotiate an ambitious veterinary, food and drink agreement, closer energy and climate co-operation, greater freedom of movement, including opportunities for young people, and further measures to lessen the ongoing economic, social and cultural damage of Brexit, and believes that it is unacceptable that the UK Government has not shared any draft summit texts with the Scottish or other devolved governments.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-17485, in the name of Paul Sweeney, on the appointment of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament nominates Karen Titchener to His Majesty The King for appointment as the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland under schedule 1 paragraph 4 of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Act 2023.

Meeting closed at 17:09.

Corrections

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, has identified an error in her contribution and provided the following correction.

Fiona Hyslop:

At col 5, para 1, line 1—

Original text—

The member is right to point out that local authorities have responsibilities in relation to such rail projects. There has been close partnership working, and I can advise that the full south car park and a small portion of the north car park will be available from Sunday 18 May. From the day of opening, there will be double the provision that was available at the previous station. South Lanarkshire Council is working closely with its contractor to complete that work.

I confirm that the bus service will call at the station from Sunday, with additional bus services calling at the station in the coming months. This transformational project will offer fully accessible and sustainable transport options for passengers as a result of the Scottish Government's investment.

Corrected text—

The member is right to point out that local authorities have responsibilities in relation to such rail projects. There has been close partnership working, and I can advise that the full south car park will be available from Sunday 18 May. From the day of opening, there will be double the provision that was available at the previous station. South Lanarkshire Council is working closely with its contractor to complete the north car park.

I confirm that the bus service will call at the station from Monday, with additional bus services calling at the station in the coming months. This transformational project will offer fully accessible and sustainable transport options for passengers as a result of the Scottish Government's investment.

John Swinney has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The First Minister (John Swinney):

At col 15, para 4, line 1—

Original text—

The level of delayed discharges is falling—it has come down from its peak by just short of 200 places.

Corrected text—

The level of delayed discharges is falling—it has come down from its peak by just short of 105 places.

This is a draft *Official Report* and is subject to correction between publication and archiving, which will take place no later than 35 working days after the date of the meeting. The most up-to-date version is available here:
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Members and other meeting participants who wish to suggest corrections to their contributions should contact the Official Report.

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