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Wednesday 12 November 2025

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CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
CONSTITUTION, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE, AND PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS	1
Creative Scotland (Funding Distribution)	1
Church Buildings	3
STV (Jobs and Regional News Programming)	4
STV (News Provision)	5
STV (North of Scotland News Programme)	6
Creative Industries (Glasgow)	8
“A Fresh Start with Independence” (Economic Implications)	9
JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS	12
Firework Control Zones	12
Peaceful Protest	14
Police Officer Numbers (Rural Communities)	16
Police Scotland	18
Scottish Prison Service (Working Conditions)	20
Grooming Gangs	21
HMP Cornton Vale (Noise)	22
Domestic Abuse Victims (Support)	23
ROSEBANK OIL AND GAS FIELD	25
<i>Motion moved—[Patrick Harvie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Richard Lochhead].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Douglas Lumsden].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Sarah Boyack].</i>	
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	25
The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead)	28
Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con)	30
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	32
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD)	34
Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	36
Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)	37
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)	39
Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab)	40
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	42
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)	43
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	45
Richard Lochhead	46
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)	49
BUS SERVICES	52
<i>Motion moved—[Mark Ruskell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jim Fairlie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Sue Webber].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Claire Baker].</i>	
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	52
The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie)	55
Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)	57
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	59
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD)	61
Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	63
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)	64
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)	66
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)	67
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	69
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	71
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con)	72

Jim Fairlie	74
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	76
BUSINESS MOTION	79
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)	81
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	84
<i>Motions moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
DECISION TIME	85
CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE BREWING AND DISTILLING (HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY)	98
<i>Motion debated—[Gordon MacDonald].</i>	
Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP).....	98
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con).....	101
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	102
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	104
The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Ben Macpherson)	105

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 12 November 2025

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. The first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. I remind members that questions 3, 6 and 7 are grouped together, so I will take any supplementaries on those questions after all three have been answered.

Creative Scotland (Funding Distribution)

1. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how much money has been distributed by Creative Scotland in the previous 12 months. (S6O-05123)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I begin by drawing members' attention to the publication today of the Scottish Government's international strategy report. I am sure that I speak for us all when I thank everyone in the global network who does so much to promote Scottish exports, inward investment, tourism growth and much else besides.

In answer to Liam Kerr's question, Creative Scotland distributed a total of £113,266,072 in award commitments between 1 November 2024 and 6 November 2025. That figure consists of more than £88 million from the Scottish Government and more than £25 million in national lottery awards to promote resilience, diversity and innovation and to help support the arts to thrive in communities across Scotland.

A key development over that period was the delivery of the multiyear funding programme, which began distributing funding in April this year to more than double the number of organisations that had previously been in receipt of core funding from Creative Scotland.

Liam Kerr: Interrogating those figures, we see that in the past five years, Creative Scotland has spent just over £430,000 on culture projects via its crowdfund. Out of 110 projects that were given public money, only four were from the North East. Those projects got a total of £20,330—that is less than 5 per cent of the fund for Aberdeenshire

and Moray. Does the cabinet secretary believe that Creative Scotland is too focused on the central belt and will he commit to reviewing how Creative Scotland can ensure a more equitable distribution to the North East?

Angus Robertson: I thank Mr Kerr for raising the issue of regional distribution. I know that members across the chamber who represent different parts of the country will want to make sure that local arts and cultural organisations and venues are properly funded.

Across the North East region of Scotland, there are 24 multiyear-funded organisations. Those include seven in Aberdeenshire, eight in Aberdeen city, eight in Dundee city and one in Angus. I will look closely at the fund that Mr Kerr has drawn my attention to, to satisfy myself that the applications match the criteria. To him, and to all members, I say that I would encourage all cultural and arts organisations, regardless of where they are, to apply for funding. That is their best chance of getting a successful funding decision, so I encourage as many cultural and arts organisations in the North East as possible to do so.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has been engaging with Cumbernauld Theatre Trust in relation to support when its transition funding from Creative Scotland runs out. Can he provide an update and state his confidence in Cumbernauld theatre and its ability to successfully resolve the matter to enable it to continue the good work that it has been doing for the past 60 years?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government understands the important role that Cumbernauld theatre plays in its community and the wider culture sector. As Mr Hepburn indicated, the Scottish Government continues to engage with the Cumbernauld Theatre Trust and the theatre's other public sector partners, including Creative Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council, to support efforts to secure its future and to understand the options that are available to the trust.

I take this opportunity to publicly thank Jamie Hepburn for all that he has been doing to support Cumbernauld theatre.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): There has been a lot of controversy about the issue that Liam Kerr raised, as well as about the transparency of the decision-making process behind the awards of funding. Angela Leitch's review of Creative Scotland is due to be published this month. Will it be published?

Angus Robertson: I am confident that the report will be published as planned. On Stephen Kerr's point about transparency, I have no doubt that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and

Culture Committee, of which he is a member, will make sure that it has the best possible answers from Creative Scotland and from the review process so that he and other members can satisfy themselves about the conclusions that are presented. I have not seen those conclusions; I look forward to seeing them. I lay great weight and store on the advice that we will be receiving, and I look forward to seeing that report as planned.

Church Buildings

2. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to prevent the permanent loss of church buildings with significant cultural or heritage value, in light of the decision by the Church of Scotland to reduce its estate. (S6O-05124)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Although decisions about church closures are for the churches themselves, not the Scottish ministers, I am keen to ensure that the cultural value of such sites is appropriately considered during any decision making, and that the appropriate planning regulations are applied. On its website, Historic Environment Scotland provides advice and guidance for asset owners, community groups and developers.

I have met the Scotland's Churches Trust and members of the general trustees of the Church of Scotland to discuss my concerns, and I will continue to engage with stakeholders to explore approaches to safeguard those important assets for future generations and for the communities in which they lie.

Claire Baker: Built in 1592, Burntisland old parish church is a category A-listed landmark with deep cultural and community significance. It is known as the birthplace of the King James Bible. It is one of hundreds of buildings that the Church of Scotland is disposing of. However, the church is of historic and cultural importance and, without intervention, it is at risk of being lost. A community group has been established to explore all avenues, and Historic Environment Scotland has visited the site. Will the cabinet secretary consider visiting Burntisland to see at first hand that undervalued jewel on the Fife coast and to discuss how we can protect that heritage building for future generations?

Angus Robertson: I thank Claire Baker for raising the issue of Burntisland parish church and for extending an invitation, which I am happy to accept. It is important to note that communities, in seeking to understand their options for the future use of churches, are best advised by those whose job it is to do so—in this instance, Historic Environment Scotland. However, I am happy to be apprised of the situation. I have seen some really

good examples of potential new uses for churches. Perhaps some of those are options that are currently being explored by the community itself, and I would be happy to hear about that.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I declare an interest as a member of the Church of Scotland. That said, I share the concern about the speed with which the Kirk is disposing of so many properties that have been at the heart of their communities—for centuries, in some cases—and to which many people have a strong emotional connection.

I am certainly aware of community groups across my region that are interested in acquiring historic church buildings, but need time to put together a business case and raise the funds, and are concerned about the speed with which the Church of Scotland is putting those properties on the market. Those groups are worried that they will not get that opportunity, because a delay has not been built into the process. I therefore encourage the cabinet secretary, if he is engaging with the Church of Scotland, to encourage it not to force the process along too quickly and to allow any community interest that expresses a view that they might want to purchase a property the time to put together a business case so that those assets are not lost to the communities that they serve.

Angus Robertson: Murdo Fraser has made a very good point. First, there is the issue of the accelerating rate at which churches are being disposed of across denominations. Incidentally, it is not just the Christian church but other faith groups which have been disposing of property, because of societal change and so on. I think that everybody understands that.

Secondly, we have the specific point that Murdo Fraser has raised, which is about the speed of disposal, which may be too quick for communities to have the option to get the best advice.

I assure Murdo Fraser that advice and information are available through the Historic Environment Scotland website. As we heard from Claire Baker, there has been Historic Environment Scotland involvement with other community groups. If Murdo Fraser has specific issues about specific sites and communities, I would be grateful if he could forward those to me. I am having discussions with the Church of Scotland and other denominations to best understand what we can do, because, if the process is accelerating, that will present an even greater challenge—albeit, potentially, an opportunity—and we have to make our way through the process as well as we can.

STV (Jobs and Regional News Programming)

3. **Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will

provide an update on its latest engagement with STV regarding the broadcaster's plans to cut jobs and regional news programming. (S6O-05125)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Following my written correspondence with Scottish Television, I met the broadcaster on 6 November to emphasise the critical importance of protecting jobs that are based in the media industry in Scotland and the vital outputs of regional news services. During the coming weeks, I will also meet the regulator, Ofcom, and the National Union of Journalists to discuss the implications of the proposals.

I recognise the anxiety of the situation for many affected staff members and communities, particularly those in northern Scotland, and I reaffirm the Scottish Government's commitment to protect sustainable jobs, maintain regional representation and uphold the broadcaster's public service obligations.

Jackie Dunbar: STV claimed that falling viewer figures and advertising revenue were to blame for it slashing 60 jobs and axing north of Scotland news. However, we have now learned from STV North's own accounts that profits rose by almost 24 per cent last year on the back of increased income from advertising. The cuts simply do not make sense and they fail communities and viewers in Aberdeen and the north-east. Does the cabinet secretary agree that local journalism is a vital part of a democratic society? Can he provide an update on the latest engagement with STV in the light of that news?

Angus Robertson: I agree with Jackie Dunbar that local journalism is a vital part of our democratic society. That is why I will continue to emphasise our strong opposition to the proposals, which put sustainable Scottish jobs and the outputs of vital news services at risk. I met Scottish Television last week to press the importance of protecting jobs for media professionals across Scotland. I will also meet Ofcom and the National Union of Journalists in the coming weeks to discuss STV's proposals and set out the Scottish Government's deep concerns, which Jackie Dunbar has raised.

I have heard important points from members across the chamber about advertising income and its future projections. That is a matter for STV to explain to us all.

STV (News Provision)

6. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to STV's proposed changes to its news provision, including

the potential impact on local and regional journalism in north-east Scotland. (S6O-05128)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I commend Audrey Nicoll for her question. The Scottish Government is deeply concerned by any potential negative impact on news provision across Scotland and, in particular, on locally relevant news for audiences in the north of Scotland. Local journalism is essential to the health of our democracy. It provides scrutiny of local institutions, gives voice to underrepresented communities and ensures that important civic information reaches those who need it most.

The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting a sustainable, diverse and inclusive media landscape. We will make those views clear through our on-going engagement with Scottish Television and Ofcom, including through the forthcoming consultation.

Audrey Nicoll: The removal of STV North from the north-east will silence the region's voice at a critical time when issues such as energy are of national importance. STV North has been an important destination for a pipeline of top-quality north-east journalists, who have cut their teeth on local stories. Indeed, the school of journalism at Robert Gordon University has a strong collaboration with STV North through student placements and a memorial bursary in the name of Donald John MacDonald—the wonderful former STV news editor.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that STV is shamefully closing the door on the next generation of journalists, producers, engineers and creatives in the north-east? Will he join me in calling on STV to immediately reverse its damaging proposal?

Angus Robertson: I agree with Audrey Nicoll that regional news is a crucial part of our media landscape. I also absolutely agree that the north-east of Scotland is a huge part of that in terms of both audiences and journalistic talent. That is why I met Scottish Television last week to press the importance of protecting jobs for media professionals right across Scotland. I will also meet Ofcom and the National Union of Journalists in the coming weeks to discuss STV's proposals and to set out the Scottish Government's deep concerns. Throughout those on-going engagements, I will continue to emphasise our strong opposition to proposals that put sustainable Scottish jobs and the outputs of vital news services at risk.

STV (North of Scotland News Programme)

7. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether the culture secretary has met with STV following

recent reports of its plan to close its north of Scotland news programme. (S6O-05129)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I met Scottish Television on 6 November, and the Scottish Government will continue to engage on the matter, including by responding to Ofcom's forthcoming consultation. The Scottish Government expects all broadcasters to reflect the diversity of our nation and our local communities. I will continue to champion a vibrant, inclusive and regionally representative media sector and a strong and sustainable Scottish broadcasting sector.

Douglas Lumsden: The fact that three north-east MSPs have lodged questions on the potential axing of the north of Scotland news programme shows how important we, on a cross-party basis, feel that it is that the local news coverage is retained. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if the chief executive, Rufus Radcliffe, cannot make the north news work in light of STV North's increasing profits, he should step aside and let someone else manage the company instead?

Angus Robertson: I am sure that Douglas Lumsden will appreciate that I, as somebody who represented a north of Scotland constituency and studied in Aberdeen, enjoyed the joys of Grampian Television before the change to STV. I understand that there is a particular dimension to the proposed changes for Aberdeen, the north-east and the north of Scotland more generally, and that is why I wanted to raise those points directly with Rufus Radcliffe. I think that he and STV will have heard the views of members across the chamber about the concerns that people have.

Members have talked about the issue of advertising and said that there are projected increases in advertising income. I was told by STV that its concern is about reducing advertising income. There is a disparity there, and it is for STV to clarify that so that we can best understand the matter. Everybody wants sustainable journalism and a sustainable STV, but we will have to understand the decision making that has been involved. I have made my position on supporting journalistic jobs in Aberdeen and right across Scotland absolutely clear.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that proper journalism has to be done locally, in communities and with communities? It cannot be a centralised function that happens in the central belt to people in Aberdeen and in Dundee. What case is he making to the chief executive of STV on that point? We see the opt-out in Dundee ending as a clear consequence of that, and we see a massive diminution in the situation in Aberdeen, where we have real challenges in our economy and real

changes in our local community. Aberdeen needs the kind of representation that comes from journalism that is done in the community.

Angus Robertson: Michael Marra makes his point very well. I should perhaps have declared an interest as a former journalist and a long-standing member of the National Union of Journalists. I understand the point that he is making very well. It is important that there are centres of journalism across the country.

STV was keen to impress on me that it will continue to provide news from correspondents in Aberdeen, Inverness and Dundee, but I hear from Michael Marra and colleagues in other parts of the chamber that that does not reassure members enough. One of the outstanding issues for me in understanding how the business works is that it is easier to do certain things in different places because of new technology. However, I want to be assured that, as part of any changes that STV is thinking about, there will not be a diminution of news from Aberdeen, Inverness, Dundee and the rest of the country.

Michael Marra makes the point very well that it is important that we have centres for journalism across the length and breadth of Scotland.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Many people in Shetland tune in to STV North news because it has a northern focus as opposed to a more generic, all-of-Scotland or, often, central belt outlook. Will the Scottish Government do all that it can to impress on STV bosses that the islands of Scotland appreciate reliable local news and that any loss is a damaging blow to respected journalism, especially in an age of fake news?

Angus Robertson: I totally agree with Beatrice Wishart. She is absolutely right. Communities in Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles and the north of Scotland, where there are particular regional reasons why the news order might be different and news reports might have different content, will have to compete much more with content from the heavy population centres in central Scotland. Having lived in the north of Scotland, I have no doubt that that will cause concern to people.

It is for STV to give assurances that any proposed changes will not lead to a diminution in reporting from Shetland or anywhere else in the north of Scotland. I have asked those questions and answers have been provided, but much more will be required to satisfy me and members across the chamber.

Creative Industries (Glasgow)

4. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support the creative industries in Glasgow. (S6O-05126)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government strongly supports Glasgow’s creative industries. Scottish Enterprise is leading on a range of strategic projects and tailored business support for the creative industries; it is managing 42 opportunities that are worth nearly £8 million in grants, and more than 90 per cent of those are situated in the Glasgow region. To support those projects, Scottish Enterprise is working with Screen Scotland, Creative Scotland, Animation Scotland and other partnerships, including Glasgow City Council and local innovation districts. Skills Development Scotland also provides apprenticeships and the free skills for growth programme to assist workforce planning.

Bill Kidd: I thank the Scottish Government for everything that it is doing to support the sector. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates that the total cost of the United Kingdom Government’s rise in employer national insurance contributions to the voluntary sector in Scotland, which includes many cultural bodies, will be around £75 million. Organisations say that they have nowhere left to cut and may have to freeze pay or cut jobs as a result.

Can the cabinet secretary say what discussions the Scottish Government has had with regard to reimbursement, and does it support calls for the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer to scrap that damaging policy in the upcoming UK budget?

Angus Robertson: I commend Bill Kidd for his question. We have always been clear that the UK Treasury must fully fund the actual cost for Scotland’s public sector, recognising the different size and configuration of our public services, to meet our specific needs.

In my portfolio, the Scottish Government is committed to investing at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts in communities by 2028-29. It is disappointing that the UK Government has chosen to erode the full benefit of that. We are clear that the UK Government should have asked those with the broadest shoulders to contribute more, rather than trying to balance its budget on the back of cultural organisations, charities and the national health service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

“A Fresh Start with Independence” (Economic Implications)

8. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential economic implications of its paper “A Fresh Start with Independence”. (S6O-05130)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The potential economic implications of the proposals in “A Fresh Start with Independence” are set out in the paper itself and in its two accompanying publications on “The macroeconomic framework of an independent Scotland and the measurement of economic flows” and “Questions and Answers”.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Leading economist Professor Ronald MacDonald has described the Scottish National Party’s economic plans as “totally shambolic” and said that they would have “a devastating effect”. In addition, “A Fresh Start with Independence” wrongly states that Scotland’s gross domestic product has grown faster than that of the UK.

Does the cabinet secretary still stand by that discredited paper—the bill for which the SNP has made Scottish taxpayers pick up—or will he admit that it simply does not add up?

Angus Robertson: No, I will not. I commend the report to Jamie Halcro Johnston because it is clear, given his question, that he has not even read it.

I know that it is difficult reading for Scottish Conservatives because the statistics in it—they are provided by, among others, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which is a very reputable international body—draw comparisons between the United Kingdom and our neighbouring countries. The report shows that our neighbouring independent nations are wealthier, happier and fairer than the United Kingdom, that growth is higher and that there is lower overall poverty—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members.

Angus Robertson: I say to Mr Halcro Johnston, so that he can read this, that those statistics, including from the OECD, are on pages 35, 36 and 37 of the report—although I do not know whether he knows what the OECD is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have three requests for supplementaries. I would like to take all three, but I need succinct questions and responses.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Since 2021, the Scottish Government has spent an estimated £3.5 million of taxpayers’ money on staffing and other costs associated with preparing and publishing pointless constitutional white papers. That money could have been spent elsewhere.

We have already heard about the case of Cumbernauld theatre—an iconic theatre that has been part of the local community for 60 years. It urgently needs to raise £300,000; if it does not find the money, it could close. For less than a tenth of

the cash that has been wasted on those imaginary white papers, a concrete community asset that actually exists could be saved.

Why does the SNP Government continue to waste taxpayers' money on white papers that have no impact, when it should be using that money to invest in impactful community assets instead?

Angus Robertson: I remind Mr Bibby—I know that it is difficult for him to accept, having lost the last election—that the majority of MSPs in the Parliament were elected on a manifesto commitment that there should be an independence referendum and that the public should be informed about the updated position on the opportunities that independence provides.

I know that Mr Bibby does not agree with that, but he lost the election, and this party won it, and we are doing what we said that we were going to do. We are providing more funding for culture and the arts than his party even called for, and I am proud of that. This party voted for it, the Conservatives voted against it—and Neil Bibby bravely abstained.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the economic implications of not pushing for the people of Scotland to have the opportunity to decide their own future and escape the mire of broken Brexit Britain?

Angus Robertson: Mr MacDonald has asked an important question: what is the consequence of remaining in a suboptimally performing state, which is the United Kingdom? It does not perform as well as our neighbouring countries. Those are facts—I know that it is difficult for the people who opposed independence to accept those facts. The cost of not becoming independent is that we do not have the levers at our disposal to be able to match our neighbouring countries, which are healthier, wealthier and fairer than the United Kingdom. Incidentally, there is only one route back to the European Union, which is to have a referendum in Scotland on becoming an independent member state. The Conservatives oppose rejoining the European Union, as does the Labour Party. In our Government and Parliament, there is a majority for rejoining the EU, and the only way to do that is for the country to become independent.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The Greens say that the SNP's latest currency policy would be catastrophic. At the previous SNP conference, the policy was described as a "dangerous experiment". Even the highly respected Robin McAlpine said:

"for god sake get off this mad, mad bus."

Why will the cabinet secretary not get off the bus? [Applause.]

Angus Robertson: I do not know how comfortable Willie Rennie is with being applauded by the Conservatives; I would be a little bit concerned if I were him. Surprise, surprise—there are different views on Scotland's constitutional future. This party and the Scottish Green Party are in favour of Scotland becoming an independent member state of the European Union; the Liberal Democrats are in favour of a federal United Kingdom; and I think that the Labour Party is in favour of protecting devolution. I have no idea what the Tories' position is at present.

I would have hoped that all of us, as democrats, could agree on one thing: that the future of the country should be determined by the people. That is why, given the change of circumstances post-Brexit, a majority in this Parliament wish there to be a referendum on Scotland becoming an independent country within the European Union. I am sorry that the Liberal Democrats are departing from what I thought was their traditional position, which is to support Scottish home rule and Scottish self-government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. In the interests of time management, we will move straight to the next portfolio.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I advise members that there is a lot of interest in the portfolio, so I would like succinct questions from them and succinct answers from Government ministers.

Firework Control Zones

1. **Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is reviewing the effectiveness of firework control zones. (S6O-05131)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Local authorities now have the powers to introduce firework control zones to tackle the misuse of fireworks, and I am pleased that, this year, they were in place in Glasgow for the first time and in Edinburgh for the second time. I also welcome the overall significant reduction in disorder across Scotland over the bonfire night period. Firework control zones played a role as part of a wider package of measures that were delivered by our partners, and I thank them all for the dedication and commitment that they have shown to keeping our communities safe. We will bring partners together to identify learnings

from this year that will help to inform our approach to bonfire night in 2026.

Maurice Golden: I associate myself with the minister's comments. Last week saw a marked reduction in trouble on bonfire nights compared with those in previous years, and there were no reports of injuries to emergency crews. Those outcomes reflect the professionalism and dedication of our police officers. However, the chief constable has warned that the force risks losing 1,000 of those officers if there is no increase in its budget support. Will the minister join me in praising emergency services, while recognising that the front line must be properly supported?

Siobhian Brown: Absolutely. As I said in my opening statement, I thank the emergency services for all the work that they do on operation moonbeam, which goes on for months before bonfire night. Of course, we will engage with Police Scotland about its budgetary requirements.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I, too, welcome the fact that there seems to have been less antisocial behaviour this year.

Does the minister hope that the first firework control zones being put in place will encourage other local authorities to use the powers that they have been given to consider the introduction of such bans? It is clear that communities such as mine in Motherwell and Wishaw are requesting them.

Siobhian Brown: Yes, absolutely. As I said, firework control zones have been in place for the past two bonfire nights. The designation of a zone is a local decision, based on local circumstances, and local authorities are responsible for their introduction and use.

Through the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022, we have given local authorities additional powers to tackle the misuse of fireworks in response to local community needs. Along with the broader measures, firework control zones are an important tool that can be used to help keep communities safe and to support cultural and behavioural change to address the misuse of fireworks.

I encourage all local authorities to consider the introduction of firework control zones. I believe that there is a strong appetite for that in communities across Scotland—for example, I know that there is a petition with more than 1,600 signatures for the introduction of such zones in Ayr. The Scottish Government will support local authorities that wish to implement firework control zones.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Many of my constituents have contacted

me because of concerns about fireworks in relation to themselves and their animals. Does the minister agree that it would be much easier to control the use of fireworks if policies on all aspects of their sale and use were fully devolved to Scotland?

Siobhian Brown: I agree that it would be better if all the legislation relating to fireworks and pyrotechnics were devolved to Scotland, so that we could fully respond to the needs and concerns of Scottish communities. In that way, we would have full control of all aspects of the sale and use of fireworks, including, potentially, limits to the noise that fireworks make. As that is not the case at the moment, I will continue to press the United Kingdom Government on what more can be done on firework regulation, and I have sought further discussions on that issue.

Peaceful Protest

2. Humza Yousaf (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to safeguard the right to peaceful protest. (S6O-05132)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The rights to peaceful public assembly and freedom of expression are important rights that the Scottish Government is committed to upholding.

The right to peaceful public assembly allows us to protest, celebrate culture and hold memorials, and it is right that our communities should be able to participate in such activities. The right to protest is important in a democratic society. Existing legislation sufficiently protects those rights. However, protests should be peaceful and should never be used to justify any form of hateful, violent, intimidating or otherwise criminal behaviour. We fully support Police Scotland's taking appropriate and proportionate action in response to such behaviour.

Humza Yousaf: Pensioners, priests and people from all walks of life—many of whom have never been convicted of anything in their lives—have been arrested while peacefully protesting in Scotland. The report of the independent commission on UK counterterrorism law, policy and practice, which was published yesterday, makes it clear that United Kingdom terror laws have been used far too widely in the case of the proscription of the non-violent protest group Palestine Action. Given the findings of the commission, which is led by pre-eminent figures such as Sir Declan Morgan, Dominic Grieve and Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, will the minister urge the Home Secretary to immediately overturn that blatant attempt by the UK Government to silence non-violent protest in the face of a genocide—a

genocide in which, of course, that Government is complicit?

Siobhian Brown: I fully recognise that the proscription of Palestine Action by the UK Government has been criticised by many groups and individuals across society, and that many people across the UK have chosen to show their opposition to that through protest. However, as the member is aware, this is an area of policy that is reserved to the UK Government, as is the decision to which he refers, and I recognise that the issue is now with the courts. The judicial review is due to take place this month at the High Court in London, and we all want to see what the outcome will be.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Retailers and members of the public are telling us that they cannot get a response to 999 calls, even when they are threatened with violence. However, when a women's rights group tried to peacefully protest, instead of the person who tried to disrupt the protest being removed, we ended up with the ridiculous spectacle of brolygate. Does the minister accept that, under this Government, police officers are being told to chase down so-called broly assaulters and record non-criminal hate incidents, instead of focusing on keeping communities safe and upholding the right to peaceful protest?

Siobhian Brown: As I have just said, it is an operational issue for Police Scotland. The Scottish Government protects the right to peaceful public assembly and freedom of expression, which are important rights that the Scottish Government is committed to upholding.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Has the Scottish Government had any discussions with the UK Government about the proscription of Palestine Action? Have ministers received any security briefings or made any representations, given the arrests at protests in Scotland?

Siobhian Brown: I have not had any discussions with or correspondence from the UK Government. I think that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs has, and she will be happy to write to the member with regard to that.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): We have seen peaceful protests outside the Parliament building by women's groups who are urging the Scottish Government to finally respect the Supreme Court judgment. Instead, we get the Scottish Government going to court to argue that biological males should be sent to the female prison estate. In the 24 hours since we tried to get answers from Angela Constance and she refused to give them, has the Government sought any legal advice, or advice from its officials, about what it can say in Parliament, or does it simply not

care about updating members and answering their questions?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please answer in relation to peaceful protest, minister.

Siobhian Brown: I do not know how that relates to peaceful protest, Deputy Presiding Officer, so I will leave it at that.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. In your ruling, you allowed the question in respect of peaceful protest. The minister has point-blank refused to answer any part of the question. Is that in order? These are serious matters that have repeatedly been raised in the chamber. Government ministers are refusing to answer the basic points that we need to hear being addressed in the chamber; they are also being asked outwith it, but we get nothing from them there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Douglas Ross for his contribution. I am in charge of ensuring that question time runs smoothly and that supplementary questions relate to the principal question on the business bulletin. That is the point that I made to the minister. I am not in charge of how the minister chooses to respond—that is a matter for her. Obviously, the member has many ways in which he can seek to pursue the matter.

Police Officer Numbers (Rural Communities)

3. **Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of any reductions in police officer numbers since 2020 on rural communities. (S6O-05133)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Responsibility for the police workforce rests with the chief constable, who has a range of local and national resources to draw on in preventing and tackling crime. The Scottish Government provided record funding of £1.64 billion in 2025-26, which is an increase of £90 million, to support capacity and capability to enable Police Scotland to take on more recruits last financial year than at any time since 2013, with further intakes planned throughout 2025-26.

Although we do not want anyone to be a victim of crime no matter where they live, I note that Scotland is a safer place since the Government took office, with recorded crime down 39 per cent since 2006-07.

Finlay Carson: Why let the facts get in the way of a well-spun story? The real facts tell a different story. Police Scotland has been defunded to the point where officer numbers in Dumfries and Galloway have fallen by 22 per cent since 2020. Now, the Government is starting to impose new occupancy charges on officers living in police-

owned accommodation—a policy that was first consulted on more than a year ago—and the Scottish Police Federation warns that even more rural officers will leave. Does the cabinet secretary accept that that penalty is worsening our already dire situation? Will she urgently review the policy before rural policing is hollowed out even further?

Angela Constance: The issue that Finlay Carson has raised is an operational matter for Police Scotland. However, in relation to police numbers over the entire country, the full-time equivalent as of 30 September was 16,441; as of 3 November, it was 16,531—

Finlay Carson: The question was on rural officers.

Angela Constance: I am getting to that, if Finlay Carson will do me the courtesy of allowing me to speak—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Carson, the cabinet secretary is on her feet responding to your question. Please let us hear what she has to say.

Angela Constance: As of 3 November, there were 16,531 officers. It is for the chief constable to deploy those police officers across the regions. As of 30 September, 354 officers were deployed in V division, which is the division that covers Dumfries and Galloway. That figure is stable in comparison to the previous quarter.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Community police officers play a key role in preventing crime. They provide a visible presence in communities, tackling antisocial behaviour and working with local people, particularly young people, to get ahead of problems that relate to alcohol, drug abuse and other issues that drive criminality. Last week, the chief constable told the Criminal Justice Committee that she wants an increase of 600 community police officers as part of the budget process. What is the Scottish Government's position on that?

Angela Constance: I am aware of the evidence that the chief constable gave to the Criminal Justice Committee. As members would expect, I have regular dialogue with the chief constable and the Scottish Police Authority. Last night, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and I met the chief constable and the SPA.

As the member would expect, we are looking very seriously at the Police Scotland budget request. However, the budget needs to be decided in due process. Once we know what the United Kingdom budget is, which will be after 26 November, the Scottish Government will be in a position to introduce our budget on 13 January. However, the member's point about community policing being central to prevention, good

community relationships and overall community cohesion was well made.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline what engagement has been undertaken with people and stakeholders to ensure that the voices of rural communities are heard in work to tackle rural crime?

Angela Constance: The key route for that is with the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, which is chaired by Police Scotland. It brings together key justice and rural sector partners, including NFU Scotland, the Scottish Crofting Federation, Crimestoppers and Rural Watch Scotland. The partnership provides a robust multi-agency approach to preventing rural crime and it supports actions that are taken at a local level. It also provides rural and farming communities with information, advice and local intelligence on how best to prevent crime in their area.

Police Scotland

4. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Police Scotland, and what issues were discussed. (S6O-05134)

Angela Constance: Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of Police Scotland. My most recent engagement was yesterday when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and I met the chief constable to discuss the policing budget. I meet the chief constable on a regular basis, and we cover a range of topics such as Police Scotland's three-year plan, stop and search, mental health and police pay negotiations.

Neil Bibby: There are now around 1,000 fewer police officers across Scotland since Police Scotland was established in 2013, and 140 police stations have closed, including in Ferguslie Park, which is one of the most deprived communities in Scotland. The future of stations such as the one in Paisley's Mill Street is still uncertain. Cuts have consequences, and the Scottish Police Federation says that officers are being run ragged. Sexual crime is up by 45 per cent and violent crime is up by 7 per cent in the past decade. Horrifically, just last week, a 13-year-old boy was stabbed in Paisley town centre. How can the cabinet secretary seriously tell the public that our streets are safe under this Scottish National Party Government when police officer numbers are down, police stations are closing and violent crime is up?

Angela Constance: Over the course of this Government, the level of violent crime has reduced. The member makes a good point about

the increase in reported domestic violence. There is no doubt that our police officers do a demanding job day in, day out. That is one of the reasons why I have ensured that our police officers are among the best remunerated across these isles.

I have not cut the budget. In fact, I have increased the budget for policing in every year that I have been the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, and police numbers are stable at 16,500. There is work to be done in and around police stations. It is important that the estate is modernised and fit for purpose. I have seen that in my constituency with the closure of the police station in Livingston, where we now instead have the West Lothian civic centre, at which all partners are brought together.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Cuts to police budgets and nearly 1,000 fewer officers since the pandemic have led to shop theft rocketing by 124 per cent. Worse, the Scottish Retail Consortium says that those figures mask a hidden epidemic of unrecorded theft and retailers warn that shoplifting is effectively decriminalised. Will the cabinet secretary combat that by giving the police what they say they need in the budget, and by extending the funding for the retail crime task force beyond 26 March?

Angela Constance: The Government and the justice ministers were pleased to secure that specific funding of £3 million to tackle retail crime. I am happy to write to the member to tell him about some of the benefits that that resource has had.

It is important to recognise the scourge of shoplifting, particularly where it connects to serious organised crime. The member might be aware that I chair the serious organised crime task force, which I will be doing again tomorrow.

On the budget, we have a due process to go through. I very much hope that, on this occasion, Opposition parties, as part of their negotiations, will advocate for budget for the police. Last year, the only person who advocated for an increase in the budget was the Cabinet Secretary for Justice.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Following comments from the chief constable of Police Scotland about the rise in online harm that children are facing and the First Minister's commitment to do everything in his power to tackle that, will the cabinet secretary support a new cross-sector coalition, which should include Children First Scotland, to urgently establish what more can be done within the powers of the Scottish Government?

Angela Constance: We will certainly be very interested in that, and work on that has already begun. That is, in part, through my engagement with the serious organised crime task force, where

we, among other things, discuss the changing and growing threat of online harm. Other colleagues in other parts of the Government, including our education and child protection colleagues, are acutely aware of that, and the work on which they lead is also very focused on online harm.

I very much accept the point of principle that the member makes and agree that it is beholden on all of us to do more against that increasing threat.

Scottish Prison Service (Working Conditions)

5. Davy Russell (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve working conditions for employees of the Scottish Prison Service. (S6O-05135)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Our prisons operate in a unique and complex environment. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service remain resolute in our joint commitment to ensuring that they remain a safe place in which to live and work.

The SPS continues to recruit at pace and invest in technology, such as body-worn video cameras, to place the service in the best possible position in which to face current challenges.

The demands that are placed on our prison officers and the rising prison population have been well documented. I thank prison officers for their hard work each and every day. In recognition of their difficult and unique roles in our justice system, the Scottish Government delivered an 8 per cent pay rise for prison officers, with a two-year pay deal secured earlier this year.

Davy Russell: The Prison Officers Association Scotland's recent "Crisis Point Reached" report highlighted a number of concerns that SPS officers have, including failures in the recruitment system, a lack of long-term planning, which sometimes makes working conditions difficult and dangerous, and a toxic working environment stemming from poor management.

I have a constituent who has been suspended for six months on full pay and whose shifts have been covered using overtime. For what seems to be a relatively minor issue, that is a gross waste of taxpayers' money.

Does the cabinet secretary agree with the findings of the report? What immediate action is she taking to address the systemic issues that it outlines?

Angela Constance: I very much welcome the Prison Officers Association report, which demonstrates the pressures and challenges that prison staff face at a time of a high prison population, and I appreciate their hard work.

It is crucial that we listen to the voice of prison officers. I know that prison officers want to do the job that they are trained to do, and it is on all of us to create the right conditions for that to happen.

I assure the member that I have already discussed that important report with the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, and she has outlined to me a number of actions that the SPS is already engaged in. If he wishes to correspond with me, I would be happy to provide him with further detail.

Grooming Gangs

6. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recent convictions of a grooming gang for sexual exploitation in Dundee, what steps it is taking to prevent similar cases across Scotland, including through the establishment of a national inquiry into grooming gangs. (S6O-05136)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government will continue to consider the need for an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland should further evidence emerge. The case in Dundee, although horrendous, is of a different nature from the cases reported in Baroness Casey's national audit. The national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group has agreed a prevention-focused approach to collectively improve how harm is identified, reported and responded to in Scotland by statutory agencies and other partners. We also support third sector organisations that are involved in preventing child sexual abuse, including Barnardo's Scotland, the NSPCC's Childline service and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation Scotland, which deliver preventative and risk-reduction interventions to children in Scotland.

Meghan Gallacher: Scottish victims of grooming gangs are demanding an inquiry. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs said that the Scottish Government would have an inquiry if that was assessed as necessary. Given the sentencing in Dundee last week and the harrowing stories emerging from Glasgow this week, what standards or criteria would have to be met before an inquiry is assessed as necessary?

Angela Constance: It is for Ms Gallacher and others to present a case that is based on the added value that an inquiry would bring to preventing abuse of our children right now. If that evidence emerges, we will, of course, listen to it fairly and without favour. As Ms Gallacher knows, there is on-going work, led by the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group. Crucially, in the justice portfolio, Police Scotland is actively reviewing current and historical investigations, and we have been clear that Police

Scotland is closely involved with the national strategic group.

There is also the Scottish child abuse inquiry. I very much know the reasons why that inquiry was set up, but it is important to stress that the extensive review that is being undertaken by the Scottish child abuse inquiry includes child protection policy and practice.

HMP Cornton Vale (Noise)

7. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any progress made to address concerns raised by local residents about levels of noise from HMP Cornton Vale. (S6O-05137)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): While continuing to support many vulnerable women, the Scottish Prison Service has taken a number of actions to reduce the noise at HMP and Young Offenders Institution Stirling that is experienced by its neighbours. Most recently, the SPS held a meeting with local residents on 23 September at which it presented a concept for a window surround to reduce the noise from the rooms closest to local housing.

The prototype window surround was installed on 16 October and entered a period of testing until 24 October. Initial feedback on the trial was very positive and planning is now under way to install surrounds to the remaining windows. Engagement between the SPS and Stirling Council has started and, pending final planning approval, it is anticipated that all work will be completed by 31 March 2026. The SPS will continue to keep residents updated via its website, especially during any period of planned work.

Keith Brown: I very much hope that the developments that the cabinet secretary has outlined will prove to be effective, but she will know that residents have been raising serious concerns about noise and disruption from the prison for far too long, with very limited progress to date. Given the on-going impact that that continues to have on the wellbeing and quality of life of those living nearby, and the length of time that it is taking to find effective solutions, does the cabinet secretary agree that the Scottish Prison Service needs to continue to treat the issue as a matter of urgency and deliver a lasting resolution?

Angela Constance: Yes, I very much do. The situation has gone on for far too long for all concerned. I assure the member that the SPS has given me its commitment that it is moving at pace, and I will continue to engage with Mr Brown and the SPS on the matter. I am grateful to his constituents for their engagement and patience.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can squeeze in question 8, but I need a succinct question from the member and a succinct response.

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

Domestic Abuse Victims (Support)

8. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting and improving the experience of victims of domestic abuse, particularly in situations where there are young children in the family. (S6O-05138)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): We are committed to protecting survivors of domestic abuse through legislation and by funding support services. Research has found that our groundbreaking domestic abuse legislation, which treats offences more seriously when they involve children, better reflects victims' experiences. Our £20 million bairn's hoose programme, which is to be rolled out in increments from 2027, improves support for children who are affected by abuse by providing trauma-informed spaces and co-ordinated services.

Emma Roddick: I supported a constituent in a truly horrific situation in which her daughter came forward to claim that her father abused her. My constituent was mandated to allow contact between the two, despite the child's protests and symptoms of trauma. In such situations, a victim can feel as if they cannot win. Every decision is scrutinised and they cannot protect their child. My constituent's daughter clearly inherited her mother's bravery, and it must have been so difficult to share what happened to her at such a young age, which has to result in protection.

Following the provisions in the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 to better incorporate the child's views, what concrete steps is the Government taking to ensure that a child's expressed fear of a parent or desire not to have contact with them is given due weight and consideration in abuse cases, rather than that being dismissed as coaching or alienation?

Siobhian Brown: I am really sorry to hear about Emma Roddick's constituent's situation. The child's welfare must be the court's paramount consideration in contact cases, and the court is required to consider the child's view, subject to their age and maturity. We plan to commence further provisions in the 2020 act to enhance how the views of children are heard in such cases. We have also set up a working group on child welfare reporters, who can be appointed by the court to get the child's views.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs.

Rosebank Oil and Gas Field

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19637, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on the Rosebank oil and gas field. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible. I advise members that there is no time in hand.

14:57

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The Scottish Greens have secured today's debate in order to discuss the imminent decision that will be made on the revised application to drill for fossil fuels at the Rosebank field, the United Kingdom's largest undeveloped oil and gas field. It is one of the most consequential decisions on climate action that will be made this decade.

Four years ago, the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—opened in Glasgow. It was a time of huge momentum for the climate movement, both in Scotland and internationally. In the run-up to the event, the then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced her position that Rosebank should not be given the go-ahead. Green MSPs had for some time made the case for that clear stance to be taken, but I am in no doubt that Nicola Sturgeon knew that it was the right position to take. It was right in principle in the face of the climate emergency and also right for Scotland in embracing the transition that we are so well placed to benefit from.

Today, such climate clarity is nowhere to be seen from the Scottish Government. Today's First Minister cannot take a clear position, the draft climate change plan sidesteps the issue and the Government's energy strategy seems to have disappeared completely.

The Scottish Greens can and will make the case, explicitly, that the Scottish Government must unequivocally oppose the Rosebank plan. No climate compatibility test worthy of the name can give the go-ahead to this immensely destructive project.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Everyone, which I think includes the Greens, accepts that oil and gas demand is not going away. On any analysis, we will still need oil and gas in the UK by 2050. To satisfy that need, we would need to import more if we did not drill Rosebank. Therefore, the environmental case suggests that we should drill Rosebank. Is that not correct?

Patrick Harvie: That completely ignores the fact, which I will come on to, that the vast majority of production from Rosebank will be for export.

Rosebank's projected carbon emissions are vast—some 254 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. The harm to our precarious climate will be somewhere in the order of 50 times as damaging as the developers first admitted. That is why not only campaigners but scientific experts have consistently opposed the development of the field at every step of the process.

The Scottish Greens were proud to support campaigners who brought a successful legal challenge against the UK Government's initial decision to approve the field. Now, the oil giants behind the project have had to submit a revised environmental impact assessment that takes account of the full emissions that will arise from drilling and burning Rosebank's fossil fuels. Oil and gas giants can no longer get away with assessing the impact of only a fraction of the climate-wrecking emissions from their dirty business, thanks to the efforts of dedicated climate campaigners.

The science is clear: any new oil and gas field in the North Sea would represent an abandonment of our role in achieving the global target of keeping the temperature rise below 1.5°C. The International Energy Agency's latest "World Energy Outlook", which was published during the opening days of COP30, shows that global oil use is set to peak around 2030 and that global gas use is set to do so by 2035. That is based on the current policy intentions of the world's Governments. At the same time, clean energy use will surge, with wind power up by 178 per cent and solar power up by 344 per cent by 2035.

However, even that reflection of the policy status quo would result in global warming reaching 2.5°C in this century, so, if we are remotely serious about avoiding catastrophic impacts, we need to accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels. It would be utterly reckless to approve Rosebank. If the Scottish Government chooses to remain on the fence, it will be choosing to throw away the last shred of its climate credibility.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I hear what Patrick Harvie has said about global reliance on oil, but does he acknowledge that peak oil extraction from the North Sea was back in 1999, that such extraction is on a downward trajectory and that there is a balancing act, because we will rely on hydrocarbons for some time to come and continued extraction will be necessary to facilitate the transition?

Patrick Harvie: The Scottish Government is also dragging its feet in relation to the pace at which we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels,

because it is watering down its heat in buildings agenda.

Even in domestic terms, Rosebank will not help the Scottish or UK economies. It is viable only with millions of pounds in subsidies, with taxpayers being asked to shoulder 80 per cent of the costs. All told, the development is expected to add £250 million to the UK Treasury's black hole. It will not help households with rising energy bills. Ninety per cent of Rosebank's reserves will be exported, mostly to the European continent. Even the portions that are sold here will be subject to prices set on the open market, so what we pay to heat our homes will be unchanged.

Rosebank is very far from a silver bullet for the North Sea workforce. With the whole North Sea basin in decline, as has been pointed out, the number of jobs has already dropped by a staggering 40 per cent. The decline is terminal, as research for the Scottish Government has shown. The only way to give the workers of the North Sea a secure future is to support them to use their skills to build Scotland's renewables future. Indeed, the truth that Equinor and UK ministers want to hide is that Rosebank will, in essence, redistribute wealth away from the public purse and investment in Scotland's renewable futures and towards wealthy fossil fuel giants.

If all that is still not enough to bring Scottish National Party ministers off the fence, perhaps the fact that Rosebank profits will actively fund some of those who are operating illegally in the occupied Palestinian territories will be the final straw. Equinor's minority partner in developing Rosebank is Ithaca Energy, which is majority owned by the Delek Group—an Israeli fuel conglomerate that is operating in the occupied territories and has been flagged for potential human rights breaches. If Rosebank is developed, the Delek Group is expected to receive about £253 million in revenue from the field. Profits from an oil field in Scotland's waters could financially benefit a company that is linked to human rights violations against the Palestinian people. That would be just three months after we voted for a package of boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel and companies that are complicit in the occupation.

For all those reasons—complicity with occupation and war crime, betrayal of Scotland's economic interests and the extraordinary scale of climate destruction—the Parliament must vote to oppose the Rosebank field.

I move,

That the Parliament opposes the development of the Rosebank oil and gas field.

15:05

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): The future of the North Sea oil and gas sector is of vital importance to Scotland's economy and society, and it is central to our energy transition. Oil and gas will continue to play an extremely important, essential and welcome role in the energy mix for decades to come. That role is now declining, given the maturity of the North Sea basin, as other members have said. It is important that we are clear that, under the current political settlement, decisions on consenting to any specific North Sea oil and gas field—be it Rosebank or any other—is a matter that is reserved to the UK Government.

The UK regulator is currently undertaking a statutory process of public consultation as part of an updated environmental impact assessment for the Rosebank field. The consultation remains open until 20 November. I expect that scientists, industry experts, activists and members of the public will wish to contribute their views to the consultation. That is why the Government's amendment reflects the importance of allowing an evidence-led, case-by-case approach to be properly followed to its conclusion.

I assure members that the Scottish Government remains clear in our support for a just transition for Scotland's valuable offshore energy sector.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Now that the compatibility report for Rosebank has been published, does the Scottish Government support Rosebank? Yes or no?

Richard Lochhead: If Douglas Lumsden looks at the Scottish Government's amendment, he will see our position, which I hope the Parliament will vote for today.

There is an urgent need for a global transition from fossil fuels if the Paris agreement goals are to be met. Patrick Harvie referred to those goals. We will not deny the climate science that clearly shows the crisis that we are all facing. However, we also need to have a just transition. I saw the damage—as did many others who are old enough to have done so—that Mrs Thatcher did to our country and our communities when she threw thousands of workers on to the scrap heap. A just transition does not mean simply stopping all future oil and gas activity overnight. That would be wrong and would threaten energy security while destroying the very skills that we need for the energy transition.

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that the minister is well aware that absolutely no one calls for all oil and gas production to be stopped immediately. Is it not clear that expanding into a new, undeveloped oil field is the opposite of a transition? A just transition is needed, but it has to

be a transition away from fossil fuels. The Rosebank plan would be another roll of the fossil fuel dice.

Richard Lochhead: The Scottish Government thinks that it is incredibly important that the guiding principles for new developments, which are outlined in our amendment, are followed. We will continue to press for that. The UK Government is well aware of the Scottish Government's position.

I return to what I was saying about the pace of the transition. We continue to call on the UK Government to approach all its reserved decisions on North Sea oil and gas projects on a rigorous, evidence-based basis. The fiscal regime for the North Sea remains reserved, too. The regime is currently having a major negative impact on Scotland's energy transition. The UK Government must listen carefully to the concerns that businesses are expressing about the impacts of its energy profits levy. The levy is clearly now affecting investment and jobs in the north-east, including in the low-carbon energy sector and across energy supply chains. This week's announcement of job losses at the Port of Aberdeen provides yet more evidence of the real-world impacts.

Liam Kerr: Will the minister give way?

Richard Lochhead: If I have time, I will take a brief intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You do not have a lot of time.

Liam Kerr: The minister will also accept that there is a very damaging effect from the

"presumption against ... oil and gas"

remaining in the draft energy strategy, so will he agree to remove those words?

Richard Lochhead: There is a great deal of hypocrisy from Liam Kerr, given that we are discussing the energy profits levy and it was his Government that first extended it. The levy is causing a lot of damage to jobs in the north-east of Scotland at the moment. The energy profits levy was supposed to be a temporary measure; we must see, through the UK autumn budget, its earliest possible end date or its complete reform. *The Press and Journal* covered that issue today and made the same call.

I am proud to restate the Government's unwavering commitment to Scotland playing its full part in responding to the global challenge of climate change. Scotland is now more than halfway to reaching net zero, and, last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy published her draft climate change plan, setting out how we will further reduce our emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.

Our approach to climate policy is guided by a just transition, with Scotland's valued and highly skilled offshore oil and gas workers at its heart. The Scottish Government will continue to support the energy workforce with all the powers available to it.

I move amendment S6M-19637.4, to leave out from "opposes" to end and insert:

"affirms the importance of a just transition, which supports workers in the oil and gas industry, as the useful life of developments comes to an end, and believes that new developments must only proceed if they contribute to energy security, meet a rigorous climate compatibility assessment and are compatible with Scotland's journey to net zero."

15:10

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)

(Con): I thank the Greens for bringing forward this debate and for lodging a simple motion: they oppose Rosebank—that is absolutely clear. In our amendment, we are absolutely clear that we support Rosebank. Let us look at the amendments from the other parties—what a load of spin and obfuscation. Why can they not just show a bit of honesty to the chamber and the people of the north-east and say whether they support or oppose the North Sea oil and gas sector and the thousands of jobs that it supports? While others dither, the Scottish Conservatives are crystal clear: we support the North Sea oil and gas sector. We are the only party in the Parliament that is clear on that.

Daniel Johnson: I am interested to know whether the member can answer this question. I know that it is not popular to support due process or the decision-making process of the court, but, given that the decision that Rosebank could go ahead was called in by a court for environmental reasons and so there is due process to be followed, does the member not think that that is needed? Ultimately, is that not what is required for stable investment—a stable regime and due process?

Douglas Lumsden: What is needed for stable investment is clear guidance, but we are not getting that from the UK Government or from the Scottish Government. There is no energy strategy at all, and, let us be honest, Scotland will still need oil and gas for years to come. The question is whether we meet part of that need from our own regulated basin and skilled workforce or whether we import more from abroad at a higher cost and with higher emissions. However, the champagne socialists are too stupid to understand that.

If people care about the climate, they should care about where we source what we still use.

Rosebank is a strategic project. It will bring £8.5 billion in direct investment and support around 2,000 jobs and it could add up to £25 billion to the wider economy, with up to 300 million barrels recoverable—

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Douglas Lumsden: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

That will mean pay packets for families, orders for the supply chain and tax revenue for public services. My constituents in the north-east understand that reality because they live it every single day. The industry is vital for Scotland, and yet the SNP ties itself in knots. We have jet set Gillian Martin, who spends her time cosying up to wind developers and selling off Scotland's countryside, but fails to stand up—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, I caution you against using nicknames.

Douglas Lumsden: I am sorry, but she is jet set in a way, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would also caution you against challenging the chair. I have made my concern clear.

Douglas Lumsden: Okay, Presiding Officer.

We have the former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon in favour of a presumption against oil and gas; wannabe First Minister Stephen Flynn, pretending to be a friend of the industry; and John Swinney, with splinters in his backside from trying to sit on the fence, not telling us whether he supports or opposes Rosebank—but we all know that he is no friend of the industry.

Labour's position is hardly clearer. Its front bench has said that

"our future does not lie in more oil and gas",—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 4 February 2025; Vol 761, c 658.]

while pressing ahead with a headline 78 per cent tax rate and scrapping investment allowances that underpin jobs and investment. That uncertainty drives away capital investment and places Scottish jobs at risk. In 2021, Anas Sarwar tweeted that it was time that Nicola Sturgeon opposed the ecological threat of the proposed Cambo oilfield, and yet, this week, he seems to have had a change of heart and pretends to be a supporter. He is so treacherous that he could be mistaken for Alan Carr, and that all matters because, at the end of the day, we are talking about people and their livelihoods.

Independent analysis warns that ill-judged policies could put up to 100,000 jobs at risk across the UK and strip out tens of billions of pounds of investment. The Scottish Affairs Committee has

warned against accelerating decline, while clean energy jobs are not yet coming on stream at the pace that is required. We witnessed that this week at Aberdeen harbour, where redundancies were announced on the back of the oil and gas downturn.

We are going to be using hydrocarbons for years to come, so let us do that in a responsible way that uses home-grown production that supports British jobs and provides revenue for our vital public services. Let us get behind our oil and gas workers.

I move amendment S6M-19637.3, to leave out "opposes" and insert "supports".

15:14

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Scottish Labour has been clear that oil and gas will be part of Scotland's and the UK's energy mix for decades to come. We were clear about that in our election manifesto, in which we said that we would support existing licences. The Rosebank field has been previously licensed, and the Finch judgment means that environmental impact has to be properly considered—something that the UK Government is now acting on, as opposed to the previous Tory failure.

We need to reduce our dependence on volatile international markets for fossil fuels and accelerate a shift away from oil and gas. However, as we discussed in yesterday's members' business debate on the "Striking the Balance" report, we need joined-up thinking and action so that we deliver a fair transition for the workers who currently work in our oil and gas sector and support the work of our trade unions, which, over the years, have negotiated decent terms and conditions and pay for people in that sector. We also need to acknowledge the work of the Just Transition Commission and the Just Transition Partnership.

We need investment at Grangemouth; in our ports and harbours; in supporting the oil and gas sector to decarbonise its operations as it continues; in the manufacture of renewables kit in Scotland; and in making more energy efficient the shipping infrastructure that all our energy sectors use.

We have to make the most of Scotland's huge potential in renewable energy. That means not just producing our electricity but maximising its use to power and heat our homes and buildings.

Liam Kerr: The Scottish Trades Union Congress says that just one job has been created for every £1 million that has been generated by the wind industry. It contrasts that with 14 jobs for every £1 million that has been generated by the oil

and gas industry. Surely, we need to support the oil and gas industry.

Sarah Boyack: What we need is to make sure that we fulfil the potential in renewables so that we have companies that make wind turbines and other kit in Scotland. For example, we have a proposal at the Port of Leith that would be transformative. We need to not just import kit but make it here in Scotland.

That means that we also need to think about the jobs that could come in our communities—joining up the thinking that I was just starting to talk about. We must think about how our communities can benefit. They need an acceleration of investment in our homes so that their heat is not expensive and does not get wasted because their homes are not energy efficient. If we use excess energy to heat our buildings, we can ensure that homes are not cold and that energy is not wasted.

Our councils need support now to implement their local heat and energy efficiency strategy plans, so that we have new, well-paid jobs across the country. We also need a joined-up investment approach so that we can maximise the benefits of capturing heat from waste and from data centres, so that we can use the additional electricity that our renewables create rather than paying £1.5 billion in constraint payments.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you.

Our transport system also needs investment to deliver decarbonised infrastructure so that people can access reliable and affordable buses and trains every day and so that they can charge their cars, wherever they live in Scotland.

Our amendment is clear that we regret the SNP Government's failure to bring forward its promised energy and just transition strategy. People need confidence to invest. We also need a stronger climate change plan.

Our UK Labour Government has acted decisively since coming into office. Labour supported the Grangemouth area in its role in the £100 million growth deal and project willow, and an additional £200 million from the national wealth fund to secure an industrial future for the Grangemouth site. It set up Great British Energy with a remit to invest in clean power and build local supply chains. It saved the Harland & Wolff yards at Methil and Arnish. It backed 1,000 jobs in the North Sea through the aspen project, and a floating wind farm by Cerulean Winds.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Sarah Boyack: Critically, it made sure that the national wealth fund would support energy, so that

we had reliable electricity and reduced constraints on Scottish wind farms.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: As countries meet to discuss COP30, we need to make sure that our communities are protected from extreme weather.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Boyack. I now need to call Jamie Greene.

Sarah Boyack: I move amendment S6M-19367.5, to leave out from "opposes" to end and insert:

"recognises that oil and gas will be part of Scotland and the UK's energy mix for decades to come; acknowledges that the Rosebank oil and gas field has previously been licensed and is currently being considered under new environmental guidance; agrees that the long-term aim for Scotland and the UK should be to reduce dependence on volatile, international markets for fossil fuels; considers that this will require the realisation of Scotland's huge potential in renewable energy, and regrets, therefore, the failure of the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration to bring forward its promised energy strategy, and believes that a properly managed energy transition, which manages existing North Sea oil and gas fields for the entirety of their lifespan and invests in low-carbon energy and energy efficiency across the country, is required to protect and maximise jobs, reduce the need for increased imports, and ensure that Scotland maintains its international reputation for excellence in energy skills."

15:19

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): Those who do not recognise that the world is in the middle of a climate emergency live not in reality but, simply, in a world of anti-climate social media, with 180-character outbursts over anything and everything that seeks to take responsibility for the mess in which we have left our planet.

That being said, although most folk I speak to care deeply about the environment around them, they also worry about how they are going to pay their gas and electricity bills and about where the well-paid jobs in the energy sector in the north-east are going to go. In my view, hyperbole on both sides helps nobody. Of course we need to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, expand our renewable energy sector and use the wealth of talent that we already have in fossil fuels to create better green jobs, but none of that is going to happen overnight.

This tap-on or tap-off argument is, in my view, an oversimplification of the complex and intertwining energy market. With that in mind, I am sympathetic to the environmental concerns that have been raised about Rosebank—rightly so—but I am equally sympathetic to the valid concerns that have been raised by workers and businesses in the north-east, who are facing absolute oblivion.

Any decision about Rosebank or any future development of oil and gas in the North Sea must have the potential loss of jobs and our local economy as key considerations, but those decisions must be made in tandem and according to strict climate checks. I hope that we can all agree on that, because due process matters when making such decisions.

Daniel Johnson rose—

Jamie Greene: I do not have time to give way.

That is how we will take people with us. We need the trust of those that the decisions affect. If the decision to block future developments—which is a decision for the UK Government and, to an extent, the Scottish Government through planning decisions—comes into force, then both those Governments bear responsibility to support the workforce in the sector. I say that as a warning to the SNP and Labour, because if we get it wrong, communities will be left behind, and we all know what that leads to.

The reality is that the UK will need up to 15 billion barrels of oil and gas between now and 2050. The question is where we are going to get it from, because we will produce less than 4 billion barrels. That means that we will import 40 per cent of our energy needs. Much of it will come from middle eastern countries with dubious human rights records. My gut feeling is that I would rather produce it at our back door.

We have to accept that oil and gas will remain part of our energy mix—even the Government accepts that—but let us not forget that the Government has an incoherent energy strategy as it is. How do I know that? It is because we built two liquid natural gas-capable ferries in my home town, but to fill the ferries with LNG, that LNG will first have to be imported first from Qatar, sent to a terminal in Kent and then driven 460 miles on the back of a tanker. I look forward to the day that actually happens, and I think about the carbon footprint of it, too.

While we are on the subject of incoherence, it is my consistent view that the SNP's effective ban on any discussion around new nuclear is difficult. It is going to make it more difficult to hit our net zero targets. I talked about hyperbole earlier. We need to remove the misconceptions around new nuclear technology, which could be cost effective and low carbon.

It is not great on the renewables front, either. This week, Shell handed back its ScotWind lease, putting more than £3 billion of Scotland-based investment at risk. That is not a sign of confidence in our energy markets.

I will make this final plea. The Scottish Government must make a statement on all of this

to the Parliament as soon as possible. I hope that the minister will listen to that call. It is about time that the Scottish Government comes clean on its position as to what its energy policy actually is.

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

15:23

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): We are at a watershed moment for the climate, not only in Scotland but globally. As I raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy only last week, we face the very real risk that crucial tipping points will be surpassed, and Scotland will be on the front line of those changes.

We rely on the gulf stream for our temperate, liveable climate, but, with the 1.5°C Paris target set to be missed, climate scientists are becoming increasingly agitated that that crucial current will collapse. Should that happen, our way of life in Scotland will change drastically. It will require decades of adaptation, which will cost a lot of money, to meet that challenge. Our economy, our homes and our food production—everything—will face huge alterations.

My questions for members are these: why do we want to make the situation worse for ourselves, and how can we, in good conscience, stand here today and pursue supposed short-term gain over Scotland's long-term health, wellbeing and prosperity? That is what Rosebank is. It is a desperate short-termist attempt by the fossil fuel industry to maintain share prices and mega pay packages. It comes at the expense of working Scottish people, both now and in the future, and it puts our collective future at great risk.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I am proud to represent Shetland. Communities there have been promised a lot by Equinor as part of its bid to start up Rosebank—they have been promised a jobs bonanza, big contracts for highly skilled and experienced local engineering firms and lucrative helicopter traffic through Sumburgh airport. However, before a drill has even been operated, the Shetlanders have been short-changed. Businesses there have been passed over for contracts, helicopters have been set to operate out of mainland airports, and money derived from Rosebank oil and gas will end up in shareholder pockets in Norway's sovereign wealth fund, not in our public purse, due to the UK's general fossil fuel tax regime.

Despite that exploitation of Scottish people and the severe consequences that Rosebank would have for the climate, the First Minister could not say at First Minister's question time last week that the SNP opposes Rosebank, nor could the

minister today, and in my region the SNP has even chosen an Equinor executive as a parliamentary candidate. Those two things tell us everything that we need to know. The SNP Government is not on the side of the working people or the climate. It has bungled Grangemouth in the face of pressure from a fossil fuel billionaire, and it appears set to make the same mistake off the coast of Shetland.

Not only are we being fed myths about the economic upside of Rosebank, we are also being told that it will somehow boost our energy security and reduce our bills, but that is simply not the case. Ninety per cent of Rosebank's production will be oil, which Equinor says will be sold on the open market, mostly to continental Europe. As for gas, estimates suggest that Rosebank will reduce the UK's annual gas import dependency by a measly 1 per cent. We can do more for our energy security and domestic bills by moving to renewables, rolling out clean heat sources such as heat networks, heat pumps and solar thermal, and properly insulating our homes.

Let us focus on doing things that will bring real, positive changes for Scottish households. Let us stand up to the false narratives that are spread by the fossil fuel industry. Let us do better by our people and climate, and let us say no to Rosebank.

15:27

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the Scottish Greens for bringing the debate to the chamber. Like other members, I have received correspondence on the issue of Rosebank over a lengthy period of time. We all know that its development and implications are wide ranging, as it will impact on the climate emergency, jobs and the broader regional economy in the north-east. Other factors in the discussion include the just transition and the impact of the UK Government's tax and levy regimes. The decisions made and the approach taken in relation to the proposal need to achieve the goals of tackling the climate emergency and the just transition and, of course, providing economic stability.

The Scottish Government continues to call on the UK Government to approach North Sea oil and gas licensing on an evidence-led, case-by-case basis, with climate compatibility and energy security as key considerations. That position has not changed. Decisions on offshore oil and gas licensing and consenting are currently reserved to the UK Government, but any development of oil and gas licensing must be undertaken in a way that is compatible with Scotland's journey to net zero. The Scottish Government remains committed to a fair and just transition to net zero,

which will provide opportunities for our industries, our economy and our climate.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes.

Scotland's energy wealth has been squandered as a cash cow by many successive UK Governments while ordinary Scots pay some of the highest bills in Europe. Labour promised to cut energy bills by £300, but the reality is that energy bills have risen by £190 since the party came into office. The SNP is calling for an end to the energy profits levy, which is having a negative impact on investment in clean energy, oil and gas decommissioning and the shared energy supply chain—there is no doubt about that whatsoever. We all hear that from stakeholders. That is why it is vital that we continue to invest in renewable energy opportunities and maximise that investment.

On Rosebank, I repeat that decisions on offshore oil and gas licensing and consenting are currently reserved to the UK Government. However, the Scottish Government continues to call on the UK Government to approach its decisions on offshore oil and gas projects on an evidence-led, case-by-case basis.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Paul McLennan: I am sorry, Mr Harvie—I have only four minutes.

Climate compatibility and energy security should be key considerations, and climate compatibility assessments and checkpoints should inform any decision that the UK Government makes on new licences. The Scottish Government has consistently insisted on the importance of those assessments—a position that has also been adopted in legal judgments. We also have to remain committed to a fair and just transition to net zero.

With the Scottish Government's backing, the north-east can become the net zero capital of the world. The Scottish Government is committed to capitalising on the enormous opportunities that the net zero system offers our industries, our economy and our climate. The Scottish Government is focused on reducing emissions in line with climate commitments, delivering affordable energy supplies and ensuring that a just transition for the oil and gas workforce is secured as North Sea oil resources decline.

The number of jobs that are supported by the UK's oil and gas industry has more than halved in the past decade. Polling has shown that more than 90 per cent of oil and gas workers surveyed want a clear path out of high-carbon jobs and that more

than 90 per cent of oil and gas workers possess skills that are transferable to the offshore renewables sector. The real pathway to supporting the workers, supply chains and communities that currently depend on the oil and gas industry is developing a credible plan for the North Sea transition and ensuring that those who are dependent on the oil and gas sector benefit from the transition. That includes establishing domestic clean energy supply chains to provide secure, long-term jobs for oil and gas workers to transition into.

The Rosebank decision is about people, climate and the future of the north-east, and it is incredibly important that we balance all those aspects as we move forward.

15:31

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The SNP's hypocrisy on the EPL is absolutely breathtaking. SNP members were the biggest cheerleaders in the Parliament for those windfall taxes and the *Official Report* shows it, so they should not try to change history now. I heard my colleague, Craig Hoy, shout from a sedentary position to Paul McLennan, "What about Torness?" The Government cannot go on sustaining the view that there is no place for nuclear in our energy mix if we believe in clean energy. However, the motion asks us to turn our backs on reality and on one of Scotland's most vital industries. It asks us to abandon the energy workers of the north-east, to weaken our national security and to reject the very resources that have powered our economy for 50 years. It is a motion that is driven not by reason or realism, but by ideology.

The Scottish Conservatives cannot and will not support that folly. We will, therefore—

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: No—I do not have time to take an intervention, unfortunately. That is what passes for debate in this place.

The Conservative amendment sets out clearly our party's position, which is that Scotland must maximise every one of its energy resources through a balanced and responsible energy mix. That means renewables, nuclear, hydrogen and—yes—continued production of oil and gas from the North Sea.

The alternative proposed by the Scottish Greens would leave Scotland more dependent on imported energy from countries with lower environmental standards, higher levels of emissions and little concern for human rights. It is the height of absurdity to import liquefied natural gas from Qatar or the United States, which is

shipped thousands of miles with double the carbon footprint, while refusing to produce our own resources from the North Sea, where our standards are among the highest in the world. That is not environmentalism—it is environmental self-harm.

Rosebank, like many North Sea projects, can be developed in a way that aligns with our climate goals, because its carbon intensity per barrel is among the lowest globally. To halt such developments does not reduce global emissions; it simply offshores them. That is not climate leadership—it is climate hypocrisy. Just like everything that the Scottish Greens stand for, it is anathema to the Scottish Conservatives and—to be frank—to most sensible people in Scotland.

The Greens have managed to deceive many by posing as a party for cuddly animals when, in truth, they are a party that is intent on returning us to the stone age. Their ideology is a form of modern-day communism that is hostile to enterprise, to capitalism and to economic growth itself. They would dismantle the very system that feeds, clothes and houses us. They would like to un-invent almost every technological advance that humanity has achieved in the past 100 years. They must be opposed, and they must be exposed.

Scotland's energy future must be based on realism, not romanticism, and on innovation, not ideology. It must support the workers who build our prosperity and secure the energy that sustains our daily lives. Our amendment is straightforward common sense: it is about jobs, security and self reliance. [*Interruption.*] Patrick Harvie can mutter from a sedentary position all he likes. It is about ensuring that Scotland remains an energy nation, leading the world not by self-denial, but by example. Let us choose prosperity over pretence, progress over posturing, and the national interest over Green ideology. Support our amendment and stand up for Scotland's energy, its workers and its future.

15:35

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Scottish Greens have brought this timely debate to the chamber. For life on this planet to be tolerable, we have to address the climate challenge and we must move away from our reliance on oil and gas. We cannot overestimate the challenge that we face. In 2024, the highest concentration—in human history—of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere was recorded. The rise in global temperatures has meant that the past decade was the warmest on record. The International Energy Agency has said that, if we are to achieve the target of limiting the global

temperature rise to within 1.5°C, there can be no new oil and gas developments internationally.

Scottish Government policy is in favour of a just transition. However, we have to be honest: the transition has started and it is not just. In the chamber, we have spoken about thousands of onshore and offshore jobs that have already been lost, despite oil companies continuing to pay massive dividends. One of those companies, Ithaca, has already been mentioned in the debate. In August, the North Sea oil giant paid £127 million in dividends for the first quarter of 2025, with total pay-outs set to reach around £388 million this year. There is no just transition for the workers who are losing their jobs.

As Liam Kerr said, in October, STUC research showed that only one job is being created for every £1 million in turnover in onshore and offshore wind. The figure across other renewables sectors is not significantly higher. We do not build wind turbines—we import them, and we are not reaping the economic benefits of any green industrial revolution. We have to be honest that not enough is being done to ensure good quality job creation and to develop the new sectors that would provide local benefits.

Richard Lochhead: The member referred to job losses in the oil and gas sector in the north-east of Scotland; I represent the Moray constituency in that area. Does the member realise that one of the key reasons, if not the key reason, that is being cited by the industry for job losses is the energy profits levy, which urgently needs to be reformed, changed or scrapped?

Katy Clark: I do not accept that. I am happy to discuss it in more detail another day. I have already referenced some of the profits that are being made in the sector.

My primary role today is to hold the minister's Government to account and talk about what this Parliament can do within our powers. I agree with the Greens that we cannot keep developing new oil and gas. However, we have to do that as part of a just transition, so I also support the offshore trade unions and the workforce in their demand for a plan.

A number of members have already made the point that we cannot respond to the challenge by importing foreign oil and gas to replace North Sea oil production. Norway and Denmark are issuing new oil and gas production licences alongside historically high investment in offshore renewables. It cannot be acceptable that we support extraction elsewhere.

The trade unions need to be centrally involved in developing a just transition. I do not believe that there has ever been a just transition for working class communities when industrial change has

taken place. Working class communities see no sign of that happening now. We need to rise to the climate challenge by having a serious debate about how we ensure that we meet our climate challenges in a way that benefits our economy as part of an industrial strategy that delivers for every community in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Clare Adamson is the final speaker in the open debate.

15:40

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): We are talking about fuel this afternoon, and the fossil fuel industry in particular, but we are really talking about power and where power lies. We know that, even if we pass this motion this afternoon, the decisions about Scotland's resources, Scotland's economy and Scotland's opportunities will not be made in Scotland. That is simply wrong.

We have seen how, for years, Westminster has failed to use the resources of Scotland to benefit the people of Scotland. In the 1980s, the SNP ran an "All of the fuel, none of the power" campaign and, unfortunately, nothing has changed since then.

Norway's oil fund was mentioned earlier. It is worth trillions of pounds and is used to benefit the citizens of Norway. Meanwhile—although, of course, I have constituents who have concerns about the climate—I see constituents who went through a transition in the 1980s, when the Tories did away with the mines and steelworks and did nothing just about it. I see people who cannot put food on the table, who cannot afford their fuel and electricity bills and who live in a country that is one of the most unequal in Europe and the world, where the profits have never been used to benefit the people of Scotland.

That is why this debate can go nowhere at this stage, because what we need is the power to control those issues. We want to be at the heart of Europe. The carbon border adjustment mechanism that is about to come in will see every exporter in Scotland hit with a charge for the carbon that they use in their production processes, and we no longer have a place at the top table to enter into negotiations about that.

Liam Kerr: That does not address the motion.

Douglas Lumsden: What does that have to do with the motion?

Clare Adamson: Again, that is left in the hands of Westminster politicians, who have failed to use the resources of this country—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Adamson, please resume your seat for a second.

I am not going to be told by members on any bench whether something is relevant. I will judge whether what Ms Adamson is saying is relevant to the amendment that the Government has lodged. I appreciate that it is not relevant to the amendment that the Conservatives have lodged and that it is not necessarily relevant to the motion that the Green Party has put forward, but it is relevant to the SNP's amendment. The judgment about that is for me, as chair, and I will not be heckled into changing that decision. I also encourage members on the Conservative benches not to provide a running commentary throughout the speech.

Clare Adamson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We face an existential threat: a climate disaster. COP30 is happening right now, and we know that we have already failed to meet the targets that would keep the rise in global temperatures below a 1.5°C increase. We are seeing weather events across the world that are devastating communities—many of which are in countries that, at some point, Britain has exploited. We see the global south suffering from climate change.

The threat to our existence is existential. We know that COP30 is looking at those issues, and we hope that a strong and good way forward will come out of the conference. However, we must have the power to control what we do, so that we can play our part as individuals, as a country, as a European partner and as a member of the world community, because this is an existential threat. It is the biggest threat that is facing us.

15:44

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I thank the Greens for lodging the motion, because it is important that we treat the climate emergency with the urgency that it deserves, and that we continue to scrutinise the decisions that we make in that context and consider the progress that we are making towards net zero, because the solution is not easy or straightforward, and, unfortunately, it is not about binary choices. In some ways, I wish that it were, but it is about a just transition to net zero. Each of the words in that phrase is incredibly important, and that is what we have heard this afternoon.

However, for those who want to resist the drive towards net zero, it is important to have two very important reality checks. First, as I have said in the chamber before, an assessment by Wood Mackenzie shows that 90 per cent of our extractable resources have already been extracted—on a more generous assessment, the figure is 70 per cent. We would have to transition whether we liked it or not—whether the climate emergency was with us or not—but it is with us, which adds to the urgency with which we must act.

Secondly, we need to recognise that, currently, we are massively reliant on hydrocarbons, and that that reliance will not go away. That was acknowledged by the Greens when they opened the debate. In heating our homes with gas, we use four times as much energy as we do with electricity. Getting off gas will be incredibly difficult. As a number of members have pointed out, importing gas comes with a substantially higher carbon footprint than using our domestic supply.

It cannot be a case of either/or—we must have balanced production and a pathway to net zero. We cannot simply cut off the taps and have a higher carbon footprint—

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: If it is brief.

Douglas Lumsden: I agree that it should not be a case of one thing or the other, but Labour's ban on new licences is making it one thing or the other. Does the member not accept that the ban on new licences means that we will have to import more oil and gas?

Daniel Johnson: We are talking about the Rosebank application, so let us use that as an opportunity to look at the issue. The Rosebank application was consented to by the previous Government. The UK Government is committed to upholding previous consents, but that consent was flawed and found by a court to have been given in error, according to the law. The consent had not taken fully into account the environmental impact assessments. That process is currently under way. Members on the Conservative benches made reference to the environmental impact assessment, but the public consultation for that does not close until 20 November.

It is important that we have due process that provides stability for investment. Let us be clear that we will need investment if we are to continue to extract hydrocarbons—which everyone acknowledges that we will do—but we cannot have a regime that chops and changes. We also need a regime that has environmental impact assessments at its heart, which is what the UK Government has now brought in. That process is under way, but it has not yet concluded.

As much as I understand why people on both sides of the argument believe that the debate is important, and that it is vital that we grant consent only if the proposals are compatible with environmental impact assessments and our transition to net zero, we must have due process and genuine assessment. Anyone who argues that we should short circuit that process is arguing against the very interests that they claim to support.

We need a plan, which is what the UK Labour Government has brought forward with GB Energy and investment. Ultimately, what we need is a just transition—Katy Clark is absolutely right. We have never had one before, but we absolutely need one now.

15:48

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I, too, thank the Greens for securing the debate. I have to say that I found their arguments less than compelling, as was their leaflet that was delivered to my home early yesterday evening, which was all about taxing the rich and making everything fairer. The rich have got rich by working hard and using the economy to their advantage, and everyone benefits from that. *[Interruption.]* If the Greens are going to destroy the economy, I do not know where we are going.

The Greens have admitted that we will need oil in the future. Have we thought about all the uses for which we will need it? The turbines that are growing in number across Scotland use hundreds of gallons of oil each year to ensure that they turn and that their gearboxes and other workings function.

Farmers need oil to fuel their tractors, because electric power will not do that. I am a farmer myself—members can check the details in my entry in the register of members' interests. We need oil for our transport. The battery buses that were sent up to the Highlands did not work, because they did not have the power required to get up the hills.

We will need oil and gas to heat our homes. I keep pointing out—as I did to Mr Harvie—that the alternative sources of power that have been proposed, such as the heat solutions and the heat transfer systems, will not work without a considerable amount of retrofitting of insulation.

Therefore, we will all continue to need oil and gas, which is why Mr Lumsden's points are so appropriate. Why not use the resources that we already have? Why not ensure that those resources are exploited to ensure that the jobs that are in Scotland continue to offer employment to people and that the money that is brought in continues to benefit the UK Treasury?

The suggestion that we should not use Rosebank means that we would just be exporting production to countries such as Nigeria. Is that environmentally sensible? It is not. If we wanted to, we could rely on Russia and allow it to supply us with oil, but that prospect is equally unpleasant. As Mr Greene pointed out, we could rely on the middle east to supply us with some of our fuel. However, some of the practices that go on there are totally unacceptable.

This afternoon, we have talked about why we should not use oil. We have ignored why we are driven to using it. It is because this Government does not want to allow the use of nuclear power in Scotland. However, the Government is fine about taking the power that comes in from nuclear power stations when the wind does not blow and there is insufficient power here. It is hypocritical for members of the Government who have nuclear power stations in their constituencies to say that they do not want them there when the employment opportunities that they offer are phenomenal.

I am unclear about the position of the Labour Party on this issue. To be frank, I am not sure who is calling the shots there. Anas Sarwar seems to be changing his position. Perhaps that is so that he can align with whichever new leader approaches the front benches when Keir Starmer is replaced, whether it be Wes Streeting or Andy Burnham.

I am confused by everyone's positions. We have a resource in Scotland and it appears that we can exploit it by carefully—

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

Edward Mountain: Do I have time, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Edward Mountain: Okay. I am sure that the member knows that I would have taken an intervention, but I do not have time.

We can exploit the resource in such a way as to make sure that we do not damage the environment. Importing it from elsewhere will probably ensure that that will happen.

15:52

Richard Lochhead: I also welcome this debate, which the Green Party has brought to the chamber. The issue of climate change raises profound questions that affect our society, our economy and our planet, not just for our generation but for those in the future. As the father of two sons, I often wonder what the world will be like when they are my age—not just in relation to climate change but on many other related issues. We are discussing profound matters today.

I believe that Scotland is showing global leadership on tackling the climate crisis. As we speak, the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy is in Brazil, at COP30, representing Scotland, showing leadership and collaborating with the international community. I notice that Douglas Lumsden presents that as jet setting. In the past 24 hours, *Time* magazine has named the cabinet secretary as one of the 100 top climate

leaders. I congratulate her on that achievement, which recognises, on the international stage, Scotland's leadership in tackling the climate crisis.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: I will take both interventions.

Douglas Lumsden: Do you think that Gillian Martin's constituents—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

Douglas Lumsden: Sorry. Does the minister think that Gillian Martin's constituents will be happy that she is one of the top 100 people in climate change when they see our constituencies being railroaded with pylons, substations and everything else?

Richard Lochhead: The member makes an interesting point. I am sure that others have noticed the anti-renewables rhetoric that is increasingly coming from members on the Conservative benches. That party used to have a green tree as its national emblem, to show that it loved the environment. Those days are long gone, given the rhetoric that we hear from it in Scotland today.

Referring to the unfortunate loss of some jobs due to the downturn in oil and gas activity, the chief executive of the Port of Aberdeen said that we need to speed up the creation of renewables jobs. However, the member who has just intervened criticises ministers for what he terms "cosying up" to wind farm companies. Those are the very companies that will supply the jobs that the chief executive of the Port of Aberdeen wants to see being created to stop the job losses that the member is complaining about. It is utter hypocrisy after utter hypocrisy.

Douglas Lumsden: That is unbelievable.

Patrick Harvie: *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Richard Lochhead: I will take Mr Harvie's intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind Conservative members that they have been given interventions and had a chance to make their points. They should listen to the person who has the floor. Currently, that is Patrick Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: A moment ago, the minister was laying claim to climate leadership on behalf of the Government. Why does he think that Nicola Sturgeon had the courage to say what she thinks of this particular project—Rosebank—and the

current Government does not? I ask him to reflect on that, please.

Richard Lochhead: The Scottish Government's position has always been consistent: such matters should be treated case by case and a vigorous compatibility assessment of our climate obligations should be put in place. That has been our constant message under each of the First Ministers of this SNP Government.

In my remaining two minutes I will turn to other members' contributions. Jamie Greene's opening remarks were very balanced. Many of the issues that we are discussing are incredibly complex, as Daniel Johnson referenced. It is not simply a case of denying the climate crisis, as some members might imply. Neither is it a case of simply shutting off the oil and gas jobs and causing economic dislocation in our country, particularly in the north-east, which others give the impression might be the solution. I hope that that is not the position, but sometimes that is the impression that we, as politicians, give the public when we have vigorous debates. We should not give that impression in these difficult, complex times.

Jamie Greene also said that he would want the Government to make a statement on ScotWind and a recent licence issue. I indicate to him that we accept that request and that such a statement will be made.

At the heart of Jamie Greene's and other members' contributions were questions about the just transition that will take place over several decades to come. A lot is happening to put in place the measures for that. For example, just recently, the First Minister opened an energy transition skills hub in Aberdeen. Many other measures are being taken besides that.

The UK Government is midway through the decision-making process on the application for the Rosebank field to receive consents to enter production. Although the process comes under a reserved matter, it is nonetheless important for us all to be aware of the detail.

We have the court rulings, and the UK regulator published updated statutory guidance for undertaking environmental impact assessments to inform offshore oil and gas consenting. The updated guidance requires that the climate impacts of the emissions arising from the consumption, as well as the initial production of oil and gas, must be considered.

As I said, the Scottish Government has long called for an enhanced climate compatibility approach to be taken to decisions on North Sea oil and gas developments, including the consideration of the fuel impacts. As outlined in the Government's amendment, which I commend to Parliament, that is at the heart of what we want.

We want energy security, we want that compatibility assessment and we want to ensure that Scotland can continue on its journey towards net zero.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Maggie Chapman will wind up the debate.

15:57

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Although the debate has been disappointingly predictable, the climate-wrecking, business-as-usual take from most in the chamber—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Chapman, will you resume your seat?

Alexander Stewart, I ask you not to chunter from a sedentary position, particularly with comments such as that, please.

Maggie Chapman: The climate-wrecking, business-as-usual take from most in the chamber—one that ideologically supports fossil capitalism—is deeply concerning.

In closing the debate, I do so with urgency for our climate and for the people whose lives and livelihoods hang in the balance. The proposed exploitation of the Rosebank oilfield is a moment of reckoning—a choice between clinging to fossil fuel profits and choosing a future that is rooted in fairness, community and justice.

If we are serious about keeping anywhere close to the 1.5°C limit of global warming and about having a liveable planet, we must be serious about having no new licences for fossil fuel extraction.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Maggie Chapman: I am not going to take an intervention from a member of a party that wants to rip up our climate change legislation.

The campaign against Rosebank reminds us that this is not abstract. It says that, if Governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal.

We can debate economics and energy security, but the real question is moral. Who do those businesses serve? In the north-east, many communities have built their identity and pride around oil and gas. I respect those workers—sometimes whole families—who have gone offshore, drilled, serviced rigs and supported supply chains. However, the reality is clear: jobs are disappearing.

Between 2014 and 2024, the UK oil and gas workforce fell from about 190,000 to 115,000. In Scotland, we have lost roughly three oil and gas

jobs for every one that is created in clean energy. One offshore worker told the Just Transition Commission:

“I’ve got probably four years left in the North Sea. Where do I go? My employer is not funding retraining ... There’s a lack of information about where is the work and what are the skills required.”

They went on to say that

“A lot of guys ... think the North Sea will go on forever”,

but it will not. That is the cost—the human cost—of transition neglect.

Rosebank would only make things worse. The UK taxpayer would carry most of the cost through billions in tax breaks, while profits flowed overseas and UK job creation remained minimal.

The promised boom is hollow. It is built on export-oriented oil and more fossil dependency when the clock for climate action is running out.

This debate is not only about Aberdeen or Edinburgh; it is about the wider world and those who are already living with the first and worst effects of climate breakdown. As scientist Friederike Otto reminds us,

“Climate change is not just a problem of physics but a crisis of justice”.

Women and gender-diverse people, people of colour and those in low-income countries are suffering most from this fossil-fuelled world. The consequences of climate change are not gender neutral.

Here in Scotland, we must ask: who does the industry serve and whose future does it ignore? Let us be clear that oil and gas corporations are raking in mega-profits, even as investment in renewables lags and supply-chain jobs erode. Equinor made £62 billion of profit in 2022, while the Rosebank project would be underwritten by the public purse. Meanwhile, north-east communities face job losses and shrinking opportunities.

A just transition means that the process is as important as the outcome. The Just Transition Commission reminds us that the shift must be co-designed and co-delivered by those affected—by workers, trade unions and communities. Roz Foyer of the Scottish Trades Union Congress has been clear that

“We must secure good, green jobs ... not leave communities abandoned”

and that we must put

“workers’ voices at the heart of any just transition”,

yet the reality falls behind that rhetoric. For every one green job created, three oil and gas jobs have been lost. Too many renewables projects import

components instead of building them here. Too often, we talk transition but deliver decline.

So, what is to be done? First, we must say loud and clear, “No new licences.” Approving Rosebank would send the wrong message. We already hold vast reserves. Even developers admit that it will not cut bills or create lasting jobs.

Secondly, we must centre communities and workers by co-designing, retraining, upskilling and reskilling, with guarantees of fair pay, fair work and secure pathways into renewables.

Thirdly, we must build local supply chains and anchor investment here. Scotland must stop exporting our skills and importing finished products. Our renewables strategy must be to manufacture, install and maintain right here at home.

Fourthly, we must confront intersecting injustices. Climate justice is social justice. Gender, race, class and geography shape who gains and who loses. The poorest in the world are already paying the price for choices that are made elsewhere.

Finally, we must use the gains of the fossil era to finance the green one. If profits are vast and subsidies generous, we should reclaim them. We should invest in communities, care, education and innovation. A fossil fuel boom that enriches a few while displacing many is unacceptable.

The decision that is before us is stark. We can keep granting new licences and prolonging carbon lock-in and the neglect of workers and communities, or we can summon the courage to break with business as usual and invest in a Scotland that is not only low carbon but fair. I speak today for young people, for families in the north-east who fear for their future and for those around the world whose lives are already curtailed by climate chaos. We cannot ask them to wait for justice.

We must act with urgency, compassion and ambition. We believe that the richest resources and technologies must not serve the few; they must uplift us all. We must reject Rosebank.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on Rosebank. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow members on the front benches to change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery His Excellency Nuno Brito, the Ambassador of Portugal to the United Kingdom. *[Applause.]*

Bus Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19632, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on better bus services. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

16:05

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Scottish Green MSPs believe that everyone in Scotland deserves to benefit from affordable, accessible and reliable transport, including from their local bus services. Having access to better buses has hugely positive impacts on people’s lives, helping everyone to access education and work opportunities, to be connected to vital local and national services and to connect with one another. It also plays a role in addressing the climate crisis, because it encourages us all to leave the car at home and cut climate pollution.

However, people across Scotland still struggle with the affordability and accessibility of public transport, especially buses. Over the past decade, the cost of bus travel has risen by more than 60 per cent, which is faster than the rate of wages and the cost of living. Those fare increases put significant financial strain on families across Scotland and disproportionately impact people on low incomes, women and people from minority ethnic communities, as they are more likely to rely on the bus.

However, it does not have to be that way. The Scottish Greens have continuously fought to make public transport more affordable, accessible and reliable, which has included delivering free bus travel for all under-22s in Scotland from January 2022 and working constructively with the Government on successive budget deals. Three years on, we can see just how successful that scheme has been: since its roll-out, more than 250 million journeys have been made and there were over 800,000 cardholders as of June. I live with two of them at home. In my region, the scheme has been taken up by just over 100,000 young people, which has resulted in some 26.5 million journeys.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Does the member share the concerns of my constituents in South Scotland, particularly young people, who might have a free bus pass but not a bus service to ride on?

Mark Ruskell: Absolutely. The point of the debate is to look to the future and to the vision that we all want to create.

The success of bus travel has not only been about the number of journeys that have been taken; it is shown in the way in which it has removed travel barriers for young people and encouraged them and their families to use buses more widely. It is clear that attitudes are changing: recent data from the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust shows that 67 per cent of young people are supportive and want to see more public transport. There is success in the thousands of pounds that young people and their families have saved, which has been crucial at a time of ever-stretching household budgets. It is also shown in the way in which it has allowed young people to find new opportunities, whether those are social, at work or in education.

In the one-year evaluation of the scheme, it was found that a third of young people using the concession scheme were able to access new opportunities and new activities. Ultimately, that is good for the economy. I want young people to get the best possible start in life by being able to access good careers and prosperity and to generate wealth that can then be reinvested back into the public services to pay for the services that gave them a helping hand in the first place. Let us dare to invest in that future for more young people.

In every way, the under-22 scheme continues to achieve what it intended. We must ensure that its success continues, which includes addressing some of the key issues that young people and their families have highlighted. Reliability, frequency and accessibility are some of the main reasons why young people, especially in rural areas, have not yet had the full benefits of the scheme. I agree with Mr Hoy that the scheme is great if you are a young person who can use it, but if no buses are near you, the timetable is not great or the buses just do not show up, it will have very little impact on your life.

As soon as a young person turns 22, they hit a cliff edge and, overnight, they are suddenly forced to pay full fares. A young person who commutes into Glasgow for a new job will face a £40 travel bill every week. A young person who travels into Edinburgh from Dunfermline to attend college will—overnight, when they turn 22—face a £35 travel bill every week. However, the circumstances of those young people's lives will not have changed overnight. The affordability crisis does not stop when they reach 22; it is not paused until a later date.

People in their 20s are far more likely to be living, and struggling, with soaring costs of living, adults under the age of 25 are more likely to be living in poverty than older adults, and 37 per cent of 16 to 25-year-olds were in relative poverty, after housing costs were paid, last year. Young people are also more likely to be in insecure employment,

with zero-hours contracts, low pay and irregular shifts being the norm, and they are significantly more likely to be in private rented accommodation, the prices for which have soared over the past decade. On top of all that, young people have to attempt to stretch their budgets even further to cover their travel costs. That will only worsen and deepen young people's experiences of poverty and the cost of living crisis.

We need decisive, bold action to expand free bus travel. The schemes for under-22s, older people and disabled people should be seen as the start of the work rather than the end of it. We should invest in expanding concessionary schemes to cover more people, so that people can continue to access vital opportunities and are not left behind because they cannot afford an extortionate bus fare.

I welcome the pilot project, which was agreed as part of last year's budget negotiations between the Greens and the Scottish National Party, to introduce a bus fare cap in a region of Scotland. However, we are just weeks away from the proposed start date and, to my knowledge—unless the minister corrects me—there has been very little progress. The Government needs to follow through on its commitments.

It is critical that more bus services are run in the public interest. It is clear that decades of deregulation have been catastrophic for bus services, so it is galling to see the Conservative amendment extolling the benefits of competition. There are different ways in which we can put the public interest at the heart of how bus services are commissioned and run in this country. I am delighted that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is moving down the road towards franchising, and the Government should support it in every way possible to achieve that goal. However, the current franchising decision-making process still raises concerns and needs to be simplified.

I want other models, too: the direct control of services by councils, the establishment of community bus companies and even national parks commissioning their own services. The restored bus services of the future should be run by the public, for the public, and should be affordable, accessible and reliable. That is the vision of the Scottish Greens. We invite other parties in the chamber to join us and make that happen.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that communities across Scotland deserve affordable, accessible and reliable bus services; further agrees that more bus services across Scotland should be run in the public interest to improve services and reduce fares for all passengers; celebrates that 250 million bus journeys have been taken by young

people in Scotland since the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s, and calls on the Scottish Government to expand free bus travel to more young people.

16:12

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I thank Mark Ruskell for bringing the debate to the chamber. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the importance of local bus services and, in particular, to acknowledge the enormous success of the under-22 free bus travel scheme, which was introduced by the SNP Government, with Graeme Dey delivering it as the minister.

Bus services play a vital role in delivering the First Minister's four priorities: eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency and improving Scotland's public services. The Government is investing more than £2.6 billion in 2025-26 to support public transport and to make our transport system available, affordable and accessible for all. We have increased our funding for bus services and concessionary travel from £430 million in 2024-25 to almost £465 million this year. We invest all that money because buses offer a more sustainable way to keep our country moving in a way that is accessible to many.

The Scottish transport statistics that were published earlier this year show that about 334 million passenger journeys were made by bus in Scotland in 2023-24. That represents a 13 per cent increase compared with the number in 2022-23, which shows that good progress has been made.

Across Scotland, more than 2 million children, young people, disabled people and older people now benefit from free bus travel, and they make more than 3 million journeys per week. Since January 2022, more than 250 million bus journeys have been made across Scotland by children and young people using their under-22 free bus travel entitlement card. That has helped them and their families to cut costs for essential and leisure travel. That is an incredible achievement, and the benefits are so important to Scotland's young people.

Craig Hoy: Will Mr Fairlie elaborate on the point that I made to Mr Ruskell, which is that one consequence of the expansion of concessionary travel is that the budget is very constrained for supported services, particularly in rural areas? Will the Government now look at creating a rural bus fund for areas, such as Dumfriesshire, that are rapidly becoming bus deserts?

Jim Fairlie: I will come on to Craig Hoy's point later in my speech.

Although we are supportive of the Green Party motion that we are debating today, it is important

that any future expansion of free bus travel to more young people—and, indeed, to others—must be affordable and sustainable. The cost of the free bus pass for under-22s is currently sitting at £200.5 million, and we estimate costs of a further £100 million per year to extend free travel to young people under the age of 26.

This financial year, we will also progress a national pilot to extend free bus travel to people who are seeking asylum, as well as establishing a pilot scheme for a £2 bus fare cap in one of Scotland's transport regions, which is backed by a £3 million fund.

I also recently announced £20 million through our transformative bus infrastructure fund. That investment supports the development and construction of a wide range of infrastructure projects across Scotland, from bus lanes and bus priority signals to accessible features and transport hubs. Those improvements are designed to shorten journey times, increase reliability and improve integration with other modes of transport, which ultimately encourages more people to choose the bus over private vehicles.

To help local transport authorities to improve bus provision in their areas, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 has now delivered the powers for local authorities and regional transport partnerships to take forward partnership working, franchising and local authority-run services, alongside their existing ability to subsidise services. It is important to remember that it is a decision for each authority to determine which, if any, of the powers that we have introduced will best address the transport challenges of their area.

The vast majority of passengers who travel by bus do so safely and responsibly. That includes people of all ages who use their free bus entitlement to travel. None of that would be possible without the bus drivers keeping communities connected. However, a minority of people of all ages act in a way that can result in harm to bus employees and passengers, and that is simply not acceptable.

We are determined to address antisocial behaviour on the bus network. The programme for government prioritised the consideration of suspending the use of concessionary travel cards on a temporary and potentially permanent basis as a result of antisocial behaviour when using the card. Detailed work is progressing on a behaviour code, robust impact assessments and a process for suspension, with enabling secondary legislation due to be laid before the Parliament on 4 December. It is simply not acceptable for drivers or passengers to have to put up with antisocial behaviour. Our actions should send a clear message to the small minority that action will be

taken and that they will lose that privilege if they continue with antisocial behaviour.

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is about to conclude.

Jim Fairlie: I look forward to hearing members' contributions this afternoon. It is clear that growing bus patronage and reflecting local circumstances in decision making all contribute significantly to delivering improved bus services for all—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I must move on and call Sue Webber—we have no more time in hand.

Jim Fairlie: I move, as an amendment to motion S6M-19632, to leave out from “further agrees” to end and insert:

“recognises that competition is essential to keeping bus fares fair and reasonable; calls on the Scottish Government to enhance the reliability and punctuality of bus services through the greater interlinking of timetables and integrated ticketing across bus and rail providers; agrees that good road surfaces are essential to improve bus services; notes that communities across Scotland, but particularly in rural areas, struggle to access bus services, and urges the Scottish Government to take action to make buses safer and to expedite the process to remove bus passes from passengers who commit antisocial behaviour.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sue Webber to speak to and move amendment S6M-19632.2.

16:18

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I think that we can all agree on the importance of having better bus services across Scotland. Communities across Scotland deserve affordable, accessible and reliable bus services because, after all, they are a vital lifeline for so many. Not only can they help the economy to prosper, but they play a key role in Scotland's social development, linking people to work, education, healthcare and leisure, while offering a real alternative to car travel.

However, our transport network has been run into the ground under the SNP, with vital road upgrades being delayed, an ageing ferry fleet needing overdue vessels and passengers experiencing poorer services. Public transport has become unreliable and far too expensive. Taxpayer subsidies, ticket prices and complaints have all soared, while the number of services and passengers using public transport have plummeted.

We disagree with the Scottish Greens' idea that more buses should be run “in the public interest”. That vague statement means nothing. The public sector is not automatically the most effective

operator. Competition, accountability and efficiency deliver better services. Competition keeps fares fair and reasonable, and it drives operators to deliver punctual, clean and customer-focused services. First Bus, an award-winning bus company, has been keen to reiterate that, stating:

“We believe that voluntary, legally binding partnerships provide the best value to taxpayers and customers”.

Better buses also require proper infrastructure and joined-up thinking. Buses cannot run on time if our roads are in disrepair or road users face disruption, with lengthy diversions due to poorly co-ordinated road works and resulting traffic jams. The Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland is keen to see faster, greener and safer bus and coach journeys. Its top priorities are to address traffic congestion and to improve journey times for the 900,000 trips that are made by bus every day in Scotland. The average bus in Scotland travels at 11.3 miles per hour.

Jim Fairlie: Does the member recognise—and rejoice at—the fact that the cabinet secretary and I had a round-table meeting with the Scottish road works commissioner and bus operators and that they are very clear that we are getting towards a position where we will make bus accessibility and the timescales for buses work better—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I think that the member has enough to respond to.

Sue Webber: Could I get some of that time back, perhaps?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can get a very short time back.

Sue Webber: It is fantastic that Mr Fairlie has had the opportunity to meet with the road works commissioner. I have tried on several occasions, but I have so far been unable to gain that meeting.

Another real opportunity lies in better integration between different transport modes. Bus and rail timetables are poorly aligned, and ticketing systems do not work across different modes of transport or different operators. I want to focus on practical measures, such as smart ticketing, allowing passengers to travel seamlessly between bus, rail and even ferry services. Moving between different modes of transport on a trip is made far easier by single ticketing and fare caps across modes, and by synchronising timetables. The technology to facilitate those things already exists, and I am at a loss as to why they have not been prioritised and put at the top of the list of things to do—we do not have to reinvent the wheel.

I was really pleased to hear from the minister about the legislation that will be laid before the Parliament on 4 December. There is a growing problem of antisocial behaviour on buses, and drivers, passengers and young people themselves

deserve to feel safe. I very much look forward to that legislation, because there must be consequences for those who engage in persistent abusive behaviour towards bus drivers and passengers.

The Scottish Government receives more money per capita for public services than the rest of the United Kingdom, and it is high time that the SNP showed some common sense and used that money to give the public across Scotland the vital services that they deserve. The public deserve a transport network that delivers for road users and provides value for money and reliability for passengers.

I move, as an amendment to motion S6M-19632, to leave out from “further agrees” to end and insert:

“recognises that competition is essential to keeping bus fares fair and reasonable; calls on the Scottish Government to enhance the reliability and punctuality of bus services through the greater interlinking of timetables and integrated ticketing across bus and rail providers; agrees that good road surfaces are essential to improve bus services; notes that communities across Scotland, but particularly in rural areas, struggle to access bus services, and urges the Scottish Government to take action to make buses safer and to expedite the process to remove bus passes from passengers who commit antisocial behaviour.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Claire Baker to speak to and move amendment S6M-19632.1

16:22

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I think that we all agree that buses are the backbone of Scotland’s public transport system. For many people, whether they are getting to work, school or hospital appointments or visiting family and friends, buses are not just a convenience, but a necessity. However, too often, people are left behind by a system that simply is not working.

Across Scotland, communities have seen bus routes cut, services reduced and fares increased. In too many rural and semi-rural areas, buses have become unreliable or have disappeared altogether. Local bus services have collapsed under the SNP, since it came to power, with more than 1,400 routes gone and 1,700 buses lost from Scotland’s fleet. Too many people living on low incomes are priced off bus services, which limits their ability to access opportunities to work. The consequences are social isolation for individuals who rely on the services and decline for local economies. Poor services also prevent people from making the switch to public transport that is vital in meeting our climate targets. It is clear that our current system is not working in the public interest.

Local authorities should have the powers and the resources to take back control of local bus services where that is what communities need. We want a model that puts passengers first and runs buses for the public good. Progress on change is glacial. The franchising process is far too complex and slow. It creates barriers that prevent councils from stepping in when private companies withdraw or fail to deliver. We need to shorten and simplify the franchising process, so that local government can act quickly and effectively. It is about giving councils the tools that they need to deliver reliable, affordable and joined-up public transport networks.

We can look elsewhere in the UK for examples of how that can work. In greater Manchester, the move to publicly controlled buses under the Bee Network has already delivered lower fares, integrated ticketing and rising passenger satisfaction. There is no reason why communities in Fife, Stirling or Dundee should not be able to have the same benefits.

If we are serious about rebuilding our bus network, we must also think about where the buses come from. Scotland has the skills, the workforce and the industrial heritage to build clean, modern buses of the future, yet, too often, contracts that could have supported jobs here at home have gone overseas. The Scottish Government needs to prioritise domestic bus manufacturing—supporting good, skilled jobs that already exist and creating new ones in supply chains, apprenticeships and innovation. That is how we will ensure that the transition to net zero transport delivers benefits across the Scottish economy.

The free bus travel scheme for under-22s has helped a generation of young people to access opportunities and participate more fully in society. We should all celebrate that. However, we must also ensure that there is a reliable service for them to travel on, because, as other members have highlighted, free travel means little if the bus never comes.

It is now almost a year since the Parliament supported a Labour motion on addressing the abuse of bus drivers and its call for the ability to remove bus passes from individuals of any age—any age—who repeatedly carry out antisocial behaviour. I was pleased to hear from the minister that the Government intends to bring forward regulations on 4 December that would make some progress on that, which would be part of ensuring that buses are safe places for drivers and passengers. As part of that, it might also be helpful to have, at the same time, an update on work around the report that was prepared under Jenny Gilruth about women on public transport, which covered buses as well as trains.

Our amendment is about action, not just aspiration. It is about giving local government real power, backing Scottish industry and ensuring that bus services truly operate in the public interest. Scottish Labour has long argued for a people-centred approach to transport policy. We want public transport that connects communities, supports local economies and tackles climate change. Affordable, reliable, safe and accessible bus services are at the heart of that vision.

I move amendment S6M-19632.1, to leave out from “, and calls” to end and insert:

“; believes that bus travel is vital to everyone in Scotland participating in the economy and is concerned by the reduction in bus routes across Scotland of 44% between 2006-07 and 2023-24; calls on the Scottish Government to shorten and simplify the franchising process, enabling local authorities to bring bus services under local public control and for them to operate in the public interest; further calls on the Scottish Government to prioritise using domestic bus manufacturers to support good, skilled jobs in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to act swiftly to make it possible to remove bus passes from those who engage in persistent abusive behaviour towards bus drivers and passengers.”

16:26

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): I remember sitting at the back on a school bus trip and singing that famous school bus trip song—the one about the ejection of one’s grandmother from said vehicle, but the other one, about its wheels going round and round. The problem is that, 30 years later, for many communities in our country, the wheels are going nowhere.

Over the past two decades, we have lost 40 per cent of our registered bus routes. In 2023-24, Transport Scotland recorded 334 million passenger journeys. To be fair, that was a recovery from the pandemic lows, but it is still way below the 425 million journeys that were recorded just a decade earlier. This is a story of long-term decline and a hollowed-out bus network, which most people find patchy, expensive and unreliable.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Jamie Greene: I wish that I had the time, but I do not. I am sorry.

In my region, bus travel has fallen by a third—that is 70 million fewer journeys just in the West Scotland region. That probably explains why the M8 is a car park most of the time. All the while, fares rose by 16 per cent over that period.

The Scottish Government says that it wants to get people out of their cars and on to public transport. That is great, but in what way does removing a lifeline bus service encourage people out of their cars? The reality is that our rural and island communities have been let down the most by that travesty.

The Scottish Government has spent a lot of money on buses. It has subsidised concessionary fares and services by nearly £1.3 billion over the past three years alone. That is public investment for the public good, right? However, the fault of the current system is that it leaves all the power to private operators, which can pick and choose the routes that they want to run while demanding subsidies for the ones that make them no profit. The model is, simply, broken.

Back in 2019, I remember sitting on the lead committee for the Transport (Scotland) Bill, which gave councils powers to create and operate local bus services under a new franchising model. However, six years on, not a single franchise has been delivered under that model. That is because, clearly, the capital and other resources that are needed to deliver such a franchise just do not exist. I said all that, of course, when the bill passed. Councils were given all the power, but none of the resource.

As has already been pointed out, when it is got right, the system actually works. Greater Manchester has had 7 million more bus journeys and there are 24-hour routes—can members imagine a 24-hour bus service in some communities?—all because it restructured its franchising model and remodelled its ticketing system. I lodged an amendment to the 2019 bill on smart ticketing but, unsurprisingly, the Government rejected it.

Some six years later, I do not think that it is beyond the wit of ministers or Transport Scotland to come up with some real long-term solutions to the long-term problems of a declining number of bus routes, rising costs and falling passenger numbers.

If the Government is serious about the local authority franchising model, it needs back that up with resource and—I am afraid—money. Multiyear funding settlements to councils will let them make multiyear investment and spending decisions. Every £1 invested in our local bus services delivers up to £4.50 in wider economic and social benefits.

However, in return for public subsidy, I want to see operators meeting clear benchmarks for reliability, punctuality and, of course, accessibility. Travellers want us to get this right—buses that come on time, tickets that they can afford and routes that connect. The current model is unsustainable for the public purse and bad for commuters, and it sees a small, select few operators make the most of the profit.

I will support all the amendments today, because they all have something valid to say, but it is not about time that we all sat down around the

table and came up with some solutions? Surely the travelling public deserve that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. I advise members that there is no time in hand. Any interventions must be absorbed within the agreed speaking time.

16:31

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): When it comes to buses, the Scottish Greens deliver. By granting under-22s free bus travel, we have seen hundreds of thousands more young people using Scotland's networks. It has saved them money, allowed them to make the most of the opportunities in their local areas and beyond and reduced their climate impact.

However, there is still so much more to do to improve bus travel. Of vital importance is the provision of reliable and joined-up rural and island bus services, ensuring that no community is cut off from the network and that everyone can choose public transport.

I have seen superb work by communities to create their own bus services. The Finnerne Development Trust in Moray runs a service that takes people from rural areas to Forres. It not only meets local people's needs but provides a social aspect, connecting people as they meet one another on the bus.

Badenoch and Strathspey Community ConnXions, which is based in Aviemore, goes even further. I joined its service on a shopping day, when it brought people from all around the Strath to the local shops. Its users enthusiastically told me that they had been on a picnic outing to Loch Morlich the day before. Not only does its service take people to events but it organises its own opportunities for social interaction, with buses as the basis. Those examples demonstrate that, when buses are community run, they are more than just transport; they build community and place.

Although it is great to see communities coming together, it cannot and should not be left up to motivated volunteers to run critical public infrastructure. The Scottish Government has a responsibility to play its part in delivering buses for rural communities. In its new climate change plan, it lists free bus travel for under-22s and over-60s as a key method of cutting transport emissions, but it makes no commitment to go any further. That is not good enough. We need a Government commitment to provide reliable services, especially in rural areas. If buses do not turn up, people cannot get on.

Private operators have shown time and again that they cannot be trusted to deliver reliable rural

bus networks. Services are withdrawn at short notice, fares rise well above inflation every year and timetables are all but meaningless—I say that from personal experience. That makes it hard for people to leave their car at home and opt for the bus to commute to work or to an appointment. The only way that we can resolve that is by bringing buses back into public hands. As has been shown by Lothian Buses, doing so can drive revenue for local authorities and, at the same time, deliver better services for local people. Rural councils are starting to take that opportunity. Borders Council has seen a 70 per cent increase in the number of bus passengers since taking services in-house, which shows what Highland Council can expect now that it has taken 17 routes back into public ownership.

We also need to think about how we deliver better transport for islanders. It is great that under-22s can now travel for free on the interisland ferries in Orkney and Shetland, but those communities face what the Government acknowledges are significantly higher transport costs compared with those paid by folk living in urban areas.

In Shetland, the Scottish Greens propose a two-year pilot of free bus travel for all Shetlanders. Such a move would address the inequality that islanders face while providing a boost to their economy, and it would give us a robust pilot to understand the impact of free bus travel. That is the kind of thinking that we need from the Scottish Government. The Scottish Greens stand ready to work with it to build on what we have already achieved and to deliver even fairer and more sustainable travel for all.

16:35

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I will make a short contribution to the debate. I recognise the fundamental importance of buses as a mode of transport and as a social and economic lifeline for many people, including many in my constituency. I recognise that, as members have mentioned and as the Labour amendment refers to, there has been a decline in the number of bus services and bus routes over the past period. That is undeniably true, and I have seen it in my area. I have had cause to raise that issue with the relevant parties, and, if time allows, I will come back to that point.

In the context of the challenges that the bus sector faces, we must do all that we can. It is clear that the concessionary travel scheme has been important in supporting individuals, but its contribution has also been important in helping to sustain and support the bus sector.

I return to the benefit to individuals. For a long time, people over the age of 60, people with eligible conditions and people with a disability have seen the benefit from being able to access the scheme and from being able to remain mobile and active in social and economic terms. I readily agree that the expansion of eligibility to under-22s has been a significant success, with more than 250 million journeys taken, which speaks to its story of success. I declare—although I do not need to declare it as an interest—that, like Mark Ruskell, I have two young people at home who qualify for free bus travel under the terms of eligibility.

Looking at the issue through a local lens—a little wider than my household but still local—I note that the scheme has been enormously supportive to many young people in my constituency in the light of a decision by North Lanarkshire Council to end school transport entitlement for a great number of young people. I absolutely recognise, and it is important to say, that the concessionary scheme should not be used to supplement or replace any removal of bus travel. As an aside, I point out that the Scottish National Party group of councillors on North Lanarkshire Council identified funding to continue school buses, but Labour and Conservative councillors still voted the cuts through. Nonetheless, it is the case that young people travelling to and from school have been able to use their free bus travel entitlement to access school.

I take Mark Ruskell's point that young people are less likely to have disposable income; they could have just left school, they could be at the outset of their working lives on an apprenticeship or they could be continuing with their education. I spoke with a constituent who told me that her daughter used under-22 transport to get to and from university in Glasgow every day and noted how essential that is. We know that the scheme is an essential support for many young people. It is welcome that more than 80 per cent of eligible young people now access the scheme through a national entitlement card or a Young Scot national entitlement card. The Child Poverty Action Group says that it could save a child in Scotland up to £2,836 a year.

The scheme has a significant impact, and we should be doing everything that we can to nudge that 80 per cent take-up closer to 100 per cent. We should be open to further expansion of the scheme. Mark Ruskell makes a reasonable case on that, but we need to be cognisant of the circumstances that we find ourselves in. The amendment in the name of the minister makes it clear that the scheme already costs £200.5 million. We are about to head into a budget process, and we are hearing, although it is not yet confirmed, that some changes that the UK Government is

making to tax could lead to a £1 billion cut to our budget. That is the reality, so, although we need to accept that case, we must look at it realistically.

I will support the amendment in the name of the minister.

16:39

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. Public transport is one of the most important issues to my constituents, and bus services are the most common source of complaint or concern, especially in rural areas.

I imagine that this will be as much of a shock to the Scottish Greens as it was to me, but I actually find points of agreement with their motion on the issue. They are quite correct to say

“that communities across Scotland deserve affordable, accessible and reliable bus services”.

At that point, unfortunately, our views diverge. They return to their safe space of demanding more free stuff that is paid for out of rising Government spending funded by ever-higher taxes on Scots, whereas I believe that the solutions lie in supporting the market to operate more effectively and that, if Scotland is going to offer young people the privilege of unlimited free bus travel at the taxpayers' expense, there should be serious consequences for abusing that privilege. I await with interest the Scottish Government's introducing legislation to address that matter.

The motion is a classic example of how the Scottish Greens approach policy: they call for lots of nice-sounding stuff and leave the practicalities to somebody else. An example is free bus travel for under-22s, which the Greens are now saying should be expanded. In principle, there is a lot to like. Giving young people the opportunity to travel to and from education or work and to visit more distant friends and family without the cost of bus fare is not a bad idea. However, it comes with a cost, not only in the troubling increase in antisocial behaviour both on buses and in bus stations, but in the other improvements to services that are not made because funds have been directed to subsidise free bus travel. Every policy comes with a trade-off, and it seems that we are sacrificing funding support for the basics in order to support and expand giveaways such as free bus travel.

Far too often in recent years, I have dealt with reports of antisocial behaviour by young people that is deterring other bus users from travelling. In Kilmarnock, antisocial behaviour in the bus station by young people, many of whom travel from outside the town, has been such an issue that it has required on-going interventions by Police Scotland and East Ayrshire Council. Time and again, I hear from constituents who feel unsafe

using the bus station and avoid it after dark. That is not easy for anyone who commutes to and from work in the winter months.

Of course, antisocial behaviour is not the only issue with bus services. Although we often talk of public transport as though it is a single entity, a brief look at the bus and train timetables would tell us that that is not the case. That is not to mention the lack of joined-up infrastructure more generally. We know that the provision of good public transport infrastructure not only encourages people out of their cars but actually improves public health, as people choose to walk or cycle from the bus stop. Nevertheless, we continue to see an inconsistent approach to ensuring that key transport facilities and routes align with each other.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Brian Whittle: I am sorry—I do not have any time. I would love to extend the debate.

While the Scottish Greens continue to peddle ideological fantasies as the solution to the challenges that Scotland's bus services face, we, on the Scottish Conservative benches, prefer to deal with reality. Private sector providers are not the enemy of good bus services; they are an essential part of those services. Where they can run a bus service profitably, they should do so. Where they cannot, and where the Scottish Government believes that such a service is necessary, as it is in many rural areas in my region, the money should be found to support those services, recognising the economic and social benefits that good public transport links can bring.

Passengers across Scotland must have a reliable bus service that is clean, safe and punctual. Only then should we be talking about spending more public money on ever more expensive freebies.

16:43

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The bus remains by far the most commonly used form of public transport in Scotland, and most people who commute to work by public transport take the bus. However, with routes being cut and prices rising, which is hitting people during a cost of living crisis, action is urgently needed to prevent people from being priced out of travelling and communities from being cut off.

Buses are vital for those on low incomes and those who need to access employment and leisure as well as their everyday lives. Lower bus fares are an aspiration, and it is an aspiration that I share. A 2023 NUS Scotland report, "Fighting for Students: The Cost of Survival", found that more

than a fifth of students had missed a class due to travel costs. Of course, it is students from low-income families who are most affected.

Local bus services in Scotland have collapsed by 44 per cent since the SNP took over in 2007. More than 1,400 bus routes were lost between 2007 and 2024, and in one year alone—2023-24—we lost 190 bus routes. I think that members will all be familiar with cuts to local services in our communities.

I have supported—and still do support—public control and the regulation of the bus industry. I believe that it is imperative that we shorten and simplify the franchising process, to enable local authorities to bring bus services under public control. I have seen an unregulated private bus industry during my lifetime, and I do not think that it has served the people all that well.

In Glasgow, taking the bus remains more expensive than taking the subway, believe it or not, with a return ticket costing nearly £6. As Claire Baker said, there is a lot to be learned from other cities, such as Manchester and Edinburgh. Edinburgh has a popular bus service whose usage reflects residents' confidence in it, and it is certainly cheaper than Glasgow's.

For me, the debate is about customer affordability, reliability and equivalency to other public transport sectors, such as rail. If you go into a railway station, you can see the timetable and whether the train is late. I know that the bus industry aspires to have that, and the same information should be available if you are waiting for a bus. If we do not aspire to have that level of service, maybe we can understand why many people still will not use the bus.

Recently, in Glasgow, which I represent, an 18-year-old girl was waiting for the number 57 night bus, which was the second-last bus home, but it did not turn up. The app that she should have been able to look at did not show her where the bus was, and the next bus was also cancelled. When she questioned the bus company about it, it was clear that road works played a big part in the delay. The company accepted that that is not where it wants to be with the reliability of its service and that it does not want to have to cancel buses. However, I would be concerned for a young female constituent who could not afford to get a taxi home. In 2025, we really should not have to hear about that happening—women's safety is really important in this.

During my first term in the Parliament, in 2016, I worked on a member's bill on the subject, because I have always believed in concessionary fares and that we have to reduce them—and not just on buses. I believe that it is also important to make train fares affordable. Mark Ruskell referred to a

cliff edge, which also affects 16-year-olds, because, when people turn 16, they have to pay full fare on the trains. That is something that the Parliament could look at in a future session. It is about having affordability, reliability and concessionary fares.

I will conclude by commending the bus industry for the progress that it has made, particularly on the decarbonisation of vehicles. Concessionary schemes are very important, and we support them. We implemented them when we were in government. We must aspire to have better community bus services that take people to the places where they need to go.

16:47

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am delighted to contribute to the debate and I agree that communities across Scotland deserve affordable, accessible and reliable bus services.

I was surprised by the Government's amendment. I recognise the cost of delivering the concessionary travel card, from which I benefited hugely in the past when I was getting to work at the hospital. I was also able to get to town to meet friends or to volunteer in the middle of Inverness. The £200.5 million investment has tangible returns. It is helping young people to hold jobs and to travel to caring responsibilities, further and higher education, voluntary roles and the social opportunities that will support their health and wellbeing.

Since the introduction of the free bus travel scheme for under-22s, children and young people have made more than 250 million free bus journeys. That is at least 250 million opportunities that have been opened up; it is 250 million steps that have been taken to relieve financial pressure on families; and it is 250 million steps towards tackling the climate crisis by encouraging a new generation to choose sustainable travel early on in their lives. Perhaps the minister can clarify the wording in the Government's amendment when he sums up.

Claire Baker: Does the member agree that it would be helpful for some work to be done on what happens when young people turn 22 and whether their commitment to using public transport continues?

Emma Roddick: Absolutely. There is probably a case to be made for enabling lots of different groups to access cheaper or free bus or other transport services, and I hope that work is done to assess where the best value will come from for society and for individuals in any future expansion of the concessionary scheme.

A strong, accessible bus service is a powerful engine for driving forward all the key priorities of this Government, including eradicating child poverty, growing a fair economy, tackling the climate emergency and improving public services.

In the Highlands and Islands, I see that every day. In communities that are spread across a vast geography, from the islands to villages in Sutherland, buses are an absolute lifeline. In Inverness, I think of the huge reliance on services such as Stagecoach's number 3, which connects communities such as mine in Merkinch and the carse to the city centre, Raigmore, Inverness College and up to Culloden. When that service suffers cancellations through weather, breakdowns or staffing issues, I hear about it. Those cancellations impact on the ladies who are stuck in the rain on Kessock Road trying to get to Harry Gow's or Raigmore hospital, the group heading to Simpsons Garden Centre and the MSP trying to make her train.

For many of my constituents—students, workers and older people—that bus is the difference between full participation and isolation. However, when we rely on commercial operators to deliver those vital services, their continuity is always at the whim of those operators, who are concerned with profits, and our rural and less well-off communities, which are the most vulnerable, are first in line for cancellations and cuts.

I share concerns about people not being able to use their concessionary card if there is no bus. That is the situation that many young people I represent are in, and it is why I spent years campaigning for an expansion of the scheme to cover interisland ferries, which I am glad has now been brought in. The justification for services involves usage, which comes with constant improvement and expansion of services, and I am confident that the direction that we are going in is the right one.

The concessionary scheme is recognised across the UK as a benchmark. We are seeing reports from Westminster committees encouraging the UK Labour Government to copy the SNP's policy and implement it down south, where fares are rising faster than inflation and costs are said to be acting as a barrier to opportunity.

Although the Scottish Government is delivering on available bus powers, including by empowering local transport authorities to consider options such as franchising, through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which has since resulted in some excellent services being taken forward by Highland Council, we must acknowledge the constraints on our ambition. The hard reality is that there is a ceiling on what devolution can achieve. We cannot secure the full fiscal powers that are needed to ensure that all essential bus services,

from the busiest routes in Inverness to the crucial once-a-day lifeline service to Durness, are protected, publicly focused and permanently secured.

16:52

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Mark Ruskell for bringing forward the debate. As my colleague Claire Baker said in her opening speech, Scottish Labour believes that we need a public transport system that is affordable, reliable, accessible and safe for all. That is one of the reasons why the former Scottish Labour Government introduced free bus travel for over-60s in 2006 and why we called for and supported the roll-out of free bus travel for young people. That has been positive, and members have talked about the gains from that policy. However, we need to recognise that it has also presented challenges. Although the vast majority of children and young people are a credit to their community, a very small minority of them have used buses as gang huts and have displayed antisocial behaviour towards bus drivers and other passengers. That is unacceptable.

As Claire Baker said, it is more than a year since Parliament supported a Scottish Labour motion calling for the removal of bus passes from individuals of any age who repeatedly carry out antisocial behaviour, and I join her in welcoming what the minister said about his plans to ensure that buses are safe places for bus drivers and passengers.

Claire Baker and Pauline McNeill both mentioned the report on the safety of women and girls on public transport, and we particularly need an update on that, too.

We welcome the provision of free bus passes for more than 2 million people, but we acknowledge that there are 3 million working-age people in Scotland between the ages of 22 and 60 who do not qualify for free bus travel. Of course, nothing in life is free, and working-age people are paying for free buses that others enjoy, but, at the same time, they are, in some parts of Scotland, paying among the highest bus fares in the UK. For example, in my region of Renfrewshire, it can cost my constituents £3.10 to make a two-mile single journey.

I know that the Government is taking action on off-peak rail fares. We have talked about pilots, but I think that, rather than pilots, we need price regulation of bus services in Scotland.

Unfortunately, over the past 18 years, we have not had any meaningful regulation of the bus system in Scotland, let alone price regulation. Next to nothing has been done to stop private bus

companies dictating our bus services and putting profits before people.

Meanwhile, as we have heard, local people have seen their bus services cut and a staggering 1,400 bus routes have been lost between 2007 and 2024. Constituents in places such as Whitehaugh, Hunterhill, Glenburn and Gallowhill in Paisley are just a few of those who have been affected. As many others have said, it is no surprise that bus passenger numbers have plummeted by nearly a third since the SNP came to power. It is no wonder that my constituents regularly ask what the point is in a free bus pass if there is no bus to get on.

We need a concrete plan to ensure that enough buses exist for those who have an existing free bus pass—and for all bus passengers—and to bring local buses under local control. The Parliament passed bus franchising powers six years ago to allow that to happen but, to date, little has changed. I am pleased that the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is progressing plans for franchising in the greater Glasgow area after consultation showed overwhelming support from the travelling public, as has been mentioned previously. However, as has been said, it needs support from the Scottish Government to allow it to take that forward.

I am not sure how committed the Scottish Government and the minister are to bus franchising. I know that the minister said that it is for authorities to decide, but we would like to hear from the Scottish Government a commitment to support franchising and local buses being taken under local control. That is the leadership that we have had in Manchester under Andy Burnham, in Leeds under the mayor there and in Liverpool. If it is good enough for those areas, it is surely good enough for areas such as greater Glasgow and others.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Bibby, will you please conclude?

Neil Bibby: I will leave it there. We want to ensure that our public transport is safe, accessible and affordable for all.

16:56

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): If I may put a slight dose of realism into this debate, it is that everything that we discuss here is about priorities and choices. Recently, I sat on a panel that the Royal Society of Edinburgh organised in Dumfries, at which Ross Greer spoke. I am not sure whether this is a confirmed Green policy, but he said that he hoped that the Green Party could offer free bus travel to everyone in Scotland. Although that might sound a very noble outcome, it would come at a huge cost.

The point that I make to the minister as the Government considers expanding concessionary travel is that, in certain areas of Scotland—particularly in Dumfriesshire over the summer—the bus network has almost entirely collapsed.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member compare the cost of providing a policy of free bus travel with, for example, the extraordinary cost of the Government's road building programme, which the Conservatives constantly tell us the Government is not spending enough money on and is not working on fast enough?

Craig Hoy: The fact that Patrick Harvie does not realise that buses run on roads shows the depth of the failure to engage in joined-up thinking.

When we look at the state of the roads in Dumfriesshire, we see a bus service and a road network that have been denuded of investment under the SNP Government. When we discuss the matter, Patrick Harvie and Ross Greer say, for example, that all of that could be funded by a wealth tax. However, if the Greens were ever to get closer to power in Scotland, I suspect that the last few millionaires in Scotland would be on a bus over the border. [*Interruption.*]

I welcome what the Government has announced today in respect of under-22s bus travel and antisocial behaviour. However, I put a practical point to it—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, please do not speak from sedentary positions. Mr Hoy, please continue.

Craig Hoy: Will the Government give some thought to how it would work in practice if the scheme was adapted to allow the bus pass to be removed? I have spoken to bus unions that have asked whether the Government is saying that, if 13 or 14 kids are about to board a bus and one does not have a bus pass, it is prepared to single out that child, given the ramifications of the increased antisocial behaviour that that might result in. Ministers will have to think the issue through, as it might well be that slightly more draconian measures will have to be put in place to address it.

In the debate, we got to the heart of some of the issues. However, my real concern, which I will close on, is the issue of rural bus services. Any expansion in concessionary travel might result in scarce resources going into central belt areas, where we now have the concept of 15-minute neighbourhoods and people want four buses an hour. People in some parts of the south of Scotland, which I represent, simply want to have a bus service each day, and it would be impossible for them to live in a 15-minute neighbourhood.

I also ask the minister to focus on the supported services in rural areas that are being cut because councils can no longer afford them. Those are lifeline services that are being cut. We have previously debated the issue of bank closures. Before the last bank in a town can close, there has to be an assessment of access to cash. We need something similar in relation to the bus system, because we cannot have communities in parts of Scotland that have no access to bus travel whatsoever. It is fundamentally unfair if people pay their taxes and get a bus pass but there is no bus for them to use. Ministers must think about that before they expand the concessionary travel programme.

17:00

Jim Fairlie: I thank all the members who contributed to the debate. It has been a good debate and the speeches have, by and large, been positive.

We have talked about the importance of buses and the challenges that we are facing. I also want to point out how we are tackling some of those challenges. I will not name everybody, but various members talked about the things that need to be put in place. The bus infrastructure fund is helping to tackle the challenge of having reliable timetables. I have seen fantastic work in Glasgow with the artificial intelligence technology that is being used there. The network support grant and the plugged-in communities fund are helping rural communities to create community bus systems.

Some of the negativity in the debate came from Sue Webber constantly running Scotland down. The Tories must come from a really miserable place when everything that we talk about—not just on buses, but across everything that happens in Scotland—is talked about in a negative way. That is disappointing, but I understand why they do it.

As I said, a lot of work is on-going. We have held meetings with the Scottish road works commissioner to try to make sure that bus transport gets moving.

Sue Webber: I am never in a position in which I totally run Scotland down. I was just making the case that there is massive inequality in bus service provision across our country. I am fortunate to live in Edinburgh, and other cities are also well provided for, but we have heard from colleagues about Dumfries and all the rural areas that have nothing. That is the point that I was trying to get across.

Jim Fairlie: I take the member's point, but it was the Tories who dismantled the bus service in the first place.

Jamie Greene, on the other hand, talked about things that are going on. We are giving RTPs powers to make sure that local authorities have the ability to bring in the local services that they want. I was happy to hear that Mr Greene wants to talk about the solutions. There are challenges, and I welcome engagement with people who want to bring solutions to the table to allow us to get what the Parliament wants, which is a good-quality, reliable public service.

Ariane Burgess and Mr Hoy talked about rural communities not having enough bus services. That is why we have the community bus fund, the plugged-in communities fund and demand-responsive transport. Those are all things that help to give people the ability to get a bus. However, there is more to do, and I accept that we still need to work things out.

Between 2022-23 and 2023-24, there was a 13 per cent increase in the number of bus journeys that were made, which is a positive thing. The figure is not as good as it was prior to Covid, and we do not yet quite know how we will get it back up, but we will continue to work on those things.

Unfortunately, I could not hear the question that Emma Roddick put to me. We are assessing what has happened since 2022. We are working out what happens once people drop out of the age group and how many of them continue to use the bus. There is an opportunity for bus companies to say, "If those people are dropping out, how do we hold on to them and keep them in the system?" Emma Roddick also talked about the great work that Highland Council is doing, and that fantastic work is to be commended.

Jamie Hepburn talked about things that are happening in North Lanarkshire and said that the council is cutting services. I make the point that councillors must be cognisant of what the local community is telling them. If people are saying that walking routes are unsafe, councillors really need to listen to that. I am glad that Jamie Hepburn brought up that point.

As we have heard, the under-22s free bus travel scheme is transformational for the young people of Scotland. I acknowledge the Scottish Green Party's ask for the expansion to be considered as part of the upcoming Opposition party negotiations in 2026 and 2027, but we must be mindful of what our budget is. Jamie Hepburn mentioned a potentially massive cut to Scotland's budget later this year.

On the topic of public ownership of bus services, we have delivered all the powers for our local transport authorities and regional transport partnerships to take forward whatever they decide to run in their communities, and that is how we will proceed.

This has been a good debate, and it has given us the opportunity to talk as a Parliament. If we can work together to ensure that we bring in the systems that will allow us to improve our public services, that will be a good thing.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Patrick Harvie will wind up the debate.

17:05

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank all members who have contributed to the debate. It is clear that, across the chamber, there is a strong recognition of the value and importance of bus services to all the communities that we represent, whether that is in tackling child poverty and the cost of living or whether that is in enabling access to services, work, college and each other. I think that one member referred to buses enabling people to access a loch to have a picnic there. Bus travel was described during the debate as the "backbone" of public transport, and I think that that is right.

I will mention Jamie Greene's speech because he was one of a number of members who talked about the reduction in bus services, especially in the more rural parts of his region. He did not simply blame the Government for that; he recognised that the model is broken. He saw that the blame often lies with the private operators and that councils have been given the power to act but not the resource to do so. In too many parts of Scotland, we see private companies quite happily running the profitable bits of the network—some people think that that is a good thing—while abandoning other parts of the network or other communities and leaving the public sector to step in.

A number of members gave examples of where communities have stepped in. Davy Russell is in the chamber, so I will mention Climate Action Strathaven, which runs the 3C bus in his constituency. That is how I travelled when we were all heading out there for the by-election campaign. Local communities should not have to step in to fill the gaps in a failed private sector model.

A number of members talked about the impact of antisocial behaviour. I believe—we all do—that every bus passenger should feel safe and be safe when using the bus. Every bus driver and worker in the bus services should feel safe at work and be safe at work. We recognise that that is an issue, but I also say that it is not entirely tied to the under-22s free bus pass. I regret that some people seem to want to tie together those issues a little too closely.

I have seen antisocial behaviour on the wider public transport network, including on trains, and

not just on buses. On buses, I have seen it from people who are significantly older than those young people who are sometimes stigmatised. I know from colleagues that such behaviour happens in parts of England and Wales that do not have something equivalent to the under-22s free bus pass.

We will look at what the Government comes forward with and take a view on it when we see it, if the Government wants to make changes. However, it is clear—at least to me—that simply removing the free bus pass would not tackle antisocial behaviour. If somebody's behaviour is the problem, simply saying that they should pay for their own ticket is not a solution, while simply saying that they should not be on the bus means that the behaviour will take place somewhere else. I would like us to think principally about the behaviour, rather than the bus pass.

The under-22s free bus pass has been an overwhelming success. Although one or two members seem to be in denial about that and to think of it as some uncosted fantasy economics, I gently remind everyone that we have actually done it. It is happening, it is working and it has been a huge success, with more than 250 million journeys taken.

I have spoken to constituents of mine who had the option to take a job or a college course that they simply could not have afforded to do if they had had to pay the full cost of their bus travel. Publicly funded journeys—whether for younger people, older people or anyone else—help to make services more viable. They help to protect and preserve services that the private sector would otherwise seek to undermine. However, that also makes the case for moving away from what is a failed free-market model.

The Conservative amendment talks about competition. We have had decades of competition in delivering bus services, and it has failed. We have seen ever-rising prices, services have been scrapped or are unreliable and many communities have been left without a service altogether. The Government often gets the blame when communities are poorly served in that way but, in fact, it proves that the free-market model is a failure.

We need to move on, certainly to franchising—and, yes, the argument for shortening and simplifying that process is clear. As well as giving local authorities the ability to do that, we need to fund the process. We need to ensure that they are resourced and have access to the funding and skills that will enable them to use those powers. From that case for franchising, we then need to move on and talk about public ownership. That will need resource, too, but it will be the most effective

way to ensure that we end up with a public transport service that works for the public interest.

I commend Claire Baker for her bravery in using the phrase “take back control” because I wish, for goodness' sake, that the phrase had been coined as a slogan not by those who were seeking to blame the European Union for all the ills of the country but by those who were looking to blame the private sector, the super-rich and the billionaires. The bus system in this country has allowed the super-rich to line their pockets by running rubbish services that are fleecing people through tickets and not providing the service that is needed to a great many communities.

Greens are proud of the progress that we have made, particularly on travel for under-22s. We are determined to build on that progress and to see a public transport system in Scotland that is run for public benefit and that meets the interests of the communities that we serve.

Business Motion

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-19649, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button now. I ask Graeme Dey to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 18 November 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Supporting Scotland's Fishing Industry

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 19 November 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 November 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Climate Action and Energy, and Transport

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill

followed by Ministerial Statement: Publication of UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 2ABC Report

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 25 November 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 26 November 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 November 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

followed by Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 17 November 2025, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[Graeme Dey]

17:12

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Two statements are urgently needed: one on Alexander Dennis Ltd and another on the future of Grangemouth and project willow. Both are of national significance. They are not parochial concerns but defining tests of whether the Government can deliver a credible industrial strategy for Scotland. I have made prior requests to my business manager, and directly to the minister and the Deputy First Minister, for ministerial statements on those issues. I am doing so again today in the chamber, because I feel that I owe it to my constituents and because time is not on our side.

On Alexander Dennis, it has been almost two months since the Government's £4 million intervention was announced. At the time, that was described as

"a bridge to a sustainable future",

but what is that future, and for how long can that bridge stand without solid progress beneath it? There has been no public update on how the intervention is working, what milestones have been set or how the company's long-term future is being secured.

We need answers on what discussions ministers have had with their United Kingdom counterparts on procurement reform to ensure fair competition for British-built buses. We also need clarity on what has changed in Scotland's procurement systems to ensure that local jobs, local suppliers and environmental benefits are properly valued. Without that, this so-called bridge is little more than a pause before decline. Scotland cannot afford to lose its last major bus manufacturer or the highly skilled workforce at Falkirk and Larbert, whose livelihoods still hang in the balance.

At Grangemouth, the situation is equally pressing. The Grangemouth industrial cluster strategy has been published, building on project willow, the just transition plan and the growth deal, but words on a page will not sustain new jobs or new investment. We need delivery, and the Parliament deserves a detailed update on investor engagement; discussions with the current owners of the former refinery site, Petroineos, on how it will be used in the future; and how public funding, including the £25 million in the just transition fund for Grangemouth and the UK Government's promised £200 million from the National Wealth Fund are being allocated and used, if they are at all.

The people of Grangemouth deserve transparency and assurance that real opportunities are being created, or are in the process of being created, for workers through

retraining, re-employment and industrial renewal. Alexander Dennis and Grangemouth are tests of this Government's seriousness about sustaining our industrial base. They are about whether we still make things here and still value skilled work and community prosperity, which is why I again use this time to urge the Government to deliver full ministerial statements and updates on both issues as soon as is practically possible. The Parliament, and the people whom we serve, deserve clear answers and visible progress, because, as ever, time is running out.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): There is a process in place in this institution to request statements, which is via the business managers of the relevant parties. I will check later tonight, but I am not aware of any current request on those topics having been received from the Conservative Party through the formal processes. That is the proper process—not raising the matter in the chamber in this way.

This Government has shown itself to be willing—this was particularly the case with Jamie Hepburn, my predecessor—to consider and often accede to appropriate statement requests. If Mr Kerr or any other member wishes to request statements on any topic, there are proper processes to be followed, as I said. If requests come via those channels, the Government will, of course, give them appropriate consideration.

Stephen Kerr: I am aware of the processes and have followed them, both by going through the party business management route and by directly soliciting a statement from the relevant minister and from the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans. We like to think that the Parliament is run by the parties, but I hope that the minister agrees that individual members of the Parliament still have a very important role in seeking the opportunity to have issues that matter to their constituents raised by way of a statement or any other appropriate method or approach.

Graeme Dey: If Mr Kerr wants to circumvent the process, or the position of his business manager, that is a matter for him. However, the proper way to take the matter forward is for the Conservative Party's member on the bureau to raise it with the Government, and it will then be discussed and considered at the bureau.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have just sent those emails across to you now, minister, but you will obviously have had the previous—*[Interruption.]*

Wait—hang on!

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Eagle. Please speak through the chair, Mr Eagle.

Tim Eagle: Just to back up what Mr Kerr has said, he has sent letters to the minister on several occasions about the matters that he raised, and the minister will not be unaware of them. We have sent letters, as we always do, but I absolutely concur with the member. Surely, on matters as significant as this, which have a massive economic impact and involve huge infrastructure for our people—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Eagle.

Tim Eagle: —the member has the right to bring them to the Parliament in any way that he chooses. As my party's business manager, I have sent those letters across tonight.

Graeme Dey: I welcome that clarity on my point, which was that we had not previously received such requests. As I said a moment ago, we will give due consideration to any requests that are made to the Scottish Government on those matters.

Stephen Kerr: Oh, come on.

On a point of order, Presiding Officer—[*Interruption.*]

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Go away!

Stephen Kerr: Presiding Officer, Scottish National Party members are shouting, "Go away!" That is exactly what the SNP would like: they want every Opposition MSP to just go away and let them have their playtime to themselves—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: I was elected here—as we all were—to represent constituents' interests. I ask whether it is in order for individual members of the Parliament, regardless of their party, to seek statements from ministers on matters that pertain to the welfare and interests of their constituents. Is it the case that I, as an individual member of the Parliament, have the right to do so?

The Presiding Officer: Under standing orders, it is the case that this particular item of business can be used for members to call for items of business that they wish to see in a future programme of the Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Day, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-19650 to S6M-19657, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, motion S6M-19658, on the designation of a lead committee, and motion S6M-19659, on a committee substitute.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Absent Voting at Scottish Parliament and Local Government Elections (Signature Refresh) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Regulation of Care (Child Contact Services) (Equality) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Regulation of Care (Child Contact Services) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Specification of Public Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber Police Appeals and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber (Police Appeals) (Procedure) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions and Members of the Police Appeals Tribunal) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Finance and Public Administration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that Gordon MacDonald be appointed as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

Decision Time

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Richard Lochhead is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Douglas Lumsden and Sarah Boyack will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-19637.4, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19637, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on Rosebank, 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.

17:20

Meeting suspended.

17:23

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S6M-19637.4, in the name of Richard Lochhead. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect to the voting system. I would have abstained, apparently.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Leonard. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether my vote was recorded. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote was recorded, Mr Balfour.

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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19637.4, in the name of Richard Lochhead, is: For 62, Against 36, Abstentions 19.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Therefore, the amendments in the name of Douglas Lumsden and Sarah Boyack have fallen.

The next question is, that motion S6M-19637, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on Rosebank, as amended, 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)
 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)

(SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
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)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Maggie Chapman]
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)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19637, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on Rosebank, as amended, is: For 80, Against 36, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Scottish Parliament affirms the importance of a just transition, which supports workers in the oil and gas industry, as the useful life of developments comes to an end, and believes that new developments must only proceed if they contribute to energy security, meet a rigorous climate compatibility assessment and are compatible with Scotland's journey to net zero.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Jim Fairlie is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker will fall. The next question is, that amendment S6M-19632.3, in the name of Jim Fairlie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19632, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on better bus services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Rennie. I will ensure that that is recorded.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McArthur. I will ensure that that is recorded.

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)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
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) (Ind)
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)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
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)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Maggie Chapman]
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]

Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19632.3, in the name of Jim Fairlie, is: For 65, Against 34, Abstentions 19.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Sue Webber is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker will fall—actually, that amendment has already fallen.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-19632.2, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19632, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on better bus services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

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)
 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Maggie

Chapman]
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19632.2, in the name of Sue Webber, is: For 35, Against 83, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-19632, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on better bus services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division, and members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. We will ensure that that is recorded.

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)
 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Maggie Chapman]
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 35, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that communities across Scotland deserve affordable, accessible and reliable bus services; further agrees that more bus services across Scotland should be run in the public interest to improve services and reduce fares for all passengers; celebrates that 250 million bus journeys have been taken by young people in Scotland since the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s, and agrees that, should there be any expansion of free bus travel to more young people in the future, it must be affordable, sustainable and ensure accessibility, bearing in mind that the current cost of the free bus pass to under-22s is £200.5 million per year.

The Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions.

No member objects, so the final question is, that motions S6M-19650 to S6M-19657, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; S6M-19658, on designation of a lead committee; and S6M-19659, on substitution on committees, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Absent Voting at Scottish Parliament and Local Government Elections (Signature Refresh) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Regulation of Care (Child Contact Services) (Equality) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Regulation of Care (Child Contact Services) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Specification of Public Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber Police Appeals and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber (Police Appeals) (Procedure) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions and Members of the Police Appeals Tribunal) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Finance and Public Administration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that Gordon MacDonald be appointed as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Centre for Sustainable Brewing and Distilling (Heriot-Watt University)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-18527, in the name of Gordon MacDonald, on the vision for a new centre for sustainable brewing and distilling at Heriot-Watt University. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the commitment from Heriot-Watt University, in Edinburgh, on the economic importance of brewing and distilling in Scotland by seeking to raise £35 million to build a new Centre for Sustainable Brewing and Distilling (CSBD); understands the centre will be a new state-of-the-art version of the current International Centre for Brewing and Distilling (ICBD), which it understands is a world leading educational establishment delivering undergraduate and graduate courses; notes that the CSBD will embrace the latest green technologies and sustainable practices, ensuring that the university continues to lead the world in securing a future for both industries; recognises what it sees as the legacy and impact of Heriot-Watt University on the industries of brewing and distilling for more than 120 years, establishing both industries as key economic drivers, and commends what it considers to be the first-class teaching, innovation and sustainable methods of working at the ICBD, which has contributed to the success of brewing and distilling not only in Scotland but across the continents of Europe, the Americas and Asia.

17:34

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I thank members across the chamber for supporting my motion in order that this important debate, which highlights the need for a £35 million centre for sustainable brewing and distilling to be built at Heriot-Watt University, could take place. I welcome to the public gallery senior members of the Heriot-Watt University team behind the project.

Scotland's brewing and distilling sectors are huge economic drivers. Scotch whisky exports were worth £5.4 billion in 2024—the equivalent of 44 bottles a second, or 1.4 billion bottles a year, being exported from Scotland to more than 160 markets around the world. Our distilling sector supports about 41,000 jobs, which is 90 per cent of all distilling jobs in Britain. Beer sales in Scotland total about £428 million, which supports the brewing sector to employ 8,000 people in Scotland in more than 120 breweries, ranging from large industrial breweries to independent craft brewers.

There is a clear and well-documented need for a new centre that is dedicated to sustainable brewing and distilling in Edinburgh, driven by increasing industry demand for environmental

innovation, reduced carbon emissions, a transition to clean energy and the implementation of circular economy practices, plus evolving green regulations and the legacy of Heriot-Watt University's leadership in the sector.

Given the importance of the brewing and distilling sectors to Scotland's economy, it is only right that we have a state-of-the-art facility that is fit for the 21st century and will support the sectors to continue to grow and expand. Since 1903, Heriot-Watt University has trained generations of brewers and distillers, which has contributed to the success of brewing and distilling not only in Scotland but across the continents of Europe, the Americas and Asia.

In 1989, the university established the world-leading international centre for brewing and distilling, which was founded by Sir Geoff Palmer, the university's late chancellor, who sadly passed away earlier this year. The inspirational leadership continues to this day, with Professor Dawn Maskell, the director of the centre, winning the award for mentor of the year last month at the inaugural women in beer awards.

It is no great surprise, therefore, that many of today's best-known Scotch whisky master distillers and brewers—including BrewDog co-founder Martin Dickie; Kirsty Black, master distiller at Arbikie Highland estate; and David Wilkinson, head distiller at Edinburgh Gin—studied at that existing facility.

The proposed new resource is a 21st-century upgrade of the existing centre. It is a fitting legacy for Sir Geoff, as it is envisaged that it will include a living laboratory for circular low-carbon production, a pilot-scale test bed for greener processes and a sensory analytics hub with flavour mapping supported by artificial intelligence to halve concept-to-launch timelines. The new centre will embrace the latest green technologies and sustainable practices, thereby ensuring that the university continues to lead the world in securing a future for both industries.

In my time as the MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands, I have seen the power of training and education in transforming lives. The centre will provide students, apprentices and professionals with the training that they need and will bridge the gap between the classroom and innovative industry. There will be new scholarships in honour of the late Sir Geoff Palmer to widen participation and diversify talent, new online master of science programmes, the growth of graduate apprenticeship partnerships and pathways, and executive education and continuing professional development, all aligned to industry demand.

It will come as no surprise to members that I support Heriot-Watt University's proposal to

establish the new centre here in Edinburgh. It is more than just bricks and mortar; it is an investment in skills, innovation and community, and in Scotland's global reputation.

We all know about the heritage of brewing and distilling in Scotland: the whisky, the craft beers, the centuries of craftsmanship and the export successes. We also know that, in an increasingly competitive global market, heritage alone is not enough—we must combine that heritage with high-end research, innovation in processes, sustainability and training for the next generation of experts. Heriot-Watt University's proposed centre offers precisely that: a place where tradition meets innovation, where our distillers and brewers can pioneer new techniques, where our students are equipped with world-leading expertise and where Scotland continues to show global leadership in the sector.

The vision for a new centre comes at a time when the brewing and distilling sectors are committed to decarbonising operations by 2040; the industry is facing extended producer responsibility fees for packaging; and market access is improving, especially in India, where the lowering of tariffs has strengthened the export case for higher-value, low-carbon products. The industry recognises those challenges and opportunities, which is why Diageo and Carlsberg Britvic both back the university's vision to deliver groundbreaking, sustainable processes and a highly skilled workforce.

The project will have huge benefits for Edinburgh and the rest of Scotland, first of all in jobs. The new centre will support roles not only in academia but in industry partnerships, supply chains and production, and young Scots will have the opportunity to build careers here, so we will keep talent local. The second benefit relates to research and innovation. By placing state-of-the-art labs, pilot plants and testing facilities in Edinburgh, we will create a hub where companies and researchers can collaborate. Through that, we can enhance productivity, reduce costs, improve sustainability and strengthen Scotland's competitive edge. To achieve that, we need everyone, from the drinks industry to policy makers, whether at local, Scottish or United Kingdom levels, to get behind the fundraising effort by Heriot-Watt University to realise the vision.

In Scotland we have many strengths—our heritage, our craftsmanship, our natural resources and our global brand—but, if we have strength without renewal, we risk being overtaken. Heriot-Watt University proposes renewal rooted in tradition, reaching for innovation and opening doors for our young people, for industry and for our communities. Let us seize the opportunity and

build a centre of excellence in brewing and distilling in Edinburgh that is fit for the 21st century—one that honours our past, equips our present and secures our future.

17:42

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I acknowledge Gordon MacDonald for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I very much agree with everything that he said.

The subject is very close to my heart. As many members will know, two of the things that I like most in life are beer and pubs, normally taken together. In order to have those things, we need good home-grown brewing capabilities in Scotland that are also recognised internationally.

As a newly elected MSP, I was delighted to be asked to convene the cross-party group on beer and pubs in the Scottish Parliament. Since becoming convener of the group, I have worked with colleagues on the CPG to raise awareness of the importance of beer and pubs to brand Scotland and to highlight some of the opportunities and threats that the industry faces. It is therefore good, on this occasion, to be discussing what is a good-news story for the Scottish brewing industry.

Only last night, the CPG on beer and pubs met for our annual quiz night. It was a lively event at the Bellfield Brewery taproom, just a stone's throw from the Parliament. Close to 100 people—MSPs, staffers and industry figures, including brewers—gathered for some friendly competition, while those who wanted to could enjoy a pint or two of Bellfield Brewery's delicious IPAs, hoppy ales and crisp lagers.

The team at Bellfield, like many brewers in Scotland, are dedicated to brewing great-tasting beers. They are independent, passionate, committed and proud of the beers that they brew, and they are fostering entrepreneurship from the grain to the glass.

There are some significant issues on the horizon, but what we are talking about today could be yet another game changer in the Scottish industry. The characteristics that Bellfield shows are, I think, those that are embodied by the world-renowned international centre for brewing and distilling at Heriot-Watt University. The centre has nurtured undergraduate and graduate courses that have breathed new life into brewing and distilling, which is hugely important not just to the Scottish and UK economies but for our global reputation and trading relationships. At the last count, in the South Scotland region, which I represent, there were 16 breweries and 703 pubs, which have created 7,530 jobs and contributed £117 million in gross value added to the economy.

However, these are difficult times for the industry. I am hopeful that a new state-of-the-art centre for sustainable brewing and distilling will ensure a resilient and profitable future for both industries that will feed into breweries, distilleries and pubs here and elsewhere.

I am afraid to say that the brewing industry faces a significant skills gap, and I am pleased that the centre, if it secures the funding, will play a vital role in training the next generation of industry professionals, who will be recognised, as Mr MacDonald said, not just here in Scotland but around the world.

With the support of brewing giants such as Carlsberg and Diageo, I hope that Heriot-Watt University's aim to raise the necessary £35 million will be successful and that the new centre will be able to tackle the fresh set of challenges that the industry faces. That will also assist it in playing its part in tackling the climate crisis while remaining a driver of employment and growth.

Brewers and pubs are key strategic assets for the Scottish economy and society, but the sectors face mounting pressures from rising costs to increased regulation and the tax burden, which could get worse at the next budget. Therefore, we need to provide targeted support.

The proposed centre would be transformational for the brewing industry, but it alone will not be enough to turn around the fortunes of the brewing and pub sectors. Therefore, I ask the minister to consider the requests of the industry and stakeholders, including the Scottish Beer and Pub Association, which, in its manifesto, asked the Government to adopt several recommendations, including a request for it to recognise and act on the findings of the "What does 'Brand Scotland' mean for the Scottish Beer and Pub sector?" report, which was published last year by the cross-party group on beer and pubs.

Evidence-based interventions that are aligned with Government priorities will be a game changer and could help to save jobs in an industry that still faces headwinds. I very much welcome the work that the centre can do in ensuring that beer and pubs remain an important part of our economy and a much-loved part of Scotland's reputation, not just here but abroad.

I close by thanking Mr MacDonald for securing the debate and by lending my voice in support of the centre.

17:47

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am delighted to contribute to this member's business debate, which was secured by my colleague and best bud Gordon MacDonald, on the vision for a new centre

for sustainable brewing and distilling at Heriot-Watt University. Mr MacDonald has been well known for supporting the industry quite vigorously himself over the years and in the time that I have known him.

Scotland's brewing and distilling heritage is internationally renowned, from the whisky distilleries of Speyside to the craft breweries that are emerging across our nation. Those industries are not just part of our cultural identity; they are vital contributors to our economy, supporting thousands of jobs and generating billions in export revenue.

The establishment of a dedicated centre for sustainable brewing and distilling at Heriot-Watt University represents an exciting opportunity to cement Scotland's position as a world leader in the sector. The centre will combine academic excellence with practical industry application, ensuring that our brewing and distilling sectors remain at the cutting edge of innovation and sustainability.

Sustainability is no longer optional—it is essential. The brewing and distilling industries face significant challenges to reduce their environmental impact, from water usage and energy consumption to waste management and carbon emissions. The new centre will provide the research, innovation and training that are needed to address those challenges head on.

What makes the initiative particularly exciting is its potential to support businesses of all sizes, from multinational corporations to small craft producers.

As you know, Presiding Officer, all roads lead to Paisley. In my constituency, we are incredibly proud of the Two Towns Down brewery, which is the first brewery in the town of Paisley for 125 years and was founded in 2019 by Heriot-Watt graduate Sandy McKelvie. Two Towns Down is a perfect example of how a world-class education in brewing and distilling can translate into a thriving local business. Sandy honed his skills at the university before launching his brewery, which now operates a successful taproom and hosts community events, including brewery tours, beer festivals and popular monthly quiz nights.

The new centre for sustainable brewing and distilling will also play a crucial role in skills development. Scotland needs a highly skilled workforce to maintain our competitive advantage in those sectors. By providing world-class education and training in sustainable brewing and distilling practice, the university will help to ensure that we have the talent pipeline that is necessary to drive innovation and growth for decades to come, producing more success stories such as Sandy McKelvie and Two Towns Down in Paisley.

This initiative is about more than just environmental responsibility, although that alone would be reason enough to support it. It is about securing Scotland's economic future in sectors where we already excel. It is about creating high-quality jobs and supporting our communities, where many distilleries and breweries are located. It is, of course, about Paisley and the fact that we have our first brewery in 125 years—a family business that works in our community and is an important part of the community. It is about ensuring that Scottish products remain the benchmark for quality and sustainability in global markets.

I commend Gordon MacDonald for bringing this important matter to the Parliament's attention, and I look forward to seeing the centre for sustainable brewing and distilling at Heriot-Watt University flourish and continue to make a lasting contribution to Scotland's economic and environmental future.

17:50

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Gordon MacDonald for securing the debate, because it is a great opportunity to talk about the fantastic work that is being done at Heriot-Watt.

Heriot-Watt University is a leading institution in our city. Its work resonates around the world and, thanks to the creation of international campuses in the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia, this Edinburgh institution continues to create a global impact.

Heriot-Watt holds a special place in my heart, as it was there that I taught town planning as a lecturer and saw at first hand the amazing impact that the institution has on students and our community alike. The new centre for sustainable brewing and distilling will cement Heriot-Watt's reputation at the forefront of one of Scotland's most critical industries, because—as colleagues have said—brewing and distilling is one of Scotland's iconic and oldest industries. For many abroad, Scotch defines Scotland, and we need to cherish and cultivate the industry.

Heriot-Watt has been at the forefront of training generations of brewers for decades. The master distillers at Ardbikie Highland estate and at our capital's very own Edinburgh Gin studied their craft at Heriot-Watt. Now, once again, Heriot-Watt is defining the future of that field, taking an industry that has defined our history and equipping it with the tools for the future.

As a passionate advocate for tackling climate change, I am truly inspired to see one of our universities invest so heavily in the technology that will deliver net zero change. The centre will equip

the Scotch industry with the tools that it requires to fully decarbonise its productions. In helping firms to trial low-carbon heat, CO₂ capture and water saving, it will provide a valuable resource for breweries, now and in the future.

As other members have said, the proposal builds on the fantastic research that Heriot-Watt has already carried out. The unique vertical Port of Leith Distillery is testament to the research and development that has been carried out in collaboration with Heriot-Watt.

Indeed, Heriot-Watt's international centre for brewing and distilling was established by one of its most prominent professors and former chancellors, Sir Geoff Palmer, who—as Gordon MacDonald said earlier—sadly passed away this year. I think that it is appropriate to pay tribute tonight to his fantastic contribution to the sector, because he was a man who achieved so much in his career. He was born in Jamaica and became the first black professor in Scotland.

Sir Geoff's research in the area of barley continues to influence the industry today. I was inspired to hear about the scholarship that has been set up in his memory to support students of Jamaican descent. There are so many brewers and distillers who owe their training to the facilities that Geoff set up. By building a centre for sustainable brewing and distilling, Heriot-Watt University will unlock a whole new generation of research and ensure that one of Scotland's biggest cultural and economic exports becomes a world leader in sustainability.

I am proud that, once again, our higher education sector is proving why it is so renowned, promoting a key Scottish industry while ensuring that we are at the forefront in the fight against the climate emergency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the Minister for Higher and Further Education, Ben Macpherson, to respond to the debate.

17:54

The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Ben Macpherson): I, too, thank Gordon MacDonald for bringing to the chamber this important debate on these significant issues and the project. I also thank members for their diverse contributions, which I will try to respond to in summing up.

In Scotland, brewing and distilling are not just industries—they are, as colleagues have emphasised, part of our national story. They are woven into our identity, our economy and our global reputation. Scotland's higher education system is equally iconic, sharing the same spirit of excellence, innovation and drive to nurture talent

that enables our nation to thrive in a competitive world.

Whisky, in particular, is hugely important to our economy, with more than £5 billion in exports to around 170 countries and territories. The industry provides £7.1 billion in gross value added to the UK economy, and in most countries around the world, you cannot go into a bar without seeing a bit of Scotland on the shelf. That is remarkable, and it is important that we continue to support and preserve it.

The sector employs more than 41,000 people in Scotland, and its reach into every corner of the country means that, in our rural and island communities, brewing and distilling often provide many of the high-skilled, well-paid and secure employment opportunities. Those jobs sustain local economies and communities, and we should all celebrate and seek to continue that.

Heriot-Watt University's international centre for brewing and distilling represents a significant fusion of the two great Scottish strengths: industry and education. Since the centre was established in 1989, it has, as members have emphasised, connected cutting-edge innovation with industry to deliver real-world impact. Its evolution into a centre for sustainable brewing and distilling is in line with the Government's net zero ambitions and cements Heriot Watt's status as a pioneering powerhouse in that sphere. It also ties in with the industry's vision, as set out in the Scotch Whisky Association's sustainability strategy, to play its part in reducing emissions. I will be pleased to engage with Heriot-Watt University on its proposals, and the need to continue to develop skills, in my dialogue with it.

Heriot-Watt's impact is wide. For example, the Deputy First Minister visited Ardgowan Distillery, where joint research with the university is improving efficiency, cutting costs and reducing emissions in the distillation process. That is a win for business and for the planet. The research was supported by the Scottish food and drink net zero challenge fund as part of a £130,000 package from the Scottish Government in 2022. To maintain our position as a world leader in brewing and distilling, we must harness every opportunity that is available to us to enhance and support those industries. One of Scotland's greatest strengths is its diversity and capacity for innovation. Those qualities are nurtured by Heriot-Watt University, and we need to build on them.

We have an incredible range of producers, from large-scale distillers—some of which have been mentioned—crafting some of the world's finest whisky, gin, vodka and rum to a tapestry of brewers. Those producers span the length of the country and are leading the way as part of a traditional industry embracing different and

sustainable practices. For example, the Black Isle Brewery is proudly certified as organic and as a B corp; it is one of the places that I really want to visit. We also have Tennent's Wellpark brewery, which is powered entirely by renewable energy, eliminating more than 4,200 tonnes of CO₂ annually from its network.

In my constituency, I know that the sector's value is clear. The Port of Leith Distillery—which is, as was mentioned, the world's first vertical distillery—is a remarkable success. We also have a thriving craft beer scene, with Moonwake Beer Co, Newbarns Brewery, Campervan Brewery, Pilot Beer and Cold Town Beer—along with Bellfield, just over my constituency boundary—each creating unique products that reach national and international markets.

Craig Hoy: I thank the minister for his positivity, but he will be aware that 2 per cent of Scotland's pubs closed last year, in comparison with just 0.9 per cent in England. Will he be a voice for the industry in the Government, and will he address the industry's concern that there is an anti-alcohol agenda creeping through the Scottish Government? We recognise that alcohol harm is real, but the industry is doing a lot to prevent it, so will he ensure that he speaks up for the industry in the Scottish Government?

Ben Macpherson: My support for the industry is well documented in the *Official Report* of this Parliament, and I continue, in my current ministerial brief, to be that person; I have just talked about the producers in my constituency. I recognise the work that the member has done in leading the CPG on beer and pubs, and I heard the call to engage on the CPG's recommendations. I will certainly welcome it if the member wants to engage with me on that, and I know that ministerial colleagues in other portfolios will be interested, too.

Scotland punches well above its weight in the craft beer industry, accounting for 12.1 per cent of the UK's craft beer market, which is worth £42.5 million. We are committed to supporting growth for the sector through initiatives such as the guest beer agreement; that is a key component of the Scottish pubs code, which came into force this year and is making a positive difference.

Ensuring that brewing and distilling remain not just legacies but areas of future success will depend on knowledge, skills and innovation—areas in which our universities are uniquely placed to excel. Their capacity for adaptation and forward-thinking research will be critical to sustaining those industries in a changing world. Through the proposed CSBD project, Heriot-Watt University will have the capacity to do even more. The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting the role that universities play in

Scotland's economy and society, and I look forward to engaging further with Heriot-Watt on the proposals for the centre.

The debate has shown that there is strong cross-party support for brewing and distilling. That is important, as those are an essential part of Scotland's national fabric. We have also underlined the role of our higher education sector in ensuring that those important industries are not just rooted in our past, but remain at the forefront of our future, and that we enable opportunities for people to enter those industries and build their skills. We will continue to support those sectors not only for their economic value, but for their leadership, and for the important role that they play in Scotland's identity and prosperity.

I echo the points that members have made about Sir Geoff Palmer and how the development of the proposed centre will help to add to his strong legacy, which ripples through our constituencies. I had the great privilege of meeting Sir Geoff several times and hearing his enthusiasm for brewing, and I know of the impact that he has made in my constituency, through the businesses that are now developing their craft there. I had the great privilege, on behalf of the Government, of attending his memorial service. In today's debate, and in many other ways, his legacy lives on, and we look forward to continuing to build on it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. Having also attended the memorial ceremony, I, too, send my personal thoughts to Sir Geoff's family. He certainly had a massive impact, not just in the university but far more broadly, as we heard at the ceremony.

With that, I close the debate and this meeting of Parliament.

Meeting closed at 18:02.

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

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