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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 26 November 2025

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands.

Scottish Economic Link Licence

1. **Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how the Scottish economic link licence is working. (S6O-05190)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): A review of the amended economic link licence condition was published in August. It showed that the policy has delivered significant benefits. Landings of mackerel and herring into Scotland have risen sharply, meeting phase targets and bringing record values to Peterhead and Lerwick ports. That has strengthened coastal economies, supported jobs and driven major investment in processing facilities, which has in turn improved business security and enabled expansion. Scottish processors report greater confidence to invest, extended employment and improved access to premium export markets in the far east. Overall, the policy is achieving its aims but continues to be under review.

Karen Adam: Given the United Kingdom Government's decision to short-change Scotland's fishing and coastal communities, tools such as the economic link licence are important for keeping value in our ports and our onshore sector. Processors in my Banffshire and Buchan Coast constituency tell me that economic link changes have helped, but they still see some unused capacity and are concerned that, without increases, businesses might suffer. Will the cabinet secretary consider commissioning further analysis of whether the current licence condition is maximising landings and processing in Scotland? If not, what options might there be to strengthen the condition in support of coastal jobs?

Mairi Gougeon: I thank Karen Adam for raising that important point. I recognise how important the licence condition has been for Scotland's processors and for our ports.

This year, we have received challenging advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, which is recommending major quota cuts for mackerel and herring. That raises real concerns about throughput and about the impact on our processors and the jobs that depend on them. We are in active discussion with processors and catchers to assess what the full supply chain impact would be and what, if any, Government intervention might be needed. We also recognise that there are strong and differing views on any further intervention. In any action that we take, we will be guided by the public interest. I emphasise that, at this point, no decisions have been made on intervening to increase mackerel and herring landings in 2026. We will carefully consider stakeholders' views.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Fishermen face many challenges, not least the economic link, which can impact the market and impede competitive opportunities for vessels to get the best value for their catches. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, without an economically viable pelagic fleet, the impact on processors, the supply chain and island and coastal communities will be considerable ?

Mairi Gougeon: I absolutely recognise that. I hope that Beatrice Wishart will take some assurance from the points that I have made. We are trying to assess the impact of that advice on our catching and processing sectors, and we are having discussions to see what, if any, intervention might be needed. I want to provide assurance that no decisions have been made. We are engaging closely, because we have to do all that we can to mitigate the impacts of that advice.

Agricultural Sector (Fatalities)

2. **Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent work it has undertaken with the agricultural sector to reduce the number of fatalities within the industry. (S6O-05191)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government works closely with the agricultural sector to improve safety and wellbeing. The Farm Advisory Service offers practical risk management support, and the next generation practical training fund helps new entrants to access accredited safety-focused courses.

We have awarded £25,000 to Farmstrong Scotland for its social wellbeing project, which fosters supportive networks and reduces isolation through community engagement. We have also provided £75,000 to the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution so that it can continue to deliver emotional, practical and financial assistance, including counselling, mental health

support and help with essential living costs. Together, those measures strengthen resilience and wellbeing across Scotland's agricultural community.

Claire Baker: Since April this year, there have been 22 farm fatalities in the United Kingdom, including the tragic loss of life at a farm in South Lanarkshire in October. The Health and Safety Executive says that farm vehicles continue to be the leading cause of fatalities and injuries. A Farm Safety Foundation survey found that women in agriculture are less likely to carry out a risk assessment before taking on a new job and that they receive less training than men. Is there disaggregation by sex when injuries and fatalities are recorded? Do we have an understanding of where the increased risks for women working in agriculture are? What is being done to reduce those risks?

Jim Fairlie: I thank Claire Baker for bringing up the subject, which is very close to my heart. I will need to come back to her on her specific point about disaggregation by sex, as I do not have an answer to that right now.

The overall safety of farmers is not just about the actions that they take; it is also about their mental wellbeing. There are a number of risks to Scotland's farmers, and it is essential that we put as much help and support in place as we can to protect them and to ensure that the fatality numbers are reduced.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a partner in a farming business and a member of NFU Scotland.

Is the minister aware of the high number of lives lost to suicide in the agriculture sector, with the winter months being a particularly difficult time for many farmers and crofters? The pressures on farmers can be exacerbated by the impact of Government actions and the frustration, anger and disappointment that they can often bring. How will the Scottish Government ensure that, in the decisions that it makes and the way in which it administers schemes and delivers its policies, it recognises that behind every application is a farmer or crofter who is already under pressure?

Jim Fairlie: I hear exactly what the member is saying about the loss of lives due to suicide. It is a subject that is incredibly close to my heart.

I put on record that every time a decision is made by anyone in the Scottish Government on how we help, support or work with people to get through difficult situations, the subject is very much at the forefront of their mind. Our officials are very clear about that, as I know they have

always been up to now in all the circumstances that have been brought to my attention.

NatureScot Species Licensing Review

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of NatureScot's species licensing review, including timelines for producing and implementing recommendations for improvements alongside charging for licensing services. (S6O-05192)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The species licensing review is being finalised by NatureScot following the completion of the external review phase. Once the review has been presented to ministers for consideration, it will be published alongside our response to the recommendations and any timelines for taking the recommendations forward. We expect to be in a position to respond to the report once it is received in early 2026.

John Mason: I think that we were expecting the report in January 2025, and then in July 2025, and now all we hear is that the review "is being finalised". Can the minister assure us that NatureScot has been listening to the RSPB and the Scottish Raptor Study Group, and that their input will influence recommendations?

Jim Fairlie: As I have said, there has been an awful lot of input into the review, and NatureScot will take all of it into account before the finalised report comes to ministers and is then presented to Parliament.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Our public money is being spent on mitigating the environmental damage caused by polluting private companies. We cannot afford to go on like this. It is therefore welcome that NatureScot is exploring the potential to apply the principle of cost recovery in its species licensing review.

I have previously asked whether the Scottish Government supports the principle that polluters must themselves pay for the environmental damage that they cause, but the minister did not answer, so I am asking again: does the Scottish Government agree with the polluter pays principle?

Jim Fairlie: The member has asked the question before, and I gave her a fairly succinct answer at the time. We will have a report on any review that comes forward and we will bring it to the Parliament.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): I have given the minister notice of this question. He has received the outcome of the muirburn licensing test phase from representatives of

Scottish Land & Estates and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, which was to see whether NatureScot would be able to grant muirburn licences to prevent and reduce the risk of wildfire on peatland. It is clear from the testing that the legislative provisions that are currently in place are unduly prohibitive when it comes to issuing licences for muirburn to take place to prevent and reduce the risk of wildfire. What consideration is the minister giving to amendment 271, which seeks to amend the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill in—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ewing—that is not to do with the species licensing review. If there is anything that you can add in response to that, minister, I am happy to let you do so.

Jim Fairlie: All that I can say is that I am carefully considering all licences that are in front of me at this moment in time.

Aquaculture (Economic Benefits)

4. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any economic benefits of the growth of aquaculture in Scotland. (S6O-05193)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Several assessments, including the marine economic statistics and annual fish and shellfish farm production surveys, have demonstrated that the growth of aquaculture in Scotland has led to significant economic benefits for our country.

The marine economic statistics report for 2023 is due to be published in December, but in 2022, aquaculture generated £337 million in gross value added, which is 7 per cent of the marine economy GVA, and it directly employed 2,200 people. The latest Scottish fish farm protection survey reported that, in 2024, salmon farming achieved a record value of more than £1.3 billion.

In our “Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture”, which was published in 2023, we set out our support for the sustainable development of the sector and recognise

“the considerable social and economic benefits the sector delivers”.

Annabelle Ewing: The cabinet secretary is aware of recent estimates that put the annual contribution of the salmon industry to the Scottish economy at more than £1 billion. Given that, and given the fact that some 11,000 jobs are supported by the industry—including more than 600 at Mowi, in Rosyth in my constituency—will she reaffirm the Scottish Government’s commitment to do all that it can to promote the industry here and abroad? Will she welcome the

significant contribution that it makes to sustainable jobs across Scotland?

Mairi Gougeon: I am happy to reaffirm that commitment to Annabelle Ewing and to members across the chamber. We remain committed to promoting the sector at home and abroad. We are continuing to work with our enterprise and innovation agencies on the international stage to ensure that Scotland has a key presence at the major trade shows, targeting new business opportunities and ensuring that Scotland remains a global leader as well as, more broadly, a collaborator.

We are also working to ensure that more people can enjoy Scottish salmon. This year, £50,000 was awarded through the marine fund Scotland—which was match funded by the sector—to try to grow sales under the coveted Label Rouge label. We continue to work together to capitalise on new market opportunities. I am delighted that Scottish salmon is on track to deliver another record year for exports in 2025.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members’ interests: I have an interest in a wild salmon fishery on the east coast.

The salmon farming industry is known for unacceptably high mortality, its use of antibiotics and the number of escapes, resulting in the royal warrant being withdrawn from Mowi. Surely it is time for this Government to consider withdrawing its blanket support for an industry that can only be described as suspect.

Mairi Gougeon: I must make it absolutely clear that Scottish aquaculture is a highly regulated sector. There are robust controls on planning and environmental impacts as well as on fish health.

Edward Mountain raised the issue of the royal warrant, but such decisions are not a matter for the Scottish Government.

We protect fish health through regulation, through communication and through legislation. The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 protects farmed animals from unnecessary suffering and places a duty of care on those who care for animals to meet their welfare needs.

We know how important the aquaculture sector is in Scotland. It supplies well-paid jobs in some of the most rural parts of our country, as well as in our island communities. It is a highly regulated sector that is very important for our wider economy.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The salmon farming industry makes many claims about itself that have proved to be misleading. It claims to be transparent with mortality data, but it does not include cleaner fish,

salmon in transport or certain smolts. It tells us that it wants to protect wild salmon, but it puts in legal appeals against the very framework that is designed to do that. It does many other things. Will the cabinet secretary commit to commissioning an independent, Scotland-wide cost benefit analysis, as per best practice, so that future policy in the salmon farming sector—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. Briefly, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: Ariane Burgess raised a point on transparency. The information that is published in relation to the aquaculture sector is very transparent. More data is published in relation to aquaculture than in many of our other sectors. I appreciate the point—we discussed it when the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee was undertaking its inquiry into salmon farming. There are issues about the amount of data that we have and how that data is used and communicated more widely. In relation to that point and in relation to the other matters that Ariane Burgess raises, the committee made a number of recommendations and I made a number of commitments in response. I offer the assurance that several pieces of work are under way.

Brexit (Impact on Food and Drink Producers)

5. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how Brexit has impacted Scotland's food and drink producers. (S6O-05194)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The food and drink sector continues to suffer the consequences of a hard Brexit, which has disrupted supply chains and created new trade barriers. Many Scottish producers continue to face reduced European Union market access, which resulted in a 50 per cent decline in the value of fruit and vegetable exports between 2019 and 2024.

While the full economic consequences of exiting the EU are still to be realised, we know that businesses face higher trading costs, and some producers have lost the ability to export goods to the EU altogether.

Kevin Stewart: Today's official statistics show that Scottish food and drink exports are worth £7.5 billion. Although the food and drink sector remains Scotland's largest international export sector and accounts for a fifth of Scotland's international exports, there has been a 5 per cent real-terms decrease since 2018. That decrease, which is a result of Brexit difficulties, has had an impact on jobs, the economy and communities, yet Westminster Labour will not even consider re-entering the EU, the single market or the customs

union to help exporters. Is Westminster Labour wrong?

Mairi Gougeon: I could not agree more with the points that Kevin Stewart has made. He has highlighted the massive economic damage that has been done by Brexit—in particular, the hard Brexit that was pursued by the UK Government at the time.

Research by the centre for economic performance at the London School of Economics and Political Science shows that UK households have paid £7 billion to cover the cost of post-Brexit trade barriers on food imports from the EU, which has pushed up household food costs by an average of £250 since December 2019. We know that low-income households, which spend a greater proportion of their income on food, have been disproportionately affected.

Brexit has undoubtedly increased the barriers and the costs for industry. Kevin Stewart rightly highlighted the value of our food and drink exports. We hope that some of that damage could be mitigated by a new sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, but such an agreement will never fully reverse the damage that has been done by Brexit.

Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund

6. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what response it has had to its letter to the United Kingdom Government regarding the fishing and coastal growth fund. (S6O-05195)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): There has been no response to my letter to UK ministers of 22 October, in which I set out our serious concerns about the announced approach of allocating to the Scottish Government just 7.78 per cent of the £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund, which is, of course, an insult to the Scottish fishing industry.

On 4 November, together with other key Scottish stakeholders, I wrote to the UK Government, calling for the Scottish seafood industry action group to be reconvened to discuss that urgent issue, alongside other concerns. Once again, to date, there has been no reply from the UK Government.

Keith Brown: The UK Government's unresponsiveness is appalling. The Scottish Government was clear in its expectation that Scotland's fishers needed and deserved to maintain an arrangement outside the Barnett formula that recognised the relative size and importance of fishing industries across the UK, and that Scotland should receive at least 46 per cent of the fishing and coastal growth fund. The

Labour Party has ignored Scotland's Government and insulted our fishing industry. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Scottish Labour MSPs need to decide whether they are backing our fishing industry and communities or their bosses at Westminster?

Mairi Gougeon: I could not agree more with that. As Keith Brown highlighted, we were clear right from the outset that Scotland should receive at least 46 per cent of the fishing and coastal growth fund, in recognition of the sheer size and importance of an industry that is vital to Scotland.

The decision to apply the Barnett formula to the fund was taken by UK ministers. It completely ignored what we asked for and is an insult to our industry, as well as to our communities. I remain steadfast in urging the UK Government to reconsider its approach and to enter into discussions with us and with fishing industry leaders with a view to agreeing a way forward that, ultimately, treats our industries and communities with the respect that they deserve.

United Kingdom Budget (Support for Scottish Farmers)

7. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what correspondence it has had with the UK Government regarding support for Scottish farmers ahead of the upcoming UK budget. (S6O-05196)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): We have repeatedly raised intra-United Kingdom agricultural funding allocation concerns with the UK Government, most recently with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at the interministerial group meeting on Monday. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government also wrote to the chancellor on 15 October, highlighting the issue among our priorities for the UK budget.

We have been clear that a population-based Barnett settlement for land and sea support is inappropriate. It misses the opportunity to recognise Scotland's larger share of land and seas and their potential to contribute significantly to the UK's climate and nature restoration goals.

Pam Gosal: The Labour Government showed its contempt for farmers this afternoon when it refused to reverse its cruel family farm tax. However, Scottish farmers, including those in my West Scotland region, have also been let down by the SNP Government, most recently through the inconsistent future farming investment scheme. This year, the SNP Government has also failed to publish the rural support plan, to provide multi-annual ring-fenced funding and to return the missing money in full to the agriculture budget.

Can the minister assure farmers that this year's Scottish budget will support them?

Jim Fairlie: The one thing that I agree with Pam Gosal on is that the inheritance tax introduced by the UK Government is an absolute disaster for family farms in Scotland. However, it is a bit rich that we have a Tory telling us about all the things that we are doing wrong here, given that the Tories started the dismantling of farm support in the rest of the UK while the Scottish Government continued with direct payments and schemes to ensure that we protected our hill and upland farmers and continued to support our industry—to the point where we have proper working relationships, whereas things are absolutely disastrous for people down in England.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am unclear what the Tories did for Scottish farmers when they were in government in the UK other than utterly fail to advocate for them. That is perhaps one of the many reasons why the Tories have not won an election in Scotland since 1955. Will the cabinet secretary—[*Interruption.*] Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government is engaging with the UK Government for farmers, following the budget?

Jim Fairlie: Every time that I meet with the UK Government, or the cabinet secretary does, we absolutely insist that it take on board all our concerns about ensuring that we have the funding for Scottish farming.

However, since leaving the European Union, Scotland's farmers have lost the certainty of multi-annual rural funding, which is essential for farming. UK Government funding remains inadequate, with future increases now based on population share rather than land use, agricultural needs or environmental potential. That is unfair to Scotland, which has a far greater share of the UK landmass, much of which is used for extensive livestock and upland farming, with huge potential to contribute to the UK's climate, nature and food security goals. We have consistently pressed the UK Government for a fair long-term funding settlement, and we will continue to do that in the future.

Bakkafrost Scotland (Animal Welfare)

8. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports of alleged animal welfare abuse at a Bakkafrost Scotland salmon farm. (S6O-05197)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government takes the welfare of farmed fish seriously. Robust legislation, policies and industry standards are in place to safeguard fish

health and welfare, and I am clear in my expectation that all producers must comply.

The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 protects farmed animals from “unnecessary suffering” and places a duty of care on those caring for animals to meet their welfare needs. The Animal and Plant Health Agency is responsible for considering and investigating complaints and potential welfare breaches relating to farmed animals, including farmed fish.

Pauline McNeill: It has been alleged that salmon infested with sea lice were left in a pen that was meant to be completely empty. Animal Equality UK carried out covert filming at the Bakkafröst Scotland farm on Loch Torridon and claims that welfare regulations were breached. Tesco has suspended the farm while it investigates the supplier. In its first report of 2025, the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee found that the Scottish Government is not being responsive enough to the complex needs of the Scottish salmon farming industry and how it interacts with biodiversity, animal welfare and the workforce. Can the cabinet secretary tell me what is being done to ensure that the industry receives better support as well as improved oversight?

Mairi Gougeon: There are a number of matters involved. I am happy to send Pauline McNeill the list of commitments and to outline some of the work that we are taking forward in that area, because we recognise the recommendations that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee made in its most recent inquiry, which updated the recommendations of the previous salmon inquiry. I want to offer some assurances that there are specific strands of work on animal health and welfare in relation to this matter. We have also made a commitment to publish guidance, which we will look to engage and consult with people on. I am regularly updating the committee on the work as it progresses. I am happy to follow that up and to send the information to Pauline McNeill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I apologise to those members whom I was unable to call. That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next portfolio questions, to allow members on the front benches to move seats.

Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next portfolio is health and social care. I advise members that there is an incredible amount of interest in supplementary questions. With the best will in the world, I will not be able to bring in everybody who wants to ask a question.

However, I will get more in if the questions are brief and the responses likewise.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Financial Sustainability)

1. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report by the Auditor General into the financial sustainability of NHS Ayrshire and Arran, which found that the board is facing a deficit of £33.1 million in the current year. (S6O-05198)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): The Scottish Government is aware of and has received the section 22 report that was issued to NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and will continue to work with that health board to resolve the issues that have been highlighted.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran is already at stage 3 of the NHS Scotland support and intervention framework for finance, and we continue to work closely with the board’s executive team to improve performance across all areas, not just finance. Targeted support has been provided to help strengthen financial sustainability, and the board received baseline funding of £1 billion in the budget—which, I note, neither Katy Clark nor her Labour colleagues voted for.

Katy Clark: The Auditor General said that the board needed a £51.4 million loan in 2024-25 to break even, and that NHS Ayrshire and Arran has outstanding loans totalling £129.9 million, which is “the highest amount ... across the NHS in Scotland”.

The Auditor General also stated that the severity of the financial challenge was “unprecedented” and warned that the board was relying on “overly optimistic” savings plans that might not be achievable.

What can the cabinet secretary do, given that the position seems unsustainable, and what further support can the Scottish Government give, given the huge concern about the current situation?

Neil Gray: We have provided increased investment in the baseline funding of national health service boards; for NHS Ayrshire and Arran, that comes to more than £1 billion, which represents an increased investment of £123 million compared with 2024-25. We continue to provide support to the new interim chief executive, Professor Gordon James, and I am confident that the work that is being done in partnership with the Scottish Government’s escalation team will continue to bring NHS Ayrshire and Arran’s finances into better order as well as bringing the performance improvement that patients need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to brief supplementary questions. The first one is from Kenneth Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the uplift of £123 million—or 13.9 per cent—in NHS Ayrshire and Arran’s funding for this year, and the additional non-recurring funding for escalated health boards to improve financial sustainability, which includes £43.7 million for NHS Ayrshire and Arran this year. How will Scottish ministers ensure that those additional funds are being used effectively, and will the cabinet secretary advise how escalated boards will be supported in the coming financial year?

Neil Gray: I thank Kenneth Gibson for putting those details on the record. The Scottish Government has provided NHS Ayrshire and Arran with several strands of support to improve financial sustainability, including leadership support and funding to support the delivery of improvement. The NHS Scotland financial delivery unit routinely challenges NHS Ayrshire and Arran on its financial performance and trajectories, including the utilisation of additional support funding.

The additional funding that is being provided for NHS boards is starting to have a positive impact on waiting times. For example, boards have reported significant reductions in new out-patient waits, including a 72.2 per cent decrease in ear, nose and throat waits in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, which is a demonstrable indicator of improved performance to go alongside the financial rigour that we need to see in Ayrshire and Arran and elsewhere in Scotland.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): This morning, Auditor General Stephen Boyle described NHS Ayrshire and Arran as being in a “loop of unsustainability” since being escalated to level 3 on NHS Scotland’s support and intervention framework in 2018. That is seven years of Scottish Government support and the situation is getting worse, if anything.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that seven years should have been more than enough time to see significant improvement? Is that lack of improvement a failure of the Scottish Government in its support, or is it an indication that the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee formula, which determines health board funding, is fundamentally flawed?

Neil Gray: The NRAC formula is an objective measure of the needs of healthcare services across Scotland. It takes explicit account of the variation in need for healthcare due to age, sex profile, morbidity, life circumstances, local

populations and the cost of delivering services across different geographies.

We are providing significant support to the new interim chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran, Professor Gordon James, and I am confident that the rigour that he will bring to its finances and performance will see improvements for patients in the locality.

Tooth Decay (Children)

2. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address tooth decay in children. (S6O-05199)

The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto): We continue to invest in our flagship Childsmile programme, which provides universal oral health interventions for all children and additional targeted measures for children from vulnerable backgrounds. The programme has supported significant improvements in child oral health, with the latest national dental inspection programme results showing that 81.5 per cent of primary 7 children have no obvious tooth decay, compared with 52.9 per cent in 2005.

We have also made significant improvements to children’s dental care as part of our payment reforms, which were introduced in 2023, with dentists now able to undertake a much wider range of preventative treatments for all children.

Roz McCall: Whatever the minister says, and whatever the Government is doing, it is not enough. I have a freedom of information request reply that shows that almost 3,000 children in NHS Tayside have been admitted to hospital because of tooth decay during the past five years, while more than 3,000 have had a tooth extracted in hospital. That is on top of the percentage of primary 7 pupils with tooth decay increasing this year for the first time since 2005. That is unacceptable.

What does the minister say to families in my region who are dealing with the consequences of the dentistry crisis, and what urgent action is the Government going to take to fix this?

Jenni Minto: I am sure that Ms McCall will recognise that tooth extractions done under general anaesthetic fall under secondary care. I recognise that there are waiting time issues in that area, and my team and the chief dental officer are having in-depth conversations with health boards to try to relieve the waiting time pressure.

I hope Ms McCall will also recognise that the Scottish Government has invested more than £135 million in reducing waiting times. She might

say that that is not enough, but it is noticeable investment to reduce waiting times.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Data released only yesterday revealed that NHS Dumfries and Galloway has the third lowest rate of child dentist registrations in Scotland. Significant inequalities exist, with more than a 10 per cent gap between children living in the most and least deprived areas. Why are children in Dumfries and Galloway considerably worse off when it comes to registration? What is the Government's response to that inequality, and what action will it take to address it?

Jenni Minto: I recognise the importance of ensuring that we support people and children, specifically those in the more deprived areas of Scotland.

Dumfries and Galloway has been impacted by a reduction in the number of dentists, and we are working closely with the health board. We have additional funding—Scottish dental access initiative allowances—to increase the number of dentists in various areas.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The progress that was being made through Childsmile has stalled, and the poverty gap is still pretty stubborn. I am sure that the pandemic had an impact on that, but there is no doubt that the lack of national health service dentists in large parts of the country, including in North East Fife, is also having an impact. What more will the minister do to improve the service in areas such as mine?

Jenni Minto: I remind Willie Rennie and other members that I have been working hard with those in the equivalent role to mine in the other three United Kingdom nations. Unfortunately, a number of the levers are held at Westminster, and Stephen Kinnock has not, to date, provided us with the support that we need to ensure that dental therapists are put back on the visa list. However, I point out that the latest national dental inspection programme results show that 81.5 per cent of primary 7 children have no obvious tooth decay, which represents a vast improvement since 2005.

Hip and Knee Replacement Surgeries (Waiting Lists)

3. **Davy Russell (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what specific action it has taken to address waiting lists for hip and knee replacement surgeries. (S6O-05200)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): As part of our record £21.7 billion budget investment in health and social care, we have targeted, this year, more than £135.5 million, including £32 million for trauma and orthopaedics, to tackle long waits. Yesterday's

update from Public Health Scotland confirmed that the number of waits of more than 52 weeks has fallen for the fifth consecutive month, which is testament to the dedication of our national health service staff. Our investment is delivering results. For example, in 2024, the number of hip and knee operations reached a record high, with more than 17,000 first replacements completed.

There has been progress in bringing down long waits in NHS Lanarkshire, with the number of waits of more than 52 weeks for new orthopaedic out-patients having reduced by 27 per cent and the number for in-patients and day cases having reduced by 31 per cent since the end of July, just after Mr Russell took up his position as MSP for his constituency. I am sure that he will welcome that fact.

Davy Russell: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but none of that helps my constituent Eileen, who has been waiting for a knee replacement since January 2024. She was banded about to various meetings and assessments, because she could not join the waiting list until her full care plan was determined. It took 20 months for her to be added to the waiting list, despite her general practitioner telling her at the outset that she would need the surgery. Even now, she has no date for her surgery, with no sign of treatment on the horizon, despite the 12-week legal guarantee having passed and it being nearly two years since she first presented to a doctor. Does the cabinet secretary not see that creative accounting being applied to NHS waiting lists is hurting patients?

Neil Gray: No. I ask Mr Russell to furnish me with more of the details of Eileen's case, because I think that there has been some confusion in what has been presented in relation to the treatment pathways that she should be able to access. I expect NHS Lanarkshire to respond to such cases timeously, especially given the investment that has been made and the progress that is being made to out-patient, in-patient and day-case processes, to which Aileen will need to be subject. The measures of waiting times that Public Health Scotland has updated are very similar to the measures in NHS Wales, for which Mr Russell's colleagues in the Labour Party are responsible.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I remind members that I am employed as a bank nurse by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

As the cabinet secretary mentioned in his previous answer, the number of knee and hip replacement surgeries is at a record high under the Scottish National Party Government, which proves once again that, although waiting lists have risen under Mr Russell's bosses in NHS England, the Scottish Government's plan to bring down NHS waiting lists is working. Will the cabinet

secretary advise how the Scottish Government will continue to drive such improvements in the months ahead?

Neil Gray: I thank Clare Haughey for that question, not least because I noted with interest the UK Parliament's Public Accounts Committee's analysis of the challenges with waiting times in Labour-run England. In Scotland, as part of our plan to reform the NHS, I announced proposals for subnational planning, which will ensure that NHS health boards work together in the east and in the west of Scotland, allowing teams to work across their boundaries to better support patients to get the care that they need in a timely manner. This year, we have allocated more than £135.5 million to specialty areas, in which the money can have the greatest impact in reducing the longest waits. As I said, yesterday's figures show that the number of waits of more than 52 weeks has reduced for the fifth month in a row.

NHS Grampian

4. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with the chief executive of NHS Grampian to discuss healthcare in Moray. (S6O-05201)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Both ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of all national health service boards, including NHS Grampian, to discuss matters of importance to local people. Douglas Ross will be interested to know that I will be carrying out NHS Grampian's annual ministerial review on Monday in Aberdeen.

Douglas Ross: Yesterday, the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer stated that NHS Grampian was not properly handling concerns raised by staff. I have had cases raised with me by staff in the orthopaedic department at Dr Gray's hospital. I have had a number of conversations with the chief executive of NHS Grampian and—to be frank—I do not believe that I have had full or truthful answers from her.

When I said that I would raise the matter in the chamber, I was told that she would brief the cabinet secretary, so my worry is that he has been fed the same lines as I have, which have been put back to constituents who still do not believe what they are being told by the head of NHS Grampian.

Given the grave concerns that constituents are highlighting, does the cabinet secretary agree that the issue should be reviewed by someone from outwith NHS Grampian?

Neil Gray: I thank Douglas Ross for raising that question. I have seen some of the correspondence that has gone back and forth between Mr Ross and Laura Skaife-Knight. She understandably has

to ensure that the confidentiality of employees is respected. However, there are clear processes in place to enable whistleblowers to raise concerns, including through the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer. There are whistleblowing champions in every NHS board; I have met them all.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment further, other than to point Mr Ross and his constituents in that direction to ensure that, where they have a concern, it is not just listened to but acted on appropriately.

Covid-19 Vaccination Programme

5. Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government, regarding its decision to narrow the eligibility criteria for the autumn Covid-19 booster, what assessment it has made of the cost to the national health service and the impact on hospitalisation rates. (S6O-05202)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Eligibility for the Covid-19 vaccine is based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and is identical across the four United Kingdom nations this winter. JCVI advice is based on its standard cost-effectiveness analysis, which shows that the oldest in the population and individuals who are immunosuppressed are at the highest risk of serious Covid-19-related disease, hospitalisation and death.

The recent Public Health Scotland "Viral Respiratory Diseases in Scotland Surveillance Report", covering the period from 10 November to 16 November, shows that

"COVID-19 activity decreased or remained stable overall",

with 73 hospital admissions that week—a decrease from 81 in the previous week.

Foysoil Choudhury: One of my constituents is a type 1 diabetic, and so is her son. She recently paid almost £300 to get booster jabs for herself and her son, and for her husband, who is an unpaid carer.

I am sure that the Scottish Government will agree that it is unacceptable to expect vulnerable families across Scotland to pay hundreds of pounds at a time to protect themselves from Covid. Will the Scottish Government therefore consider applying a discount for type 1 diabetics who are under 75?

Jenni Minto: I understand that the groups who are no longer eligible for Covid vaccination—namely, those aged 65 to 74, those in wider clinical at-risk groups and front-line health and social care workers—might be feeling anxious. To them, I say that the overall threat of Covid has thankfully diminished over time as a result of high

levels of vaccine-based immunity and naturally acquired immunity from the infection.

National Health Service Patient Complaints and Feedback

6. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether patient complaints and feedback about the care they have received from NHS boards are used to inform inspections undertaken by Health Improvement Scotland. (S6O-05203)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Healthcare Improvement Scotland has a duty to improve the quality of healthcare in Scotland, and its inspection programme is a key part of fulfilling that duty. HIS determines what inspection activity it should undertake, using a risk-based, proportionate and intelligence-led approach. That includes consideration of patient complaints and feedback, which are a valuable source of information and intelligence for making improvements.

HIS also gathers information from patients, families and staff during inspections. Through the process of responding to concerns, HIS addresses complaints in a person-centred manner, upholding the rights of everyone involved.

Ruth Maguire: The cabinet secretary and I have previously spoken in the chamber about the impact that a negative experience of birth can have on women and their babies. I have shared a letter with him that my constituent submitted to NHS Ayrshire and Arran in May 2025, which gave a detailed account of her negative experience. NHS Ayrshire and Arran will not engage with MSPs once a complaint process has been triggered, which I find to be a defensive approach. On behalf of my constituent, I chased up the matter with NHS Ayrshire and Arran on 5 October, when I was told that a draft response was in progress, and again on 30 October.

At the end of her letter, my constituent said that she wished that her complaint would be

“handled with the seriousness that it deserves, and that corrective actions will be taken to improve patient care”.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that this is far too long to have to wait for answers to help her to process the trauma and distress that she has experienced? Does he also agree that a defensive, bureaucratic response to feedback is wholly unhelpful?

Neil Gray: I am grateful to Ruth Maguire for putting that detail on the record. Clearly, it is unacceptable for a response to take that long. I am very sorry to hear about her constituent’s experience, which I know that she has written to me about and to which I will be responding in

writing. After portfolio questions, I will ensure that our exchange is shared with the interim chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran in order to underline the concerns that have been raised with me and to ensure that the process is sped up for her constituent, as well as for MSPs who interact with NHS Ayrshire and Arran.

The NHS complaints handling procedure sets a 20-day target for responses, emphasising timely and effective resolution. Complex cases may require more time, which I think that we would all understand, and extensions are allowed. However, if the target cannot be met, the complainant must be informed and given an expected response date. I will ensure that both I and NHS Ayrshire and Arran respond to Ms Maguire as soon as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will need briefer responses and, certainly, briefer questions.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Following an unannounced HIS inspection in June 2025, NHS Lothian’s maternity service has been escalated to level 3, requiring Government oversight after failing to meet 26 basic standards of care. Only two health board maternity services have been inspected. Will the cabinet secretary accept that now is the time for a nationwide review into our maternity services?

Neil Gray: I and the Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health have set out in detail our response to NHS Lothian’s position and the wider concerns that were raised following the BBC’s “Disclosure” documentary. We are taking the issues seriously and are establishing a task force that can help to inform a review. As an immediate update, this morning, I and Ms Minto had a further discussion with NHS Lothian to get a progress update. The board gave us an assurance on the progress that is being made, and I will be updating the Parliament in due course on the outcome of that discussion.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the work that is being done by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, but the context is that public satisfaction with the NHS in Scotland has dropped to its lowest in a decade, according to the latest Scottish household survey. Complaints to NHS boards have gone up and appear to be taking longer to resolve. What is the cabinet secretary doing to improve performance with complaints?

Neil Gray: I have already set out our expectation for performance with complaints, as well as what I expect to happen in the case that Ruth Maguire has brought to our attention.

On the performance of the health service, although we have more work to do, I am pleased that yesterday’s Public Health Scotland figures

demonstrate the progress that has been made and the corner that is being turned thanks to the efforts of staff. I expect that that will boost confidence in the health service among patients and staff and reduce the need for complaints.

Audiology Waiting Lists (NHS Grampian)

7. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making on reducing audiology waiting lists at NHS Grampian. (S6O-05204)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I recognise the steps that NHS Grampian is taking to reduce audiology waiting times. The board has recruited a qualified audiologist and is appointing a new team member for Moray to support older adults with hearing loss. Increased staffing will help, although high demand means that progress will take time.

NHS Grampian has shortened some clinic appointments, prioritised adult reassessments and introduced text reminders to reduce missed appointments. Workforce pressures remain significant, with one audiologist serving around 28,000 patients, which is well above the average across other health boards.

Douglas Lumsden: I can tell from my inbox that it is well above the average. If the Scottish Government committed to delivering a community audiology service, high street audiologists would be able to deliver the service in as little as 18 weeks and clear more than 70,000 people from audiology waiting lists. What is preventing the minister from scoring an easy win and delivering on her party's manifesto commitment to put community audiology services on par with the successful community eye care model?

Jenni Minto: I and the Scottish Government remain committed to our vision for integrated and community-based hearing services across Scotland. We recognise the difficulties that are faced by health boards, as highlighted by the independent review of audiology, and we wanted to check and ensure that we introduced all the recommendations in that regard. I have also asked officials to continue to have conversations with the audiology community to improve the service that we are offering people who live in Scotland.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Can the minister advise what steps the Scottish Government is taking to look at improvement and reform of audiology services, particularly in relation to engagement and collaboration with stakeholders?

Jenni Minto: As I indicated, we are continuing to engage with national health service boards, the third sector and private providers to scope out potential models for any future community hearing

care services, ensuring that the voices of those with lived experience inform that work.

Sport (Child Poverty Reduction)

8. Humza Yousaf: To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the health secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the use of sport to support its goal to reduce child poverty. (S6O-05205)

The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport (Maree Todd): Eradicating child poverty in Scotland is a national mission and is this Government's top priority, with ministerial collaboration across portfolios to identify and implement effective measures such as the Scottish child payment.

We know that sport can change lives, creating meaningful and hugely positive opportunities for children who are affected by poverty. The benefit that it delivers can improve children's and young people's health and their educational and social outcomes. Through Government and sportsotland-funded initiatives such as active schools, the sport facility funds, the active play development project and the extra time programme, we improve opportunities for children to be active, ensuring that sport continues to contribute to our efforts to tackle child poverty and promote inclusion across Scotland.

Humza Yousaf: I thank the minister for that comprehensive response and I hope that she will also join me in congratulating the efforts of Pollok United, which offers an outstanding range of community services, including the extra time programme, which was mentioned by the minister, parent and toddler groups and groups for older people, in addition to its multiple football sessions for young people in my constituency. At the heart of its efforts is its desire to make its community thrive and be a place that is prosperous and inclusive for all.

What concrete action is being taken to support Pollok United and similar sporting organisations to maintain and expand their vital community efforts, particularly in challenging financial circumstances?

Maree Todd: The Scottish Government recognises the incredible impact and reach of sports organisations and community clubs such as Pollok United. I know that, when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care met the club last month, he was incredibly impressed by the work that it does. We will continue to work alongside it to support the communities that it serves.

We provide the Scottish Football Association with £1.3 million annually via sportsotland to support grassroots football. Additionally, in partnership with the SFA, we are investing £5.5

million in the extra time programme, which supports up to 5,000 children and families through breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs. That improves children's health and wellbeing while enabling parents to work, thus tackling poverty right at its roots.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to those I was unable to call. That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care.

Oil and Gas

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19894, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, on backing oil and gas. I invite members wishing to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

I call Douglas Lumsden to speak to and move the motion. You have up to seven minutes, Mr Lumsden.

14:54

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Today is a really dark day for the oil and gas industry and for the north-east of Scotland. We have seen headline after headline in *The Press and Journal* this week on the damage that the energy profits levy is having. I assure Labour Party MSPs that that was not scaremongering—we must all brace ourselves for what is coming next.

My party has called it an “oil and gas emergency”, and that is by no means overdramatic. It is an emergency, and we need to brace ourselves for a tsunami of job losses across the sector after today's budget.

As the Office for Budget Responsibility revealed earlier, the EPL will remain, but the intake from it is tailing off dramatically as it kills off the industry and thousands of jobs with it. It is completely wrong.

I have met many energy companies over the past few weeks—I guess that the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy has done so as well, but no one from the Labour Party ever seems to attend the meetings that are called. The energy companies tell me time and again how bad things are, that they are not replacing people who leave, their order book is reducing, they are focusing on work overseas, they are moving their skills overseas and they are downsizing and getting rid of offices. The sad and frustrating part is that that decline is self-inflicted and driven by political policy. It is a classic case of shooting ourselves in the foot.

It is not just the north-east that is suffering—the news from Grangemouth and Mossmorran is a result of the North Sea contracting, with less product flowing to them. I was at a meeting last night about Mossmorran, and I was told that the reasons for closure are Government policies. The plant pays carbon tax of £20 million per year, with that amount due to double. It has high energy costs and there is less ethane available because of the North Sea shutdown. We were told that the ethylene that Mossmorran produces is 50 per cent

more expensive than that of its competitors abroad. How can the plant compete in that market?

When global companies are choosing to walk away from Scottish energy and manufacturing because policy is hostile and uncertain, that is not a transition—it is economic vandalism. We should brace ourselves for more, because as Governments force the decline of home-grown hydrocarbons, more and more large pieces of infrastructure will become unviable. The gas plants, the pipelines and the terminals are all at risk.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): Does Mr Lumsden agree that we should take a leaf out of Norway's book, given that Equinor has just announced plans to drill 250 new wells, invest \$5.9 billion a year and maintain production up to 2035 at 2020 levels? Should we not be following Norway's example?

Douglas Lumsden: I could not agree more with Mr Ewing. The sad fact is that not only is Norway producing more, it is actually selling to us. Norway is producing oil and gas from the basin where we are choosing to leave them in the ground.

I also get angry with the Scottish National Party. If we have a presumption against new oil and gas, this is where it leads us. We cannot say that we do not want home-grown oil and gas and then shed crocodile tears when no new oil and gas means that jobs are lost, infrastructure is no longer needed and the only transition that people face is moving from Scotland to Stavanger.

Our motion puts it plainly: Scotland's Government has adopted a

"presumption against new oil and gas exploration and production"—

an approach that is not only economically reckless but blatantly disconnected from Scotland's energy reality. The SNP says that it is about climate leadership, but its own documents admit that we will need oil and gas for some time as part of the journey to a transition. The truth is unavoidable. If we turn off domestic supply, Scotland will not consume less oil and gas—we will simply import more foreign energy at higher carbon intensity, supporting jobs abroad.

The SNP's position is not climate leadership but climate hypocrisy. Meanwhile, communities in the north-east—my constituents—are paying the price. The SNP supports a just transition, but it cannot explain why the north-east has lost three oil and gas jobs for every one clean energy job that has been created over the past decade. It cannot explain why more than 13,000 Scottish oil and gas jobs have been lost in a single year, with employment now almost half of what it was in

2013. It is time to call this out for what it is—an ideological campaign against a sector that Scotland still relies on.

What about the SNP's energy strategy and just transition plan? It will soon be three years since it produced the draft. Where is it? Is the SNP Government incompetent or untruthful?

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Both.

Douglas Lumsden: Does the SNP no longer have any idea what should be in the plan, or does it fear the backlash when people realise what is in it? I agree with Mr Carson—I think that it is both.

The SNP does not want to be honest with offshore workers on its position on oil and gas. It does not want to be honest with our rural communities about the impact that the scale of expensive renewables will have on our countryside, whether that is monster pylons, battery storage or substations. It does not want to be honest with our fishermen about the impact that offshore wind will have on fishing grounds, nor does it want to be honest with households about the true cost of renewables and their impact on bills. Instead of the cabinet secretary jetting off around the world, she should meet communities and hear people's concerns.

Scotland is blessed with one of the most highly regulated, low-carbon oil and gas basins in the world. The North Sea is not the problem; it is part of the solution. The public agree: 84 per cent of Scots support continuing domestic oil and gas production during the transition. Therefore, the Parliament must send a clear message today: that it does not support the SNP's presumption against new oil and gas, it does not support Labour's punitive energy profits levy and it stands with Scotland's workers, Scotland's energy security and Scotland's economy.

This country needs a transition that is built on realism, not ideology. The SNP refuses to give clear support to the industry and Labour says that our future is not in oil and gas. However, we say plainly that Scotland needs its domestic oil and gas industry, it needs energy security and it needs a fair and affordable path to net zero. That begins with backing our own workers, our own resources and our own future. I urge colleagues across the chamber to back my motion.

I move,

That the Parliament regrets the Scottish Government's ideological drive to end North Sea oil and gas exploration and production; notes the negative impact on oil and gas jobs, energy security, the economy and the environment of the Scottish Government's failure to pursue an informed, data-led, evidence-based North Sea policy; demands the immediate and unequivocal reversal of the Scottish Government's presumption against new oil and gas

exploration and production, and calls on the UK Government to immediately abolish the Energy Profits Levy.

15:01

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin): The Parliament debated oil and gas policy just two weeks ago, and we now return to that policy in the light of significant United Kingdom Government announcements that have been made over the past hour—or, I should say, in the light of the lack of announcements, because the omissions from the chancellor’s budget statement are more significant than what was included.

The future of North Sea oil and gas remains of vital importance for Scotland’s energy transition, energy security, economy and society. Oil and gas still play an important role in Scotland’s energy mix and will continue to do so for decades to come. That role is declining as we reduce demand through decarbonisation of the systems that we rely on to live, and given the geological maturity of the North Sea basin.

The previous debate focused on consenting for offshore projects that are already in development—decisions that are reserved to the UK Government. Today’s motion focuses on licensing for exploration to identify new oil and gas fields and the associated fiscal regime. Those are, again, reserved matters.

On licensing, within the past hour, the UK Government has published its “North Sea Future Plan”, which includes how it will approach future oil and gas licensing in the basin. The Scottish Government did not receive prior sight of that document, so I will need to take time to carefully consider the detail and its implications for Scotland. We will continue to call on the UK Government to approach all its reserved decisions on North Sea oil and gas projects on a rigorous, evidence-led, case-by-case basis, with climate compatibility and energy security as key considerations.

Douglas Lumsden: The environmental compatibility report for Rosebank has been available for some weeks now. Does the SNP Government back Rosebank—yes or no?

Gillian Martin: It is getting a bit tiresome explaining the Scotland Act 1998, the Electricity Act 1989 and all the reserved functions of the UK Government to the Conservative energy spokesperson, who I would have thought would be familiar with the detail of those.

Meanwhile, we will continue the oil and gas transition training fund to support the industry-led energy skills passport and provide enhanced training opportunities for oil and gas workers via

our colleges. We have already invested more than £120 million in the north-east through our just transition fund and energy transition fund to support the region’s transition to net zero. That funding has helped to create new jobs, support innovation and secure a highly skilled workforce for the future. We are on the side of energy workers.

I turn to the omissions from the chancellor’s statement this afternoon, which I referenced earlier. That means turning to the fiscal regime in the North Sea, which is—again—reserved to the UK Government. I am deeply disappointed by the UK Government’s budget announcements a few hours ago, but, more than that, I am deeply worried. Do not just take my word on that; I have the response from David Whitehouse, the chief executive of Offshore Energies UK, who said:

“Today, the government turned down £50 billion of investment for the UK and the chance to protect the jobs and industries that keep this country running. Instead, they’ve chosen a path that will see 1,000 jobs continue to be lost every month, more energy imports and a contagion across supply chains”.

I totally agree with him.

On the other side of things, I want to explain how the situation is affecting communities, because the levy is not just a tax on companies.

Fergus Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Gillian Martin: I will come to Fergus Ewing in a second, after I make this point.

Communities are being affected not just in the north-east but across Scotland. Donna Hutchison, the chief executive of Aberdeen Cyrenians, has made clear the real-world consequences. She said:

“Every job lost in the energy supply chain lands somewhere—in a home, a family, and a community. It can mean rent arrears, foodbank visits, or a parent quietly skipping meals so their children don’t have to.”

Fergus Ewing: Would the way to avert those job losses not be to preserve and create the 1,000 jobs that would come from Cambo and Rosebank?

Equinor’s analysis is that 12 or 13kg of CO₂ is emitted per barrel of oil, which reduces to 3kg if there is electrification. That compares with 80kg for fracked gas or liquefied natural gas.

Gillian Martin: I will use the short time that I have to make one point to Fergus Ewing. I am fully in favour of electrification of production platforms. The decrease in production emissions is important and should be taken into account when all licences are considered.

I am deeply worried, because the UK Government did not even mention EPL in the budget statement today. The situation is worse

than simply not heeding warnings from the industry. The Labour Government has not taken the offer of Offshore Energies UK to reform the levy in a way that would prompt renewed investment while creating longer-term tax receipts for the UK Treasury. It did the work for the Government. It presented a plan and a way out that would lead to more revenue coming to the Exchequer, but it was not even referenced. As far as I know, it has not even had a response.

The EPL is affecting investment in offshore wind and the stability of the energy supply chain, as well as causing job losses well beyond oil and gas producers. It is having a ripple effect on communities in the north-east, Grangemouth and Fife. Furthermore, it is preventing the decommissioning of obsolete assets, with all the jobs that would come with that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Gillian Martin: It is simply a tax on the industrial workers and communities of Scotland. I am appalled that it has not been scrapped.

There is one more thing to say before I sit down. The Tories have a brass neck. They introduced the EPL, but they did not even mention that, or that they extended it. It is shameful that they cannot fess up. [*Interruption.*] They would rather just mislead the public.

I move S6M-19894.3, to leave out from first “the Scottish” to end and insert:

“that the Conservative Party, while in the UK Government, extended the Energy Profits Levy and failed to replace it with a sustainable fiscal regime that supports a just transition, and recognises that communities in Scotland are now paying the price of the UK Conservative administration’s levy on Scottish industry.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we please make sure that we can hear the person who has the floor? A bit of response and reaction to what is being said is one thing, but barracking in that way is not acceptable.

I call Sarah Boyack to speak to and move amendment S6M-19894.4. You have up to four minutes, Ms Boyack.

15:07

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate for Scottish Labour. Today’s debate should have been an opportunity for Parliament to come together and set out a clear, credible path for Scotland’s energy future. However, once again, we are confronted with a motion from the Conservatives that is more about political theatre than about serious long-term planning.

From the SNP, we see the same pattern.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you.

Douglas Lumsden: It is not about political theatre; it is about—

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you. I had four minutes, and now I have less time than that.

There has been a complete absence of SNP strategic leadership. Let me be clear from the outset that Scotland’s oil and gas industry has made a profound contribution to our economy, to workers’ livelihoods and to energy security for decades. The people who built that industry—the engineers, the offshore workers and the supply chain businesses—deserve a future that is every bit as strong as its past. Instead, they have been given years of neglect. The Conservatives at Westminster and the SNP at Holyrood have both stood by without any plan for what comes next. Our amendment makes that point clearly. We regret that the SNP and the Tories have let Scotland’s oil and gas sector down, with no plan for the future.

Scotland should be a global leader in the energy transition. We have the engineering expertise, the offshore skills, the natural resources and the public support, but we have lacked leadership. That is why we welcome the UK Government’s plans, which are deeply rooted in energy security, fairness and a realistic path to net zero. Labour is clear that oil and gas will continue to be part of our energy mix for decades to come, because turning off the taps tomorrow is not an option. That would undermine energy security, push up bills and make us even more dependent on imports from other countries. We also need to make—

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you. I just want to be clear on this topic—it is a short debate.

Scotland’s huge renewables potential must be unlocked by maximising the opportunities from offshore wind, accelerating onshore wind, expanding green hydrogen and investing in the carbon capture and storage projects that the Tories delayed for years—projects that would have delivered thousands of jobs across the north-east and at Grangemouth.

We must also address the climate and nature emergencies, which are beginning to affect households across the country. For example, let us look at heating our homes. Scotland’s 2.5 million homes account for 13 per cent of our total greenhouse gas emissions, so we need action now from the Scottish Government—I say that on fuel poverty awareness day. Our councils need support to invest in that area, so that we get new,

well-paid jobs across the country. Midlothian Energy Ltd is looking at delivering low-carbon energy projects and investment. Its heat network will supply 3,000 customers. The work has started, but we are not seeing the development to take it to the next level. I therefore call on the Scottish Government to deliver on the statutory undertaker rights that were included in the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021. Their implementation has been delayed, so heat network projects are not able to proceed. We will not see new jobs being created unless we have a plan or cross-Government action, which is vital.

Here is something that I agree with Douglas Lumsden on—shock, horror! A draft energy strategy was announced nearly three years ago. Businesses are crying out for clarity, supply chains need to be able to invest now, and, crucially, workers need to know where their future lies. A credible energy strategy must include a real skills and training plan, so that workers in oil and gas can transition; well-paid jobs; clear investment pathways for renewables; and green hydrogen that is linked to local production and supply chains and is not imported from foreign manufacturers. I call on the SNP Government to publish its energy strategy and just transition plan now.

I move amendment S6M-19894.4, to leave out from first “the Scottish” to end and insert:

“that the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Conservative and Unionist Party stood by for years and let Scotland’s oil and gas industry decline with no plan for the future; welcomes the UK Labour administration’s plans to ensure that oil and gas continue to be key parts of the country’s energy mix for decades to come, while working to unlock Scotland’s huge renewable potential; condemns the two decades of SNP failure to turn this enormous potential into jobs, wealth and social good for communities across Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently publish its Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, and to invest now in skills development and the green jobs of the future.”

15:11

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The green voting sheet for this afternoon’s debate was not difficult to fill out. Very obviously, we will oppose the motion. The Scottish Conservatives are here to serve the interests of the profit-hungry, climate-wrecking, lethal fossil fuel industry, and they make no attempt to hide it. Equally obviously, we will oppose the SNP’s demands for a massive tax cut for the same lethal fossil fuel industry. Just as obviously, we will oppose Labour’s amendment, which comes on the day of Labour’s capitulation to the fossil fuel industry and its backtracking on its already weak position on new oil and gas.

Sarah Boyack started off by blaming others for party political posturing and then indulged in exactly the same thing. None of the other parties

has put the blame where it belongs, which is fairly and squarely on the fossil fuel industry itself—those who have extracted not only vast amounts of oil and gas, which they have pumped into the atmosphere, but vast amounts of profit, and who are now happy to put their workforce on the economic scrap heap.

I thank the organisation Uplift for the briefing that it circulated. It rightly points out that North Sea developments are made economically viable only

“with massive state support”

and that the industry’s claim that half of the UK’s oil and gas demands could be met from the North Sea is misleading. The industry admits that it is

“considered to be beyond realistic assumptions”

and would require

“massive tax breaks.”

The industry has a long history of choosing to prioritise its shareholders over its workforce and, certainly, of prioritising profit over planet.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will Mr Harvie take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: No. I do not have time.

My real worry at the moment is that the Tory and Labour position—the new antagonism to any kind of credible climate policy—not only is bad in its own right and harmful in indulging the interests of the fossil fuel industry and rebooting climate denial, but is worse because of the effect that it is having on both the Labour and SNP Governments. They are clearly reaching the conclusion that they can persuade people to compare them to those who are looking to rip up climate legislation instead of being judged against what the science demands. In reaching that conclusion, they have clearly decided that they can get away with doing the absolute minimum on climate policy or even going into reverse.

That is why the Scottish Government thinks that it is fine to scrap road traffic reduction targets, scrap any halfway-serious action on clean heating, reject the UK Climate Change Committee’s advice on agriculture, and demand a massive tax break for the fossil fuel giants that have brought the world to a state of climate emergency. Clearly, it is also why the UK Government thinks that it is fine to betray the trust of those who thought that the Labour manifesto commitment on oil and gas meant something. I was always sceptical, but I know that there were those who thought that “no new licences” was a pledge worth having. Now it is clear that the UK Government will always put the interests of the fossil fuel giants first, and it does not care much for the last shreds of climate credibility that it once had.

It is easy to forget that it is only a few years since the Scottish Parliament had complete consensus in recognising the reality of the climate emergency. The public still want climate action, and growing Green parties in all the nations of the UK will continue to call out those who back the multinationals. We will stand up to the fossil fuel profiteers, and we will show that a fairer, greener and more equal society is the only viable path ahead of us.

15:15

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): In what was quite a unique collaboration, Offshore Energies UK and Scottish Renewables joined forces recently and called for the energy profits levy to be scrapped and replaced. They said:

“Unless we slow the pace of decline in North Sea oil and gas while simultaneously accelerating the scale and speed of renewable energy deployment, we face a widening gap in jobs, investment and capability that will weaken our economy.

Ultimately, this will make the government’s energy ambitions harder to achieve, and cause long-term damage to our communities.”

Gillian Martin: Does Willie Rennie agree that decommissioning has not been mentioned enough in the debate? Much of the activity that the supply chain and workers would have been doing relates to decommissioning, but they do not have the headroom to do it. That is another area that is costing jobs.

Willie Rennie: For years, we have talked about a just transition, and we now have it—live—in front of us but lacking a joined-up approach. Last night, I was at the Mossmorran working group, which I thought was quite an open and reflective event, but the deal was already done, the jobs have gone and there is no just transition plan for Mossmorran, as had been promised.

That happens over and over again. I understand that the Scottish Government will point to the Westminster Government, but the reality is that we do not have a plan whereby things work together in a joined-up way to make the transition work. Today, the UK Government has buried on page 71 of its budget document the replacement for the EPL, the oil and gas price premium, which is projected to be replaced by 2030, with a consultation in the year 2026-27. However, the UK Government is so far behind the curve that the OBR does not even have projections for what tax that would raise.

We need to get real. We can see, right now, the impact of jobs going in the north-east—the Aberdeen Cyrenians have already been referred to—and it is a handbrake on the region’s economic prospects. We have seen the impact at

Mossmorran, on my doorstep, and at Grangemouth, where Petrofac is going into administration with 2,000 jobs. Many of those people will not go for other opportunities in Scotland; they might just disappear abroad, and we will lose the skills base that might be essential for developing the renewables potential that this country clearly has. The transition must be managed.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: I am sorry, but I do not have the time.

The North Sea oil and gas basin in the United Kingdom is, of course, a declining resource—that is a geological fact—but we are not making that decline any better by having such an aggressive EPL tax regime. The UK Government needs to understand that, if we are going to live with this for generations, we need a more sensible arrangement. I will admit that we supported a levy on excess profits back in 2022. We thought that it was the right thing to do at the time, because the profits were excessive. That does not mean that we were committed to it forever, though, ignoring the reality on the ground of an extended windfall tax arrangement irrespective of the impact on people and their livelihoods.

The UK Government and the Scottish Government must get their act together and work on a proper just transition, so that we do not end up arguing polar opposites but can have a—to some degree—boring, managed plan; so that people can live and work here and pay their taxes; so that we can have energy security in this country; and so that, all together, we can deliver on our climate change obligations. Is that too much to ask for? It sometimes seems that it is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): We move to the open debate.

15:20

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak today, given the unquestionable—but often overlooked—importance of the oil and gas sector to the Highlands and Islands. My region has been at the forefront of the Scottish oil and gas industry since it began.

Last week, the First Minister’s remarks to the Parliament showed that he sees the future of the industry in terms of managed decline. That is quite a turnaround for a man who, not long ago, was talking about a second oil boom and about how more than half of the value of the North Sea’s resources was still to be extracted. With the odd honourable exception, members on the SNP benches have spent the past decade with a policy

on oil and gas that mirrors their much-ridiculed views on an independent Scotland's currency: one that is unclear and constantly changing. Labour, too, has found itself speaking with two faces: one presented to the workers, another to its environmentalist support. Although they may be useful political tactics in the short term, the equivocation about our oil and gas sector at the UK level from Labour and in this Parliament from the SNP—with its friends in the Scottish Greens—has cost investment. It has also cost jobs, and it will continue to cost jobs unless things change.

Grangemouth and Mossmorran may dominate the headlines, but facilities such as the Flotta and Sullom Voe oil terminals are vital to our communities in the Highlands and Islands. I have raised the futures of those terminals with UK and Scottish ministers and will continue to do so, but we cannot pretend that they are local matters—the issue is one of wider policy. I urge SNP ministers in this place and Labour ministers at Westminster not to let those places become another Grangemouth or Mossmorran. They should not wait until crisis forces them to act. They should not wait until it is too late and then create another constitutional fight over who is to blame. Talks on the future of both those sites, and others, should be on-going; they should be happening now, and in detail.

Disastrous though it may be, the Green prescription for Scotland at least has the merit of being consistent, as Patrick Harvie highlighted. The same cannot be said of the policies of the SNP and Labour, which seem to want the tax revenues and jobs without the inconvenience of the industry. That position cannot stand. As the Scottish Affairs Committee noted last month, there is little sense on the ground of a just transition happening. We are haemorrhaging jobs, and the once-promised green jobs revolution has not materialised on anything like the scale that the SNP suggested. Meanwhile, the vital transferable skills that could contribute to clean energy roles are also being lost. It is clear that, even if the long-term promises of the transition were realised, on its current trajectory many skills from our oil and gas sector will disappear. Skilled workers are retiring, retraining or leaving the country for better prospects elsewhere.

What must be done? Well, abolishing the energy profits levy, as our motion calls for, would have been a start—but, yet again, Labour is not listening. There will be no silver bullet for the industry; global economic forces will not stop at our borders. What this Parliament—and Governments both here in Edinburgh and down in London—must do is get behind our oil and gas industry, without equivocation, and move to a strategy that clearly emphasises maximising production. As Fergus Ewing highlighted, although

its Rosebank development west of Shetland faces opposition from Government, Equinor is pushing ahead with plans to drill 250 oil and gas exploration wells in Norwegian waters in the next decade.

We need to get licences approved and ensure that there is a fair taxation system in place—one that lets the industry function while delivering a sensible and realistic contribution to public spending. We should recognise that oil and gas are going to continue to be in demand for the foreseeable future. The alternative would be devastating and is wholly unrealistic. There is no merit in offshoring production and destroying our own industry for the sake of statistics. A transition that simply means a greater reliance on imports in the short and medium terms is one that fails to address our energy security. It harms not only our current industries but our future industrial and economic potential—all to satisfy a paper-thin illusion of greater progress towards net zero.

15:24

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The budget is a little over two hours old, and I have already had a number of messages and communications from constituents and family members about the content of that budget and the fact that the energy profits levy will remain. I have been told, “They are destroying Scotland’s energy future,” and, “They are taxing my job out of existence.”

Mr Lumsden seems to have forgotten that it was his party that introduced the energy profits levy in the first place. Rather than strutting about on his high horse, Mr Lumsden and the entire Tory party should be on their knees apologising to every single oil and gas worker for the horrific damage that the Tory energy profits levy has done to the industry. The Tories have gone, but, whether in relation to Brexit, eye-watering household bills or the energy profits levy, the promise of change has brought change for the worse under Labour.

The offshore industry desperately needs change for the better, and it desperately needs the energy profits levy to be abolished, not in 2030 but now. The levy needs to be abolished to keep oil and gas workers in jobs, to support the transition to net zero, to boost the economy and to protect communities in the north-east of Scotland.

The Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce estimates that 100,000 jobs will be lost if the UK Government does not get its boot off the neck of the oil and gas sector. It is not only the offshore oil and gas workers who will brave the perils of the North Sea or the Atlantic to ensure that the lights stay on and our homes stay warm this winter who will be affected; the tens of

thousands of workers in the supply chain in every corner of Scotland and beyond will also be affected. The job losses have already begun. Just the other week, the Port of Aberdeen announced redundancies due to oil and gas activity falling by 25 per cent.

Labour must not do to the oil and gas workers what Thatcher did to our coal miners. Labour must stop following the Thatcherite blueprint of industrial decimation that has blighted Scotland's pit villages. Instead, it must listen to Offshore Energies UK and unlock £50 billion-worth of UK oil and gas projects, which will sustain tens of thousands of jobs and, over time, deliver higher tax receipts while supporting our energy security and net zero ambitions.

This is about the ambition to reach net zero. We cannot transition to net zero without the investment, expertise and skills of our offshore industry and our oil and gas workers, because today's offshore oil and gas workers are tomorrow's offshore renewables workers. Today, the chancellor had the opportunity to abolish the energy profits levy, and I am gutted that she did not, as are thousands upon thousands of people who I and others represent. It is likely too late, but the chancellor could think again and abolish the energy profits levy. However, I do not think that she will, as neither she nor the Labour Party gives a flying futret for Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland.

15:28

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

What an absolutely dreadful speech that was by Kevin Stewart. I will pick up on a number of the points that he made in it in a moment, because it was completely blind to his own party's failings on the issue.

However, I want to start on another point. Douglas Lumsden, in his excellent opening speech, and Willie Rennie both mentioned Mossmorran. I just cannot get past this point, so I will use the debate to ask for a very simple answer from the cabinet secretary. In April 2024, her predecessor, Màiri McAllan, said that the Government was developing a just transition plan for Mossmorran. Where is that plan?

Gillian Martin: I think that Douglas Ross has been given the answer to that question. Màiri McAllan announced that a just transition plan for Mossmorran would be worked on after the deployment of the Grangemouth just transition plan, which is only a couple of months old.

What we did not see coming was what ExxonMobil has done. The UK Government knew about that a good few months in advance of us, and Kate Forbes is on record as saying when she

was told about ExxonMobil's decision in relation to Mossmorran. The just transition plan would have made no difference to this announcement that we did not know about.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, that was a very long intervention.

Douglas Ross: That was a very long answer. First of all, we do not know what difference it would make, because no one has ever seen the plan. The Government made a commitment—it made a pledge in the chamber—to develop a just transition plan. I would like the cabinet secretary to review her answer after the debate, because my understanding, from a request made under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, is that the Scottish Government said that the plan was in progress. That was more than two months ago. If the cabinet secretary is saying that it was starting to do that work in just the past couple of months, she has potentially misled the Parliament. However, the issue is not going away, because this is typical of the SNP: it makes grand announcements in the chamber, it does not do the work, and then it cries foul and blames other people when problems such as this occur.

I want to use the remainder of my time to focus on the rant that we heard from Gillian Martin at the end of her speech, about the EPL and the Conservatives, and the disgraceful speech that we just had from Kevin Stewart. SNP speaker after SNP speaker has criticised the energy profits levy, but not one of them has been honest enough to say that they called for it; they demanded it. They said there must be—

Kevin Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Ross: I am not going to give way to Kevin Stewart. I certainly will not waste my time on Kevin Stewart, but let Kevin Stewart listen to what some of his own SNP members had to say about an energy profits levy. If he turns round, he can ask Jackie Dunbar what on earth she was thinking when she said:

"We must extend the windfall tax".—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2022; c 97.]

If he turns back round and looks to the front bench, he can ask Gillian Martin what she was thinking when she said:

"We need to put a windfall tax in operation".—[*Official Report*, 18 May 2022; c 36.]

When he travels back to Aberdeen, he can ask Stephen Flynn why he lodged a motion in the House of Commons that said that the Government should implement a windfall tax on companies.

Kevin Stewart: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Douglas Ross: No, I am not giving way to Kevin Stewart.

When Tom Arthur, an SNP minister, comes into the chamber, maybe he can say why he not only supported the energy profits levy, but said that he wanted it to be broadened. He said:

“a strengthened windfall tax should be an important source of funding”—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2022; c 56.]

and that it should be broadened.

John Swinney, now the First Minister, said:

“We have been clear that an enhanced windfall tax should fund that support in place of increased borrowing or spending cuts.”—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2022; c 25.]

I will take no lectures from the SNP. It wanted the EPL, and it called for it. It cannot now cry foul when it is implemented.

15:32

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

It is clear that we will continue to depend on hydrocarbons for many years to come. These are precious resources, and we must redouble our efforts to stop using them for transport and heating and to develop substitutes for their use in products where there are not yet alternatives.

Ahead of the debate, I believed that we all agreed that we should not use all our reserves. We need to recognise that these are finite resources and that, if we do not take steps to move away from their use, they will run out—something that the Conservatives and the SNP have ignored in today’s debate so far.

The Conservatives and the SNP have also not taken account of damage caused to the planet by burning hydrocarbons and releasing more carbon into the atmosphere. That is not news—we have known about it for decades—and yet we are still far too dependent on those resources. We need to increase the pace of our development of alternatives, and we need to develop other industries in order to have a just transition for our workers.

However, that does not mean selling off our resources to the lowest bidder. The ScotWind auction is a case in point. I thought that the objective of an auction was to find the highest bidder. Whose idea was it to set a ceiling on the auction? The Government’s response to that question is that it was intended to leave more money in the bidders’ coffers for local workforce development and jobs. That is spurious, because there is no onus on those companies to do that. What that approach did was boost the profits of the multinational companies, with no return for the Scottish people.

The £700 million that was raised at the auction could have been £8 billion to £10 billion, which would have covered the SNP’s black hole and left plenty to fund a just transition—something that the Scottish Government has failed to do. It could have funded our further education sector, which is crucial to a just transition. Colleges are the vehicles that will transition the skills of our workforce from oil and gas to renewables. What a wasted opportunity.

We need to reset the energy market. Energy prices are totally dependent on oil and gas prices.

Gillian Martin: Will Rhoda Grant take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: I am very short of time.

We need to move our energy on to a different footing, and we have the opportunity to do that, but it is not being grasped. We know that communities get compensation for hosting renewables in their areas. We also know that those communities can develop their own renewables and get 35 times more from that investment—funds that they can use to tackle fuel poverty and build community resilience. That is community wealth building in practice.

I was disappointed that the Scottish Government did not lease the Cruach Mhor wind farm in Argyll and Bute to Cowal Community Energy. That community energy company would have used the profits from the development to benefit its community. That is another wasted opportunity. The Scottish Government also rejected an amendment to the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill that would have ensured that that could never happen again.

Gillian Martin: If Rhoda Grant will take an intervention—

Rhoda Grant: Do I have time?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, there is no time in hand.

Rhoda Grant: I am sorry.

We need to ensure that, in future, priority is always given to community bids for leases and repowering opportunities for renewable energy on publicly owned land. That should be a right.

The Conservatives bring the debate to the chamber having abjectly failed to decrease our dependence on hydrocarbons to prepare our country for the future and protect our planet for future generations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stuart McMillan joins us remotely.

15:36

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde)

(SNP): Every MSP recognises the economic impact that the oil and gas sector has had on the wider economy since the 1970s. Clearly, there has also been an environmental impact. Although the sector is based in the north-east, it involves workers from across the country, in addition to companies in the supply chain. Therefore, the debate on the oil and gas sector and the energy sector as a whole is for every MSP.

I have family who work in the sector or who have previously worked in it, and I have friends who work in the sector. I have long since heard their concerns about the sector's future. I recognise that their views on renewable energy are not that positive, but that is not the case for every worker in the oil and gas sector. It is essential that the just transition happens. Douglas Lumsden stated earlier that Scotland needs a transition based on reality, and I very much agree.

The cabinet secretary has previously highlighted her family background as coming from Clydebank. She was right to highlight the absolute carnage that was wrought on the communities along the banks of the Clyde when the shipbuilding industry was decimated by the Conservatives in the 1980s.

Communities such as mine are still struggling to fully deal with that. There has been 44 years of population decline because industry was shut down. Thousands of jobs were lost and yards were torn down, with retail units, fast food outlets, some offices and flats being built in their place. Those facilities are cleaner than the shipyards and heavy engineering that once stood there, but there was no concept of a just transition at that time. The enterprise zone that was installed delivered some successes, but very little was of long standing.

My community suffered as a consequence of a Conservative Administration that was hellbent on destroying working-class communities. I do not want that to be replicated in the north-east of Scotland—where some of my family now live, as they were forced to get on their bikes as per the demands of Norman Tebbit.

The energy profits levy was useful in the short term, but the fact that the past Conservative Government never replaced it with something more sustainable is yet another example of the utter chaos that was emblematic of the Conservatives' time in government. The SNP amendment states:

“and recognises that communities in Scotland are now paying the price of the UK Conservative administration's levy on Scottish industry.”

My only challenge to my party on that amendment is that the energy profits levy is the present-day

equivalent of what the Tories do to Scotland any time that they are in power. The systematic demolition of industry and communities, or the raking in of finance from cash-cow communities when it suits them, will always be fair game to the Conservatives.

Whether under the Conservatives or Labour, Westminster has failed to provide the oil and gas industry with certainty or stability. That approach is in direct opposition to supporting jobs and the just transition, which would safeguard energy security and lower bills.

Fundamentally, the energy profits levy should be scrapped and a proportionate tax regime should be established. There was a time when oil and gas giants were making windfall profits in the UK, but that is not the case now. They are global companies, and the vast majority of their profits are made outwith the UK. All that the windfall tax is doing is costing jobs and driving a more rapid decline in the North Sea. In a nation that is as energy rich as Scotland is, it should be a disgrace that so many of our citizens are so energy poor—and every single MSP should be appalled at that.

Although Labour promised to cut energy bills by up to £300 per year, the reality is that bills have risen and the blame lies squarely at Westminster's door. Key powers over industry, trade, industrial relations, employment law and energy are all in Labour's hands. That is why it is vital that we remain steadfastly behind the renewable energy revolution and maximise the investment and opportunities that it will bring.

If Westminster repeats the mistakes of the past and allows Scotland's immense natural resources to be mismanaged, we will all risk the same fate. I do not want other communities to suffer 44 years of decline and—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Graham Simpson to speak for up to two minutes.

15:41

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland)

(Reform): What a disgrace the budget was. What a disgrace it was that Rachel Reeves did not listen to calls to scrap the energy profits levy. It appears that she liked what the Conservatives started and she is doubling down on it.

Thousands of jobs are being lost in the North Sea thanks to the measure that was brought in under the Tories and made worse under Labour. Rachel Reeves should be ashamed of herself. She might have sounded the death knell for the oil and gas industry in Scotland, but the SNP cannot get off the hook, because its anti-oil and gas rhetoric has had an impact. The workers of

Grangemouth, Mossmorran and elsewhere know who they have been let down by.

The cost of living is among the top concerns of voters across the UK, but we would not know it from the utterances of ministers in Holyrood. The SNP is currently demanding that Ed Miliband vastly increases the subsidies that are on offer to renewables. That is because, as the Tory motion rightly says, the SNP has an “ideological drive” to end production in the North Sea. It is a case of, “It’s Scotland’s oil, as long as you don’t touch it.” What renewables advocates do not tell us is that, since the subsidies are recovered through electricity bills, increasing subsidies means higher electricity bills for everyone, at a time when households are already feeling the pinch.

So, well within my two minutes, I say that, despite the hypocrisy of the Tory motion, I will support it and reject the amendments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

15:43

Patrick Harvie: What a curious debate we have had. At times, I have felt as though I am the only atheist in the room as holy war breaks out and religious schisms emerge.

There has been so much performative disagreement between all the other parties when in fact they agree on so much. They all want to expand fossil fuel extraction; they just have different degrees of enthusiasm about how much they are willing to advocate for it. They are all slowing down and backtracking on climate policy and they all seem to share the common delusion, expressed by many members across the chamber, that the fossil fuel industry is investing in the just transition.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The oil and gas industry is failing to invest in the solutions that will enable the transition. Three quarters of North Sea companies plan to invest solely in oil and gas production between now and 2030. Globally, the oil and gas industry invests nothing more than marginal amounts in renewables and other transition technologies. Across the chamber, members have been trading quotes from the fossil fuel industry and its representative body as though they all believe that the Parliament is elected to represent them and their shareholders.

As they express a shared anger at the lack of a just transition, all the other political parties are pointing fingers at each other, instead of looking at who the truly bad actors in this scenario are—those who have extracted vast profits from fossil fuels and who have zero interest in investing in the transition.

The Green amendment, which was not selected for debate, also expressed regret. However, unlike the Conservatives, who expressed regret about an ideological opposition to oil and gas, we expressed regret about the Conservative Party’s ideological opposition to credible climate policy. There would be immense opportunities for Scotland in relation to long-term jobs, energy security, the economy and environmental improvements if the Scottish and UK Governments pursued what we described in our amendment as an informed, worker-led and evidence-based just transition to a sustainable economy.

We agree that the Scottish Government should finally publish its energy strategy and just transition plan, but it must include the continued presumption against new oil and gas exploration and production.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will Patrick Harvie take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I do not have time.

We have called on the UK Government to ensure that those in the fossil fuel industry, who have generated vast profits while causing the current climate emergency, pay enough tax to make a serious contribution to the cost of the transition, instead of the costs falling on the state alone. Fundamentally, that is what is missing from every other political party’s position on the crisis.

The central reason why an unjust transition is taking place is that no Government is willing to hold to account the billionaires who sit behind the fossil fuel industry—those who have lined their pockets and are now putting their workers on the economic scrap heap, despite having caused an environmental crisis that will threaten all our futures. What is needed for a just transition is to hold economic power democratically accountable, instead of leaving things to the self-interest of billionaires.

15:47

Sarah Boyack: On several occasions in the past few weeks, we have discussed the need for leadership and action to deliver a fair transition, with new jobs across the country, while supporting those in the oil and gas sector. Therefore, I welcome today’s announcement by the chancellor that she will tackle the cost of living for working families by cutting the cost of energy bills by, on average, £150 a year from April.

Kevin Stewart: Will Ms Boyack give way on that point?

Sarah Boyack: No.

The UK Government is backing Scottish industry and jobs, including through £14.5 million

for Grangemouth, £20 million for Inchgreen dry dock and the North Sea future plan for a fair, managed and prosperous transition. That will be critical, and it followed extensive consultation with workers and unions.

The UK Government will establish the North Sea jobs service, a world-leading national employment programme that will offer tailored end-to-end support for members of the workforce who are seeking new opportunities, including in clean energy, defence and advanced manufacturing. The service will provide support at every step of a worker's career journey, and it builds on the discussion that we have had in this Parliament about the energy skills passport. Funding of up to £20 million will be provided by the UK and Scottish Governments, following demand for the Aberdeen skills pilot to help oil and gas workers to retrain. Transitional energy certificates will be critical in supporting the management of existing North Sea fields for the entirety of their lifespans, and a new jobs brokerage service will offer end-to-end career transition support. That will result in more skilled Scottish jobs and more opportunities for the green industries of the future to drive our economic growth.

We need our Governments to work together, whether in relation to project willow for Grangemouth or support for the workers at Mossmorran. We also need a joined-up approach when considering the benefits of capturing heat from waste and from data centres, to ensure that we use the additional electricity, instead of paying £1.5 billion in constraint payments. We must ensure that we make the right investment.

I agree with the cabinet secretary about the opportunities to decarbonise existing oil and gas platforms, including through making links to offshore floating wind, considering low-carbon technology and investing in new shipping.

Rhoda Grant's comments about ScotWind were bang on. It could have delivered so much more in terms of both income and Scottish manufacturing.

Our approach is rooted in partnership with workers, businesses and communities. Part of me is not surprised that, today, the SNP has focused on the EPL. The SNP has criticised Tory austerity and ignored the additional public spending that our Labour Government has already delivered. That is £5.2 billion already this year, and my understanding is that, when we add in what was announced in today's budget, there will be £10.3 billion in total for the Scottish Government.

We can continue with the decade of division, delay or missed opportunity, or choose a path where oil and gas workers are supported; renewables are accelerated; people's bills come down; and we have a clean, green energy

powerhouse that is built in Scotland. That is the future to which Scottish Labour is committed, maximising the opportunities, with new jobs created right across the country delivering confidence in supply chains; supporting new manufacturing opportunities; investing in renewables; and making our homes, buildings and transport, and our industry, fit for the challenges of the future. That is the future that our Parliament should back today.

15:50

Gillian Martin: I did not really expect to have to correct quite a lot of misinformation that is coming through in the debate—*[Interruption.]* Actually, I will rephrase that. I did not think that I would be using a lot of my time to respond to some of the accusations that have been put to me—*[Interruption.]* I would also like to be able to hear myself speak as I rebut some of the comments—*[Interruption.]*

It is all very well for members to quote from a debate in 2022, when we were all in agreement that there had to be a levy on excess profits. Every member across the chamber agreed in 2022 that there were excess profits, but, by spring 2023, those profits were absolutely plummeting, and that was starting to affect investment. The Scottish Government, along with others, therefore called for the EPL to be scrapped. That is the fact of the matter, and I make no apology for initially supporting what was meant to be a temporary situation where there were excess profits.

I had an issue with the fact that other sectors that also had excess profits were not being taxed in the same way, and I commented at the time that I thought that it was unfair to single out one particular sector when others were making so much profit—

Craig Hoy: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Gillian Martin: No, I will not, because Craig Hoy did not contribute to the debate.

I also make no apology for focusing—

Patrick Harvie: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is the cabinet secretary taking any interventions from the gentlemen who have just offered to intervene?

Gillian Martin: No—I am going to continue, because I ran out of time in my opening speech, and I am not going to run out of time in this one.

I make no apology for focusing on the energy profits levy, because it is the single issue that every single supply-chain company, whether it works with renewables, oil and gas or a mixture of the two, has continually highlighted to me and to

others. Those companies say that the effect of the EPL is damaging their viability, and they are seriously worried about the impact that that is having.

What actually happens when we have an oil and gas industry that has no headroom to invest or to do anything other than just keep production at a low level? The industry does not invest in decommissioning, which would create thousands of jobs. Decommissioning was supposed to fill the gap between the decline in the production of oil and gas and the ramping up of ScotWind. However, it is not happening, because the companies do not have the headroom to do it given the 78 per cent profits levy that they currently face.

The supply chain starts to lose confidence, as well. Many supply-chain companies let people go, and people lose jobs. The people who have lost their jobs go elsewhere, to other parts of the world, and we will be lucky to get any of them back. We increase our demand for importing natural gas from elsewhere to heat our buildings for as long as they are heated with natural gas, because we are not producing enough of it domestically.

I understand why Sarah Boyack and Rhoda Grant did not want to dwell on the EPL—they must be secretly disappointed that there was not an announcement in Rachel Reeves's budget statement today.

I see that Sarah Boyack is shaking her head; she is obviously pleased that the EPL continues. However, as long as the EPL continues in its current form, 1,000 jobs will be lost each month. That will not affect oil and gas workers directly; those jobs will be in the supply chains, and in cafes, restaurants and cinemas—the other sectors in the community that depend on their clientele and people having money in their pocket. It will affect the community that I represent, as well as Fife, Grangemouth and further afield. It is not just a north-east problem or an oil and gas problem; it has a wide reach.

To be honest, people need to wake up to the fact that this is not about ideology; it is about protecting people's lives in a managed just transition that must happen—but it must happen without cliff edges. It is fine when cliff edges appear on the horizon, because we can prepare for them, but when they are introduced by punitive fiscal policies, which ExxonMobil accused the Labour Government of, hell mend us all. To have a just transition, we need a fiscal policy that supports workers in the supply chain and beyond.

15:55

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Douglas Lumsden's motion opens by regretting the

"ideological drive to end North Sea oil and gas exploration and production".

Nothing in the debate contributions or in the amendments to the motion from the SNP, the Greens, or Labour suggests that those parties have the least recourse to the facts or, indeed, practical reality. They have failed to confront a simple, but overarching, truth: our society runs on oil and gas. When Rhoda Grant makes facile comments about not using oil and gas, she utterly fails to recognise the demand for oil and gas to heat our homes, power our factories and run the trains—

Rhoda Grant: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: Not just now, thank you.

Rhoda Grant: You mentioned me.

Liam Kerr: Not just now, thank you.

Oil and gas is also required to make plastics, which make our medical equipment, food packaging, phones, cars, and the turbine blades and nacelle covers of wind turbines. Demand for plastics is not falling; it is rising. Plastics are entirely synthetic and are made from oil and gas. They drive 12 per cent of global oil demand. By 2030, it will be a third, and by 2050, it will be half.

Brian Whittle: My colleague is making a good point. Does he agree that the oil that is extracted from the North Sea is very high grade? It is used in the petrochemical industry and is probably in all our clothes. Without it, the national health service would collapse.

Liam Kerr: Brian Whittle makes exactly my point: there is no debate about whether we use oil and gas; we are debating where we get it from. Conservative colleagues have made the positive case for why that must be from the North Sea. I argue that the SNP and Labour's position, both today and in years past, is an ethical failure. Patrick Harvie absolutely missed that, since demand will not reduce, all reductions that the UK makes in North Sea oil and gas must necessarily be replaced by imports from countries such as the United States, Qatar, or Russia. In Fergus Ewing's intervention, he gave members hard data on the fact that oil and gas from those countries carries a far higher carbon footprint. The result is that, although we cut domestic production, global emissions rocket.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: Perhaps in a second, Mr Harvie.

What of the human cost of the domestic cut? In a typically measured way, Willie Rennie told us of the jobs that will go, and are already going—hundreds of thousands of jobs, both direct and indirect. When Sarah Boyack speaks of a transition, I remind her of the Scottish Trades Union Congress analysis, which shows that wind energy creates just one job for every £1 million that is spent, in contrast to more than 13 jobs per every £1 million that is spent in oil and gas.

One of the few correct things that Kevin Stewart said in his speech was that there is no transition without the oil and gas industry. The SNP and Labour's ideological closure of the North Sea does nothing to reduce global consumption; it just slashes British jobs and, as Jamie Halcro Johnston flagged, it torpedoes the economy.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: Can I see whether I have time at the end, please?

To continue on the human cost, North Sea operations are among the most tightly regulated in the world. They have strict emissions standards, strong worker protections and transparent oversight. Replacing North Sea oil and gas with imported hydrocarbons transfers the environmental impact, the industrial risk and the human burden to countries that have weaker regulations, labour standards and safety enforcement. It is an out of sight, out of mind approach, and I find that morally unjustifiable and ethically indefensible.

Patrick Harvie: As I was challenged on the issue of imports and exports, I will simply point out something that I think the member already knows, which is that the large majority of domestic production goes to export. It is not used in this country. Even the small proportion that is used in this country is at a price that is set on global markets, so this is not about displacing other exports.

Liam Kerr: I am afraid that Mr Harvie has shown his ignorance in that intervention because, in reality, the issue is about where we refine the oil, and a report that was published by Wood Mackenzie this week shows that 65 per cent of UK-exported crude comes back to the UK as refined product. We have to get real about this, and we have to get data and evidence into the debate, because, as the motion notes, ideology will not cut it.

We will continue to use oil and gas for plastics, for industry, for heating and for the transition to renewables. The ethical question is not whether we use those resources but where we source them from.

As Scottish Conservative speakers have set out, using the North Sea is environmentally beneficial and economically prudent, it supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and it helps our energy security. Ending North Sea oil production, which the SNP's presumption and Labour's appalling budget from today will make happen, means that demand will increasingly be satisfied by imports, an approach that increases emissions, exports harm, funds dubious regimes, undermines energy security and erodes trust in climate policy. It is unethical policy disguised as environmental virtue signalling. Accordingly, this Parliament must vote for the motion in Douglas Lumsden's name and reject the amendments in order to force the immediate and unequivocal reversal of the Scottish Government's presumption against new oil and gas, and continue to demand that Labour reverse course on the energy profits levy.

Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19895, in the name of Craig Hoy, on growing Scotland's economy. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. I call Craig Hoy to speak to and move the motion.

16:02

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Today, the chickens came home to roost for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In what has been described as "shambolic" and "a fiscal fandango", Rachel Reeves has systematically and recklessly talked down the economy. She has flown kites and then shot them down. She has repeatedly leaked tax and spending proposals. She has performed U-turn after U-turn and then sought to blame others for the breaches that have sown much doubt and distrust. It has been a bizarre strategy: a nihilistic form of expectation mismanagement, which has taken a wrecking ball to the United Kingdom economy.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I will not give way at this point in time.

Markets have heard the mood music and have responded in kind—

Michael Marra: The pound is up, borrowing is down.

Craig Hoy: —with the savage cost of servicing our long-term debt.

Michael Marra: Pound is up, borrowing is down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Marra, please let the member speak.

Craig Hoy: If Mr Marra were to look at what we are paying on the gilt market relative to our competitors, he would realise that the markets have no confidence in this Government.

Michael Marra: It is cheaper than this morning.

Craig Hoy: Mr Marra says that it is cheaper than this morning—it was extremely bad this morning. I will leave Mr Marra to make his own case for this disastrous budget.

It is quite clear that we are now in a doom loop of Rachel Reeves's own making. Confidence in the economy has slumped, business confidence is dismal—the sharpest drop since Labour was last in power 17 years ago—and confidence in this Labour Government is shot beyond repair.

However, it did not have to be like this. When the Conservative Government left office, we were leading in terms of gross domestic product growth, which was twice what it is now, inflation was falling, interest rates were on a steadily downward path and the cost of living crisis was abating. The Conservatives recognise that things were far from perfect, and we are determined to learn from the mistakes that we made. I only wish that Michael Marra would do the same.

Last June, the green shoots of recovery were visible and very real, but they are now gone. Today's reckless tax-and-spend budget—and, I suspect, the Scottish budget—will set us back further still, because it was a missed opportunity to promote economic growth; to deliver investment into Scotland; to address the alarming increase in economic inactivity; to reduce and not further inflate the benefits bill; to recognise the importance of backing and supporting working households; to ease the cost of living pressures; and to protect Scotland's struggling rural economy.

As the debate that preceded this one made clear, our top ask for this budget was to end the energy profits levy, but the chancellor did not scrap it—in fact, she has extended it. We in the chamber should now share a very real concern for the oil and gas industry, including the jobs, the tax revenues and the wider economic activity that it generates, which the Office for Budget Responsibility has downgraded by £2.5 billion for this year alone.

To hear from John Swinney and the Scottish National Party hollow calls for the chancellor to scrap the windfall tax on oil and gas companies is, frankly, pitiful. That has more to do with John Swinney saving his own job than preventing further job losses in this vitally important sector.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: If I can get the time back, Deputy Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is not a lot of time, but we will see how we go.

Kate Forbes: Could the member remind us which party introduced the EPL? That is all that I want to know. *[Interruption.]*

Craig Hoy: The Deputy First Minister should have been here earlier. I believe that she asked for it. Which party brought in the presumption against the issuing of further oil and gas licences in Scotland, which is doing damage to the Scottish economy?

There is a raft of other tax and spending announcements where our commonsense calls

have been ignored by both Governments. Labour's cruel family farm tax will do real damage to the farming community and the wider rural economy.

Neither the United Kingdom chancellor nor the Scottish finance secretary has grasped the fundamental rules around taxation. What Scotland needs now is the sensible application of a modern-day equivalent of Reaganomics, not the counterintuitive, tinpot fiscal policies of Rachel Reeves and Shona Robison.

Our motion sets out a position against any further tax rises. Instead, Rachel Reeves is setting out on a path towards ever higher tax—a path to nowhere that is well trodden by Shona Robison and the SNP—and an extra £26 billion in tax by 2029-30. That is the highest ever tax base in the United Kingdom. It is tax on top of tax on top of tax.

Freezing thresholds might in the short term stealthily fill the chancellor's black hole, but that will surely and steadily damage the economy as more and more middle earners become enmeshed in ever higher taxes. As we see in Scotland, the net effect is that people work less hard, save less, retire earlier or do not take that promotion, which all compounds the depressing doom loop that undermines growth and investment.

However, it is not just income tax that is rising under Labour—there are higher taxes on savings, dividends, gambling, capital gains and the use of electric cars. There is national insurance on salary-sacrifice pensions and more tax on In Bru. This is not a smorgasbord of tax changes; it is a fiscal car crash that is anti-aspiration, anti-business and anti-growth.

The politics of envy are all over the budget. There is a higher tax on middle-income earners and a mansions tax, which sends out a message to the world that the rich ain't welcome in Britain any more.

Labour is not just making the same mistakes as the SNP is on tax; it is making the same mistakes on welfare, too, with £3 billion to remove the two-child benefit cap and a failure to fundamentally reform the social security system. Labour's approach and the SNP's approach mean that welfare spending is now out of control in Scotland and in the rest of the UK.

I accept that today's budget delivers extra resources of £820 million to the Scottish Government. My challenge to John Swinney and the SNP is this: why not do something that they have not done before? They should do something novel, such as cut tax. That would deliver the best solution to tackle the cost of living crisis by giving people their own money back. That would be a good budget for Scotland and a good budget for

growth, but it will not happen because John Swinney is Rachel Reeves in disguise.

We need both of Scotland's Governments to urgently prioritise economic growth and to deliver economic stability. The Scottish Conservatives are pro-growth, we are low-tax and we are on the side of workers and businesses.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the UK Budget should be an opportunity to promote economic growth, deliver investment in Scotland and address the alarming increase in economic inactivity; recognises the importance of backing working households, easing cost pressures and protecting Scotland's rural economy; believes that ending the Energy Profits Levy is essential to secure investment in the North Sea; emphasises that the UK Labour administration's tax rises on family farms and small businesses are deeply damaging and should be reversed, and warns against further tax rises; calls on the Scottish Government to prioritise growth with measures to improve productivity, support small businesses, tackle soaring welfare costs and strengthen Scotland's fiscal position, and believes that both of Scotland's governments must urgently prioritise economic stability, investment and opportunity as the foundations of sustainable public services within the UK.

16:09

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): There are many reasons to be optimistic about Scotland's economic performance and potential. We have a fundamentally strong and resilient economy. Since 2007, gross domestic product per person in Scotland has grown by more than 10 per cent, compared with less than 7 per cent across the UK as a whole. Productivity has grown at an average rate of 0.9 per cent per year, compared with the UK average of 0.3 per cent. We have a highly skilled population and world-class sectors in food and drink, financial services, gaming, digital technology and energy. We are second only to London and the south-east of England when it comes to attracting foreign direct investment.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ivan McKee: I do not think that I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no time in hand—it is up to the member.

Ivan McKee: Be very quick.

Murdo Fraser: If what the minister says is correct, why did Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli make the point in his report that was published just two weeks ago that, had the Scottish economy grown at the same rate as the UK economy, we would have an extra £1 billion in tax revenues to spend? Was he wrong?

Ivan McKee: If we look back at the data for the most recent full year—that is, 2024—we will see that the Scottish economy grew faster than the UK economy as a whole. The latest figures show that Scotland's unemployment is lower than that of the UK and that Scotland's median monthly pay is higher. Just in the past year, the Scottish National Investment Bank, which was created by this SNP Government, supported more than 3,000 jobs and £168 million of supply chain spend in Scotland. The Techscaler programme that was created by this Government supported almost 1,700 individuals, representing more than 1,200 start-up and scale-up businesses. Over £500 million of investment in net zero, which was committed by this SNP Government, will unlock infrastructure and manufacturing facilities that are critical to growing the offshore wind sector.

There is much that we can be positive about. However, despite all that, there is no doubt about the challenge and difficulty that our economy has experienced over the past few years due to a combination of Brexit, Covid and the war in Ukraine, with the resultant energy crisis and inflation shocks all driving up the cost of living. Labour's damaging tax on jobs and the increase in employers' national insurance contributions have had a deeply damaging impact on our economic prospects.

The Scottish Government is doing all that it can to support the transition to a low-carbon economy, but the UK Government's current approach to the energy profits levy is driving an accelerated decline that places the energy transition at risk and destabilises economic growth opportunities. Industry leaders across the oil and gas and renewables sectors have united in calling for reform of the EPL, a levy that critics say is risking the loss of 1,000 direct and indirect jobs every month.

However, the chancellor confirmed today that the levy will remain in place until 2030. We are all deeply concerned that that approach will have further consequences for business confidence, jobs and investment across Scotland's energy sector over the coming weeks, months and years. We continue to call on the UK Government to be sensible and to bring forward a sustainable fiscal regime that supports the important just transition.

Meanwhile, businesses continue to face significant challenges. Those include high energy costs, which deter investment, drive higher production costs and weaken industry. That has an impact on the growth of industry across the wider economy.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind):
rose—

Ivan McKee: I am afraid that I do not have any time left in the short time that is available.

It remains deeply disappointing that energy bills are £500 higher than the Labour Party promised before the UK general election. That has contributed to the cost of living crisis, which has also had an effect on our high streets and hospitality sector.

I must also mention the significant impact of Brexit, which has caused the primary and most damaging impact on the economy and public finances in the past decade. The conspiracy of silence from Labour and the Tories on the damage that Brexit has caused remains jaw dropping. The House of Commons library estimates that Brexit is costing the Treasury up to £90 billion a year in lost revenue, and that, for the average Briton, there has been a hit to GDP per head of up to £3,700. Brexit has generated significant barriers to trade and investment. The opportunities that would be presented by open access to a market of 450 million people are enormous for an outward-looking economy such as Scotland's, which is why this Government believes that Scotland must rejoin the European Union as an independent nation.

Scotland is a country of tremendous opportunity, and this Government's economic strategy outlines how we will utilise our strengths to do everything in our power to grasp that opportunity. We want the ability to ensure that Scotland's renewable energy wealth delivers lower bills for households and businesses, a transformational competitive advantage for Scotland's economy, restored membership of the EU and full self-government with independence, which will allow us to take control of our own economic affairs. That golden combination is how we will transform our economy, improve the lives of our people, protect the planet and put more money in people's pockets.

I move amendment S6M-19895.3, to leave out from "and address" to end and insert:

" , including through delivering investment that can be utilised for public services such as Scotland's NHS and to help Scotland's journey to net zero; further believes that a fiscal regime for offshore industries must support a just transition for oil and gas workers, and support the development of Scotland's key renewables sector; notes that UK Government tax changes on family farms and employer national insurance contributions have impacted Scotland's economy, and calls on all parties to support efforts to rejoin the European Union and the European Single Market, recognising that Brexit has been the primary and most damaging impact on the economy and public finances in the last decade."

16:14

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):
Today's budget from the Labour UK Government

is a budget for the good of ordinary people across our country, and Labour values run right through it. It will lift 95,000 Scottish children out of poverty, provide vital help with energy bills and raise the minimum wage. There is an additional £820 million for Scotland in the budget, which was secured by Scottish Labour and Anas Sarwar. Since Labour came to power last summer, Scotland's budget has been transformed by £10.3 billion in additional funding.

I thank the Scottish Conservatives for this early opportunity to discuss the budget as we all begin to analyse the impact that it will have on our economy, our family lives and our public services.

Craig Hoy: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir.

My thanks end there. The Tory motion is an exercise in brass-necked gaslighting of our country. It was the Tories who crashed the economy three years ago and sent inflation, mortgages and bills soaring. It was the Tories who spent the national reserve three times in the first quarter of 2024, burning through money that the country did not have.

Not content with 14 years of growthless ideological austerity, which left the fabric of our country weakened and hobbled our economy and productivity, the Tories sought to salt the earth at the end of a session of Parliament when living standards had fallen for the first time since the Napoleonic wars.

The mammoth task that the Chancellor has faced since she entered the Treasury on 5 July last year is the result of those 14 long years of feckless, immoral incompetence from ever more rabidly right-wing Tory leaders who partied while our old folk died; who corruptly lined the pockets of their rich friends; who broke the bonds of trust between citizens and politics in this country; who committed a historic act of national economic self-harm in Brexit; and who laid our nation's reputation low across the world. May we never see their likes again.

People continue to struggle with that legacy and the cost of living in this country. However, in the face of that horrendous legacy, the job of rebuilding has begun and real progress is being made. Since the general election, there have been five interest rate cuts, which have taken nearly £1,500 off the average annual cost of a mortgage. Inflation is coming down. The average wage has increased by £1,800, and that will grow further, given the increase in the minimum wage that is provided for in the budget today.

We have always said that there was more to do on energy bills, which is why I am so pleased to

see that, in today's budget, the Chancellor announced that this Labour Government is cutting the cost of energy bills by £150 every year. Alongside the warm homes discount, that will mean that Labour has delivered £300 off energy costs for the Scots most in need.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Michael Marra: I am happy to give way to Mr McMillan.

Craig Hoy: The member is happy to take an intervention from someone who is not in the chamber.

Michael Marra: I did not know that he was not here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We do not seem to have Mr McMillan now. Please just continue, Mr Marra.

Michael Marra: What a shame. On we go.

The Chancellor and the whole of the Labour Party have been very clear from the start that none of this is easy and that a country cannot be fixed overnight.

Craig Hoy: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: Certainly, Mr Hoy.

Craig Hoy: Does Mr Marra believe that Rachel Reeves will be in her job this time next year?

Michael Marra: Absolutely. I dearly hope that she is, because today's budget is an incredibly strong budget, and she delivered an incredibly strong budget speech. It has set a new trajectory for the country. It has made strategic interventions on poverty for people in Scotland, and it is setting the economy on the right road.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir.

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

Michael Marra: Populists of every political stripe might pretend that there are shiny, easy answers to the challenges that are facing our country, but serious, decent people know that there are not. The hard work of governing is to deal with the world as it is and to work to make it better.

I move amendment S6M-19895.4, to leave out from "UK Budget" to end and insert:

"delivery of a successful Scottish economy depends on stability in the UK public finances and a long-term plan to invest for future growth; recognises the challenging global circumstances, including the continued threat of tariffs, which create uncertainty and risk deterring investment and

dampening growth; notes with concern that lower earnings and employment growth in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK are reducing the impact of tax policy in Scotland; agrees with the Auditor General for Scotland that ‘the Scottish Government has not set out clearly enough how it plans to address this economic challenge in future years, and what this would do to support fiscal sustainability’, and calls on the Scottish Government to work in proper partnership with the UK Government to deliver stability, long-term growth and prosperity across Scotland.”

16:19

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): Since Russell Findlay took over the leadership of the Scottish Conservatives, he has taken the party into outright rejection of science and evidence and full-on climate denial, suggesting, as the motion for debate does, that understanding the implications of climate science and the importance of meeting international legal obligations is ideological. I would have thought that would horrify traditional Conservatives, who respect experts, science and international law.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Will Lorna Slater point me to any such denial of science? I do not recall any such interjection on my part.

Lorna Slater: Russell Findlay has come to the chamber several times, including in supporting the two Conservative motions today and on at least two occasions at First Minister’s question time, to challenge the climate science around the extraction of oil and gas and the need to stop burning fossil fuels. We absolutely and urgently need to stop burning fossil fuels in order to prevent global heating beyond 1.5°C. If Russell Findlay is in full support of climate science, he will understand that the recommendations that are made by the Climate Change Committee must be taken seriously and implemented. That means no more expansion of oil and gas extraction in the North Sea.

Russell Findlay: Does Lorna Slater not see—

Fergus Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: Certainly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Which member is Lorna Slater giving way to?

Lorna Slater: I will give way to Russell Findlay.

Russell Findlay: Does Lorna Slater not see the difference between supporting Scotland’s oil and gas industry, which we are proudly and rightly doing, and supporting the journey to net zero in a responsible and affordable fashion?

Lorna Slater: I will come on to the state of Scotland’s oil and gas industry, why it is in decline and what we must do about that in detail in my

closing remarks, but first I will take the other intervention.

Fergus Ewing: On the science, the UK Climate Change Committee states unequivocally that carbon capture and storage is “essential” to achieving net zero. Do the Greens support the scientists in that regard by supporting CCS?

Lorna Slater: I am aware of the Climate Change Committee’s recommendation. There are two different types of carbon capture—Fergus Ewing may or may not be aware of the technology. One type involves the theoretical idea that carbon can be stuffed into caverns in the North Sea, which is totally unproven, and we are not sure that it would work at scale.

The other kind of carbon capture is something that can be fitted on to industrial sites to temporarily decarbonise them as the energy system decarbonises. We absolutely support the second type as part of a transition to clean energy. However, until the theoretical notion of stuffing carbon back under the North Sea is proven to work at scale, I do not support that type, because it is not proven to work and it sounds like it could be highly dangerous and risky. That is my answer to that question.

Let us talk about growth. The Tories, the Lib Dems and even the Labour Party have the peculiar idea that we need to have growth before we can fix any problems, whether the problem is poverty, quality of life or climate change. The answer is always that growth will fix it, but that just is not correct. Let us compare Japan, a low-growth country, with the USA, a high-growth country, as examples. Japan—the low-growth country—has lower rates of crime, lower inequality, better public transport, much lower maternal mortality and universal healthcare. High growth has categorically not enabled the USA to tackle any of those problems. In fact, as the benefits of growth in the US have largely been felt by the richest, it has actually made the problems of inequality worse.

It simply is not true that the best way to run an economy is to try to maximise growth. The way to run an economy is to balance opportunity and obligation, so that everyone can thrive, and to invest in the commons—that is, the things that contribute to everyone’s wellbeing, such as effective public services, public infrastructure and transport.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Slater, please conclude.

Lorna Slater: We are all richer when we have good universal healthcare, reliable trains, and clean air and water.

I move amendment S6M-19895.1 to leave out from first “believes” to end and insert:

“calls on the UK Government to deliver a budget that supports a fairer, greener economy for Scotland by introducing an annual wealth tax on the wealthiest 1% of households in the UK, raising between £70 billion and £130 billion a year, to invest in communities, public services and climate action across Scotland, including reducing the cost of energy and other essentials for those who are struggling with the cost of living and inflation.”

16:23

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): I apologise to colleagues in the chamber for dialling in remotely today due to illness.

This is a worthy topic of debate, particularly today of all days, on UK budget day. The Scottish export statistics that came out yesterday revealed that our total international exports have fallen by 4 per cent in real terms since 2018. As we know, Scotland’s food and drink exports are declining at a rate of around 5 per cent.

With that in mind, particularly on budget day, I wanted to see a cut to spirit duty in Labour’s budget in order to support our whisky industry. We should also have seen reforms to agricultural funding, to ensure that our Scottish produce thrives and is available on supermarket shelves right across the world, and support for our north-east industries. Instead, there has been a raft of announcements, including a pay-per-mile penalty on electric cars, which I have to say is bizarre given our so-called net zero ambitions as a country.

There are also hidden tax rises with the income tax threshold freeze, not forgetting the top-down tax that tells people what they can and cannot drink. The reality is that the budget has not provided an opportunity to grow Scottish industries, and I do not think that it will do anything to drive the economic growth that we need. That is not my view; it is the view from our key sectors. The comments that have been made since the budget was announced this afternoon from bodies such as the Scotch Whisky Association or Offshore Energies UK tell their own story about how industry has reacted to the budget.

Of course there is never enough money, but it is important that Scotland gets its fair share of any consequential that arise from today’s budget. We desperately need that. I say that from my time on the Public Audit Committee in relation to our perilous college sector, the national health service and the state of our roads: we see it all around us in our public services. We do not simply tax and borrow our way out of the problem.

The reality is that we are not growing fast enough. I say politely to Lorna Slater that growth is

not a bad thing if it is done fairly and with fairness at its heart. It is possible to grow the economy—it is not just possible, but necessary. Our economy grew by 1.2 per cent in 2024, and we had just 0.5 per cent growth in 2023. We can compare that with the figures from countries such as Spain, with more than 3 per cent growth—and Malta has 6 per cent growth. Other countries are keeping pace.

Lorna Slater: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I do not have a lot of time—I apologise.

There is a sense of urgency about the situation. Audit Scotland has told us there is a massive funding gap in the Scottish budget, which will be around £5 billion by 2029. My concern is whether we will have years of cuts to public services to fill that black hole.

I would have liked to have seen more in the UK budget today about rejuvenating and reviving our city centres, town centres and high streets, because many of them sit empty and derelict. I was pleased to see some money for Inchgreen in Greenock, but it is a drop in the ocean compared with what is actually needed to revive areas such as Inverclyde. There are 91 vacant retail units in my home area of Inverclyde—91 units sitting empty, without creating employment or raising taxes. In North Lanarkshire there were 382 vacant town-centre units. We can fill those spaces with economic activity, with a boost and a boon to small business growth. I would really like to see that.

The UK budget was a bit of a missed opportunity to galvanise the economy. We need to grow the pot of money that all Governments need to invest in public services. All eyes will now be on the Scottish Government and its budget. It will have some tough choices to make as well.

I hope that, if nothing else, we can all agree today that Scotland can and should be a powerhouse of economic growth across a wide range of key sectors. I hope that that is a shared ambition that will require a grown-up conversation about how we fund public services, how we finance capital investment and how we trigger a small business and start-up boom.

I move amendment S6M-19895.2, to leave out from first “should” to end and insert:

“must be a turning point, which delivers real economic growth, tackles the cost of living crisis and seeks a closer relationship with Europe; understands that far too many families are struggling to get by and believes that businesses have been held back by the increase to employer national insurance contributions; calls for an emergency plan to give immediate help through a 5p VAT cut for hospitality, accommodation and attractions until April 2027, alongside the removal of the main renewables obligation from people’s electricity bills, funding both

through a new windfall tax on large banks and saving households £270; notes the analysis by Audit Scotland that shows that there is a projected deficit of £4.7 billion in the Scottish Budget by 2029-30, for which ministers have not provided detailed plans, and believes that Scotland deserves better than this, but that it needs to be a change with fairness at its heart.”

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

16:28

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Today’s UK budget appears to be another missed opportunity to tackle the biggest challenges standing in the way of the economic growth that Scotland should be capable of.

A strong workforce is vital for effective economic growth. However, as our motion highlights, there is currently an alarming decrease in economic activity across Scotland. Unemployment has increased over the past year, and a fifth of working-age Scots are economically inactive. Those are far from just statistics; that inactivity means missed opportunities, stalled ambition and lost growth.

To be clear, that is a problem created by both of Scotland’s Governments. The UK Labour Government’s jobs tax is already costing jobs and livelihoods. One in five businesses are claiming that they have already cut jobs due to the national insurance hike. A third of businesses are saying that they plan to cut jobs in the coming months. At the same time, Labour’s Employment Rights Bill will only make it more difficult to provide employment. Instead of strengthening our labour market, the bill risks making hiring more complicated and more expensive. It is little wonder that the Federation of Small Businesses, the Law Society of Scotland and the Confederation of British Industry have raised concerns about the proposals. There is little use in increasing job security if the reforms risk decreasing the number of jobs that are being created and becoming available. Any chancellor who is serious about creating growth should urgently reconsider those anti-business reforms.

Meanwhile, here in Scotland, the SNP’s high-tax agenda has meant that the Scottish tax base has not had the growth that it should have had. Despite having significant powers in relation to employability, the SNP has chosen to prioritise welfare reforms.

As our motion highlights, the welfare budget is rapidly spiralling out of control. The total budget is set to reach more than £9 billion by 2030, which is over £2 billion more than the block grant allocation for social security. The UK Government has already tried, and failed, to control welfare spending earlier this year. As it stands, the

Scottish Government has no plan for how to address those spiralling costs—and does not seem to be interested in creating one.

Our motion rightly speaks about the risks in some taxes that threaten opportunities, and the importance of dealing with those risks. We should be backing working households and working people. At the same time, we need to address the spiralling welfare costs that are consuming ever-higher amounts of both the Scottish Government and UK Government’s budgets. We need to deliver reforms that mean that, where possible, people get into well-paying jobs, while ensuring that we target support for people who need it the most. That also means creating more jobs and making sure that there are no anti-growth taxes such as those brought in by the Labour Government.

If the political will existed to do that, members on the Conservative benches would stand ready to work with either Government to ensure that we improve and that those reforms take place. For now, the onus rests on both of Scotland’s Governments to do what is needed to place Scotland firmly on the path to sustainable growth. Doing anything else would be an abdication of responsibility.

16:31

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I thank Craig Hoy for bringing forward this debate, which provides us with some limited time for initial reflection on the UK Government’s budget. That is welcome. I begin on an unusual note of consensus: I agree with Mr Hoy—I think that most of us would agree—that the manner in which we have reached this point has been somewhat shambolic on the part of the UK Government.

Notwithstanding that, it would be churlish not to welcome at least one announcement made by the UK Government today: the long overdue reversal of the two-child cap. The Scottish Government has long called for that—the SNP has long called for it. Tremendous efforts have been made by the Scottish Government, such as through the Scottish child payment, that are bearing fruit and having an impact on driving down child poverty. The fact that that measure has been taken should be welcomed.

However, I want to flag some areas of the UK budget where I have concerns. Jamie Greene has already mentioned the first one: the road pricing for electric vehicles seems somewhat counterintuitive when we are trying to move in the direction of tackling climate change. That needs to be explored further.

In relation to the minimum wage, or the misnamed national living wage—I commend Mr Marra for not using that misnomer; the terminology should be changed—there is a missed opportunity in that the age differential remains. It is welcome that the minimum wage level is rising and we should not pretend otherwise, but the fact that it is rising to £12.71 only for those aged 21 and over is a missed opportunity. The independently assessed real living wage—the real, real living wage, independently assessed by the Living Wage Foundation to be the minimum that is required for people to have a decent standard of living—is already £13.45. We should remember that, through the efforts of the Scottish Government and others, Scotland has the highest proportion of working-age population of any UK nation that is paid at least the real living wage.

One other area in which I will flag a note of caution is the extension to the soft drinks industry levy. I think that it is well-intentioned and I understand the rationale for it, but being, as I am, the representative of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth where that great Scottish icon, AG Barr, is located, I am concerned to understand what the implications of the measure might be for AG Barr as an employer. We will have to reflect further on those matters in due course.

The promotion of economic growth is interesting subject matter for the Tories to have chosen today. It was interesting to hear Craig Hoy suggest that there were mistakes made by the Tories in their own record. He did not spell out what any of those mistakes were; I will try to spell out what a few of them might be.

For example, the Institute for Public Policy Research reported the New Economics Foundation's finding that, in the decade up to 2019, the austerity measures that were undertaken by the Conservative Government—which, I should say, began under the previous Labour Government, although they certainly went into overdrive under the Tory UK Government—cost the UK economy £100 billion. Austerity shrank the UK budget by £100 billion. We had the disaster zone of the Truss-Kwarteng mini-budget, for which no OBR assessment was produced, and which the Tory MSPs wanted to be replicated here. That increased inflation, pushed up mortgage rates, collapsed market confidence and reduced the value of people's pension pots.

On top of all that, we had Brexit, which the National Bureau of Economic Research has said will, by this year, have reduced UK GDP by between 6 per cent and 8 per cent, investment by between 12 per cent and 18 per cent, and productivity—which, in Scotland, grew by twice the amount by which it grew in the UK between 2008 and 2024—by between 3 per cent and 4 per cent.

Therefore, I think that we should support the minister's amendment, if for no other reason than that it sets out, quite reasonably, that we should reverse the damage of Brexit and rejoin the European Union.

16:35

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): If our business and industry leaders were participating in this debate, they would be absolutely seething about what they have heard in today's budget, such have been the missed opportunities to improve productivity and to increase growth, which were their two big asks, and to lower the tax burden.

Business and industry leaders are really angry about the confusion that has been created over recent weeks by the extraordinary briefings, rebriefings and leaks that we have had from 11 Downing Street, many of which have created considerable uncertainty and anxiety in the financial markets. They are angry about the intention of Rachel Reeves to put billions more into the welfare budget, which is already well out of control, and which comes at the expense of ordinary taxpayers having to stump up for the black hole in the fiscal budget. They wonder why on earth it should become even more comfortable to be on benefits at a time when the promotion of jobs is becoming more expensive.

Business and industry leaders are angry with the UK Government, which imposed a £25 billion bill for employer national insurance contributions—£2 billion-plus of that in Scotland—the effect of which, in rural communities, has been compounded by the pernicious tax on family farms.

Business and industry leaders in Scotland are worried, too, because, in Scotland, there is the same policy pursuit of making welfare more generous in relation to the overall size of the budget. That has already brought very serious warnings from the Auditor General, the Scottish Fiscal Commission and the Fraser of Allander Institute, which have all been warning the Scottish Government for a long time about the folly of its ways—all, apparently, to no avail. Those expert bodies have all made the point that the increased devolved tax rates may have increased revenue in recent years, but that impact has been seriously weakened by the lower growth in earnings and employment in Scotland relative to the UK. In other words, we are paying far more tax but to no real benefit.

Those facts should underpin the approach of the Scottish Government in its own budget, when it comes on 13 January. We cannot have a repeat of what has happened in recent budgets, such as the

8.3 per cent real-terms cut in funding for the economy portfolio that formed part of the budget two years ago and the 20 per cent real-terms cut in college funding that has taken place over the past five years. Those are examples of policy decisions that undermine growth because they undermine jobs and the harnessing of new skills. In the case of colleges, they also undermine some of our local communities, which are desperately trying to address economic inactivity by getting more people back into the labour force.

Let me turn to tax. As I know that the Scottish Government has been told by many senior figures in business and industry, the growing gap between UK Government and Scottish Government tax rates is detrimental to attracting some of the new skills that we desperately need in this country, especially when it comes to new recruitment of middle and higher earners. That is on top of the fact that, as the UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Peter Kyle, has admitted, recent UK tax rises have led to an exodus of wealthy entrepreneurs. That is deeply damaging to investment. In Scotland, the difficulty of recruiting middle to higher earners is compounded by the higher rate of land and buildings transaction tax. The UK Conservatives say that it is time to scrap stamp duty. Will the Scottish Government do the same for LBTT?

The Scottish Government maintains that all those effects are offset by free prescriptions and free tuition, but it knows only too well that those are not free at all, as it is all taxpayers' money that is being shelled out. The Government also knows only too well that the so-called policy of free tuition—which, incidentally, is very discriminatory because it affects only Scotland-domiciled students—is simply not working.

The artificial cap on places for domiciled Scots is a very serious issue with regard to encouraging more graduates to stay in Scotland, and the Scottish Government knows that that is having a detrimental effect on colleges. When it comes to 13 January, just for once, will the Scottish Government listen to what it is being told by the experts—the Scottish Fiscal Commission, the Fraser of Allander Institute and all the experts—because their messages are very stark?

16:40

Davy Russell (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab): The budget that was published today can be viewed only in the context of a mandate that was given to the UK Government to provide stable and reliable governance of public finances. As we know from a previous UK Government, a cavalier approach, especially from Liz Truss, led to a disastrous situation in which interest rates jumped and

inflation went through the roof. The national reserve was spent three times over, leaving a black hole of £22 billion, which is phenomenal. At best, it could be said that that was reckless; in actual fact, it was incompetent.

However, in July 2024, Labour took the reins. Do not get me wrong; it has been extremely challenging and difficult for the Labour Government. However, since then, interest rates have been cut five times, as has been mentioned; mortgage rates have been reduced; businesses have more money to invest in new technologies; inflation has dropped from over 9 per cent to 3.5 per cent; and the minimum wage will have risen by over 11 per cent in less than two years, helping the lowest-paid earners. Abolishing the two-child cap—

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Davy Russell: I do not have much time and I have quite a bit of my speech still to go.

That is what competent governance looks like. Instead, the SNP Government has proposed unfunded spending demands worth more than £90 billion since Labour won the election while rejecting every single revenue-raising measure that is put to it.

Let me tell you: money disnae grow on trees. Instead of living on fantasy island, the Scottish Government must now look forward with the same ambition and vision that the UK Labour Government has shown and use the opportunity of a new budget to invest in Scotland's growing industries and people.

As I speak, Scotland is lagging behind England and Wales on regional growth, and median wage growth is stagnating, compared to the UK average, the north-east and north-west of England, Yorkshire and the Humber, the east midlands, the west midlands and Wales, which have captured growing technology and manufacturing sectors with a fraction of the economic levers that the Scottish Government has.

If Scotland had the same growth and investment as those regions, its economy would be larger to the tune of £8 billion, with increased tax revenues to match for further investment in health, housing and education, further enabling growth.

The Scottish Government should start by showing faith in Scottish companies by prioritising them in the way that greater Manchester and Norway have done. Manchester directly awarded contracts for buses to Alexander Dennis, and Norway has done the same with ships built in Glasgow, where the finest ships in the world are built. However, the drive, ambition and creative

ideas that Scotland needs from its leaders in this challenging global context are clearly lacking and beyond this very old, tired SNP Government.

16:43

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the Tories for bringing forward this debate on the day of the UK Government's budget. Thanks to the OBR, we all knew what was in the budget before it was presented—the whole process has been shambolic.

Some measures are welcome. The lifting of the two-child benefit cap is obviously welcome, but this is not a budget for growth. Growth is forecast to slow, productivity to fall and inflation to rise. The Resolution Foundation published its analysis today, forecasting that disposable income will rise by 0.5 per cent per year during this Parliament—the lowest increase since the 1950s.

Let us look at the state of the UK economy today. The UK national debt is at £2.7 trillion, which is nearly 100 per cent of GDP. We hear from Craig Hoy and his colleagues about responsible management of the economy. The national debt was £1.1 trillion in 2010 and rose to £2.15 trillion prior to Covid—that is the price of Tory mismanagement. Inflation is at the highest rate in the G7. Just today, the Scotch Whisky Association said that the budget would “needlessly cost jobs” in Scotland.

Liz Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

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

At the same time, the Bank of England is selling gilts that were held under the quantitative easing scheme. More overseas owners have stepped into that market, accounting for about a third of it. The OBR has warned that that could make the UK more vulnerable, and gilt prices have fluctuated today.

Against that backdrop, Britain's annual debt interest spending has reached £100 billion. That represents £1 of every £10 that is spent by the Treasury, adding to budget pressures.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has downgraded its forecast for UK growth in each year to 2030-31, as part of a review that was undertaken before the budget.

It is clear that the lack of investment under Tory Administrations undermined the UK's potential economic expansion. Just last month, Rachel Reeves said that the Office for Budget Responsibility would be

“pretty frank”

that Brexit had had

“a bigger impact on our economy than even was projected”.

I have not heard a word from either the Tories or Labour colleagues about that.

A new study by the US National Bureau of Economic Research has found that the economic damage since the 2016 vote resulted in a cut to the UK's GDP of between 6 to 8 per cent. A new analysis by the House of Commons library has estimated that Brexit is costing HM Treasury up to £90 billion a year in lost tax revenue. There is still not a word from Labour or Tory colleagues about that. Brexit has hit GDP per head in Britain by between £2,700 and £3,700 per year.

The SNP is clear in our amendment. We call on

“all parties to support efforts to rejoin the European Union and the European Single Market, recognising that Brexit has been the primary and most damaging impact on the economy”.

In my constituency, the biggest drag on growth has been the UK Government's tax changes for family farms. Douglas Alexander and I recently met NFU Scotland in East Lothian. The NFUS told him that the inheritance tax changes were preventing investment from coming into the sector. Douglas Alexander turned around and said that, at that time, he—the Secretary of State for Scotland—had no influence over the Treasury on that point. That is obvious.

The renewables sector is key in Scotland, including in East Lothian. Scottish Renewables has called on the UK Government to increase the ambition for offshore wind in allocation round 7. That is incredibly important. Claire Mack said:

“It is critical that the UK Government's upcoming auction rounds enable Scotland's offshore wind pipeline to move into construction so that their full value can be realised for consumers and communities.”

It is a fantastic growth opportunity.

The Scottish Government has a strong record on economic growth. Since 2007, GDP per capita in Scotland has grown by 10.3 per cent, compared with 6.1 per cent at the UK level. Scotland is the top destination in the UK for foreign direct investment outside London for the 10th year in a row and, last year, Scotland secured nearly one in six of inward investment projects in the UK.

I ask members to support the amendment in Ivan McKee's name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Fergus Ewing is the final speaker in the open debate.

16:47

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): Admittedly, it was before the Deputy First Minister

was born, but when I first campaigned in a parliamentary by-election—in Dundee East, when Gordon Wilson narrowly failed to get elected in 1973—our slogan was, “It’s Scotland’s Oil”.

When I had the privilege to be the energy minister—I also had responsibility for business, tourism and enterprise—from 2011 to 2015, I was proud to be part of a team that said that the primary objective of the Government was economic success for our country. Everything else comes from that. All the revenue for public services comes from a successful economy. That is so obvious, is it not? Well, it seemed so.

When I was energy minister, I worked with leading experts such as Sir Ian Wood, and we quickly formulated maximum economic recovery as our policy—a policy so good that it was filched by the UK Government. I have no objection to that piece of political larceny—it was a good theft. I should say that the prime influencer was Sir Ian Wood, not humble me. However, it was the right policy then, and it is the right policy now.

I say to the Deputy First Minister that I genuinely fear for Scotland over the next five years, because although people believe that we must go to renewables, that will take a long time—much longer than people say—and we need oil and gas. There is a consensus among ordinary people that that is the case.

Back in 2022, I was proud to bring together a cross-party group—Alistair Carmichael, Amber Rudd, Charles Hendry and Brian Wilson—and, in Aberdeen, we made a declaration: we need both. During my remaining time, which is not long, I want to talk about the more subtle point that the group made: how is the UK going to afford the just transition?

The London School of Economics estimates that the cost will be £1 trillion, and the Climate Change Committee estimates that it will cost £50 billion a year. I have seen even higher figures quoted to upgrade the national grid. They are on a colossal scale and would have been unimaginable 20 years ago.

Lorna Slater: Will the member take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: I am sorry, but I want to develop my argument in the short time that I have.

The Government and the taxpayer have not got the money for this. We have got to be quite clear that the economic problems that we face in Britain, given the level of gross domestic product per head and the level of borrowing per head, are unprecedented. Unless we draw in our horns, spend money more effectively and avoid taxing everything in sight, we are leaving a bitter legacy for our children. Is that responsible? No, it is not.

My recommendation is very serious. We need oil and gas. As Gary Smith—a fine campaigner for the industry—says, the oil and gas industry is not the enemy. As was argued earlier by Douglas Lumsden and Liam Kerr, the industry supplies just about everything that we need, including anaesthetics, incidentally.

Only by working with the industry can we raise money from oil revenues—£40 billion from Campbell Fuel and the Rosebank oil field alone. Perhaps we can mandate oil companies to invest in carbon capture and storage. If we do that, with the expertise that will remain in Aberdeen, although not for much longer, we can develop world-leading expertise in CCS in the North Sea. As we did with subsea expertise in the North Sea, we can export that expertise all over the world and create something out of nothing. That is the only way that it can happen.

The two Governments need to start to wake up and smell the coffee. We need more exploration and a fair tax system. The EPL must go. It is as plain as a pikestaff: if that does not happen, we are in deep, deep trouble.

16:52

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): There have been some pretty good, but still predictable, speeches in the debate. We have heard everyone blaming everyone else for the woes of the world, as always, but when you talk to people in the real world, they only want both of Scotland’s Governments to get on with the job of making sure that our economy is surviving and thriving. Scotland has bags of opportunity up and down the country.

As I said in my opening speech, we have a strong food and drink industry, which includes everything from distilleries, fisheries, our farms and food processing. We all have those in our constituencies and regions. There are 17,000 businesses in the sector, employing 123,000 people, and there is a turnover of nearly £20 billion.

That is a powerful foundation for a small country to work from, but we have not only food and drink; we also have our fintech, renewables, pharma, TV and film, and, yes, oil and gas—and I cannot forget our world-famous tourism offering. We need to do more of what we are good at, but that should not be the height of our ambition. We have to grow our new and emerging industries—biotech, defence, data centres and those involved in the artificial intelligence revolution. Unfortunately, we heard very little discussion of that in today’s debate or during the budget at Westminster earlier. My appeal to the Scottish Government, as well as to the UK Government, is to focus on how

we help Scotland and its economy do more of what it does best.

The problem is that we cannot grow any of those industries without the right talent, and I am afraid that the picture there is quite worrying. We have a massive skills shortage. The Scottish Government's own employer skills survey showed that there are 20,000 skills shortage-related vacancies in Scotland. Clearly, businesses are struggling to fill key roles, particularly in the engineering sector, which needs about 58 per cent more engineers over the next couple of years. Much of that demand will be met by those who have done apprenticeships, and it is no surprise that we have a skills shortage when our colleges are making teachers redundant and cutting courses. Many of them have hit financial walls—a point that was raised by Liz Smith.

The CBI is calling for a Scotland-wide strategy to develop workforce skills. We can go further if people want to change careers and retrain in tech or AI, and we can reform our planning system to get infrastructure projects off the ground, because there are far too many bottlenecks in the system.

We should not forget about transport and connectivity, and I make no apologies for raising those issues. Trains and buses are one thing, but we will unlock potential by fixing our ferry network, getting those using the M8 moving, dualling the A9, getting people to work and keeping people connected.

Governments needs to be honest with people. If they are going to take money from people's pay packets, they need to spend that money wisely. So far, people have not seen that from either of their Governments.

16:55

Lorna Slater: Fergus Ewing overlooked the dangers of runaway global heating when he talked about the costs. He is right that the costs of transitioning are expensive, and the whole of our society and economy must focus on that issue, but the costs of not transitioning far exceed the costs of a managed and just transition.

There has been talk in the chamber about plastics as by-products of oil and gas. Plastics are ubiquitous in our society and are generated as a by-product of oil and gas because they are so cheap. We pull up oil and gas literally to burn most of it, and some of it is turned into plastics as by-products, but I reassure members that plastics can be synthesized from any hydrocarbon—it does not have to be oil or gas. We use oil and gas for anaesthetics and other by-products just because so much of them goes to waste. Those chemical processes could be changed and applied to other hydrocarbons in the future, including for recycled

and waste plastic. Members do not need to worry—we do not need to keep pulling up oil and gas in order to keep the plastics industry going. We can adapt.

The Conservative motion not only does not take climate risk seriously but does not deal with the reality that, however much Craig Hoy wishes it was not so, the North Sea basin is in decline.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: I will not take any more interventions.

Production peaked in 1999, at 4.4 million barrels a day. The figure is now down to about half a million barrels a day, so there has been an annual decline of 7 per cent, and each barrel is more expensive to extract than the last.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will Lorna Slater take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: No. I took loads of interventions in my opening speech.

The oil and gas sector is not a growth industry in the UK, and an industry that is experiencing such a precipitous decline cannot form the basis for the growth that the Tories want. The Scottish Conservatives do workers and investors in the industry a disservice by pretending that any amount of policy change or investment can take the industry back to where it once was or put it on a growth trajectory. Until they accept that the industry is on its way out, they cannot develop transition plans for the alternative industries that will grow and provide a stable future for the economy.

We owe it to the people who work in the oil and gas industry and the communities that depend on it to be honest about the future, which is not in oil and gas. It is high time that we accepted that and came up with alternative plans, or we will have more communities being suddenly surprised, as the ones that depend on Grangemouth and Mossmorran have been. We knew for a long time that those communities needed alternative plans, and pretending that the oil and gas industry can carry on for ever does them a disservice.

The alternative involves an economic transformation towards a net zero economy. The CBI reports that the UK's net zero economy has become a powerhouse of job creation and economic expansion, with 10.1 per cent growth in total economic value being supported by the net zero economy since 2023. There is the growth that the Conservatives have been looking for—it is in the net zero economy, not in the oil and gas industry, which is declining by 7 per cent a year.

The CBI also says that, in Scotland alone, the net zero economy contributes £9.1 billion—about 4.9 per cent of the country's total gross value added—and supports 100,700 full-time jobs, so nearly one in five Scottish workers are employed in a role related to net zero. That is what the future looks like, and it is where investment would create the foundation for a successful long-term economy.

Flogging the dying horse of oil and gas is not only endangering our future; it is not preparing us for it, with Scotland risking being left behind as investment moves into technologies and industries that are designed for a net zero world.

16:59

Michael Marra: The Labour Government is bringing stability to our national finances in a turbulent world, and it is right that we strike a balance between what the country can afford and when it can afford it. I am therefore delighted that, today, our Labour Government scrapped the two-child cap. As a result of the stability that is being increasingly won, that legacy of the Tories has finally gone.

Murdo Fraser: Has Mr Marra had a chance to look at business reaction to the budget today and the comments from the Scottish Chambers of Commerce? The SCC's Liz Cameron has described it as a "disappointing and damaging" budget that puts business on the brink. Where are the member's pro-business credentials now?

Michael Marra: As, I am sure, Mr Fraser might want to acknowledge—I said this to Mr Hoy earlier—people often tell us to look at the markets, and the pound is up and the cost of borrowing is down since the chancellor took her seat. It is absolutely clear that the budget has received a positive reception in the marketplace, and rightly so, because it brings stability to the public finances.

Scottish Labour has consistently called for the scrapping of the two-child cap, but, more importantly, it is something that we have worked to deliver. I pay tribute to Anas Sarwar and Paul O'Kane, who have worked consistently, behind the scenes and in front of cameras, to tell the story as to why that should happen.

I personally made the case to the chancellor on behalf of the more than one in four children in my home city of Dundee who are growing up in poverty. Degrading, grinding child poverty is a moral offence that limits the life chances and potential of far too many in Scotland, and the extreme cost of dealing with the consequences of child poverty has an impact on our public finances that lasts for decades. Scrapping the two-child cap alone will lift 1,000 children in Dundee, and 95,000

across Scotland, out of poverty. To be frank, that is why I am in Parliament, doing this job. That progress is won through rebuilding the foundations of our economy and the stability of our public finances. It is diligent decency, it is right and it is just.

This Labour budget redistributes wealth. In supporting working people, it gives a helping hand to those with the least and increases the minimum wage, which will benefit 200,000 of the lowest-paid Scots. Introducing a mansion tax—something that the SNP Government has, so far, refused to do—will mean that owners of properties that are valued at more than £2 million in other parts of the UK will pay their fair share. There is also the first-ever permanent real-terms increase to the universal credit standard allowance. Those are Labour choices, but they can be made only because of the tough choices that have been made since July last year.

Paul McLennan was right to highlight the size of the public debt across the UK. I recommend to him an instructive video, "Britain's debt, explained with custard creams", which shows how we got to that position. Some of the culprits are sitting on the opposite side of the chamber. The budget also delivers increased headroom, which—to be frank—we need in order to ensure that we can bear down on that public debt in the long run.

I agree with my colleague Davy Russell, who was right to ask whether the SNP should reflect on whether it can call itself a good-faith partner in that process. In the past year alone, the SNP has made in excess of £95 billion of spending demands of the UK Government while, at the same time, opposing every single revenue-raising measure.

Ivan McKee talked about wondering where the money comes from, and he mentioned tax rises. That is what raises the money, Mr McKee. You have to put in place the tough decisions around taxes to get the £10.3 billion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair.

Michael Marra: —of extra spending for the Scottish purse.

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir.

The SNP are not serious people, and their own woeful record of financial mismanagement and incompetence proves it.

More than £6.7 billion of money has been wasted on ferries that do not sail, prisons that do not get built and ever-increasing Government largesse, not to mention the three chaotic

emergency budgets. If SNP members want to talk about stability, I point out that the Scottish Government has had three emergency budgets in subsequent years. To top it all, there is a £1 billion underspend, although SNP members cry “Austerity!” at every opportunity.

Scots are sick of the tired SNP Government. In 2026, they will have the chance to vote for a Scottish Labour Government that will work in genuine good-faith partnership with the UK Government to grow our economy and deliver for the people of Scotland.

17:03

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): I know that members will agree that it is always nice to start an economy debate with a bit of positivity, which has been sorely lacking so far this afternoon.

Looking back at the journey that the Scottish Government has been on over the past few years, there are some very encouraging statistics that reflect the creativity, brilliance and vision of Scottish business. Back in 2020, we set out a vision to establish Scotland as one of Europe’s fastest-growing entrepreneurial economies. The latest Tech Nation report shows that Scotland is by far the fastest-growing major entrepreneurial economy in the UK, and among one of the most dynamic in Europe, growing at an annual rate of 19 per cent and outpacing the wider UK at 12.5 per cent, France at 12 per cent and even Sweden—one of the world’s most admired start-up economies—at 10 per cent. I think that that illustrates what we can do when we work closely in partnership with the drivers of economic growth, which are our businesses, our workforce, and our wonderful founders.

The debate was a characteristically Labour moment, I felt. If the Tories’ time in office was characterised by arrogance and frequent bouts of ineptitude, then Labour’s time in office has been incoherent and confused. It is worth remembering why millions of voters backed Labour last year. Many of them had high hopes that change would happen.

Michael Marra: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Kate Forbes: I have only four minutes.

Many believed that Labour’s manifesto would deliver economic growth and prosperity, and many believed and hoped that the party would be different. The only change that we have seen is that Labour has frequently changed its position, sometimes within days. I think that it would be fair to characterise its manifesto more as fiction rather

than non-fiction, and there has been a constant saga of U-turns and broken promises.

Many people have commented that the budget process has been absolute chaos from start to finish. Every time the chancellor did an interview, she raised the prospect of a new tax. That is not just bad politics; it reverberates across the economy and creates huge unease and uncertainty, when we know that the economy thrives on certainty. That is part of the reason why businesses, some of which have been quoted already in the debate, have been so critical of the UK Government’s budget.

I also know that many people voted for Labour because energy prices were one of the single most challenging costs that households were grappling with. They hit people hard. I remember sitting next to a senior Labour MP who promised that Great British Energy would reduce people’s bills by £300, which perhaps tells us how much thought Labour had given to designing GB Energy prior to the election. However, UK household energy bills are now £340 a year higher than the Prime Minister promised, even after today’s announcement.

As we have heard in the debate, the UK Government is not even pretending to deliver on its promises. It is giving all sorts of reasons for that, not least the legacy that was left by the last Government. However, there is a cost to the broken promises and ideological incoherence.

One of the most obvious costs is that—despite most parties agreeing that the energy profits levy is guaranteed to cost thousands of jobs, not just in the north-east, but elsewhere—the UK Government has not offered any hope of delivering a change to the tax before redundancies take place. In other words, it is waiting for thousands of people to lose their jobs before it replaces the energy profits levy. The UK Government seems to be interested only in policies that suppress the job market, hit family firms and family farms, and cost people their jobs. The rhetoric from both parties that are sitting opposite me is undermined by the reality of what they have delivered while they have been in Government. I think that the people of Scotland can see through that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Murdo Fraser to wind up the debate.

17:08

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will try to wind up the debate and respond to a few points that have been made. I have to start with the Deputy First Minister. I noticed that in her remarks she referenced Tory ineptitude. I wonder whether she has glanced at the *Business Bulletin*

for today and tomorrow and seen that we will be spending the rest of this afternoon and tomorrow afternoon trying to fix a mess that is of the SNP's making. Perhaps the Deputy First Minister needs to examine the beam in her eye before she extracts the mote from others.

Kate Forbes: I will use four words: Liz Truss; Kwasi Kwarteng.

Murdo Fraser: Well, Presiding Officer, I will mention Derek Mackay in response to that.

We are here to debate the Labour budget. As Craig Hoy said, the handling of the budget—never mind the detail for a moment—has been absolutely disastrous. We have had briefings and counter-briefings, with the chancellor appearing on television one day saying that she was going to do one thing and then, three days later, changing her mind—income tax was going to go up, then it was not, and so on. The chaos has been deeply damaging to the economy, as my colleague Liz Smith said. Andy Haldane, the former chief economist at the Bank of England, said that the situation was a “fiasco”, that it has been “costly for the economy”, that it has

“caused paralysis among business and consumers”

and that it is

“the single biggest reason why growth has flatlined.”

That is true. The uncertainty has been deeply damaging.

Before the budget, we already had the largest tax burden increase in UK history. The country is facing a £33 billion fiscal gap, which is due to profligate spending by Labour. Despite its promises to cut spending, Labour's welfare changes are actually increasing it. I say to Michael Marra that UK borrowing costs are surging to a 27-year high under Labour, with 30-year bond yields higher than when Liz Truss was Prime Minister.

Let us leave aside the fantasy story that we heard from Michael Marra and look at Labour's true track record. Economic growth has stalled, with the economy barely staying out of recession. When she presented her budget last year, Rachel Reeves promised that she was going to fix the economy and sort out the public finances. However, she did the opposite. The increase in employer national insurance has been disastrous. We have seen an increase in unemployment to its highest level since Covid, and businesses complain that it is a literal tax on jobs. The Understanding Scotland economy tracker shows that 73 per cent of Scots expect the country's financial situation to deteriorate in the next year, and 69 per cent say that it has got worse over the past year, thanks to Labour. Meanwhile, the public finances are in a dreadful state, with the Institute

of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales warning that the UK is on an unsustainable path.

Labour broke its promises to business, to pensioners, to farmers, and to the WASPI women—women against state pension inequality. Now we have the budget headlines from today. Income tax and national insurance thresholds are frozen—that also means a broken promise, because taxes are going up for working people. Taxes on income from dividends, property and savings are up. There is a new pay-per-mile levy on electric cars, which Jamie Greene and Jamie Hepburn referred to. Someone who has an electric car and lives in a rural part of Scotland will be paying through the nose, thanks to the choices that have been made by Labour. There is an increase in spirits duty. The number 1 ask of the Scotch whisky industry was a freeze on alcohol duty, but what has Rachel Reeves done? She has increased it and slapped on more tax. On that point, I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. According to the OBR, the tax burden is to hit 38.3 per cent of GDP by 2030-31—an all-time historic high—which could distort or constrain economic activity by more than expected. All of that is to pay for more welfare spending, which will be up £11 billion by 2029-30.

Growth is down, productivity is down, inflation is up, taxes are up, spending is up and borrowing is up. We have no new support for the oil and gas sector, no new oil and gas licences, and the EPL is being extended and will remain in place, even though the OBR says that it is unsustainable.

Let us not forget the SNP record, which I will address in the short time that I have remaining. Earlier, I reminded Ivan McKee that, over the past decade, the Scottish economy has grown at one half of the UK rate on average. According to Professor Anton Muscatelli's recent report, that is costing the Scottish budget £1 billion a year in tax revenues.

The SNP has taxed business in Scotland more than they would be taxed elsewhere. Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, which are already being squeezed due to a lower consumer spend in Scotland, and which have actually been given a bonus in England by Rachel Reeves today, are paying much more than their counterparts south of the border. It is little wonder that barely a week goes by without some of them closing their doors.

As Liz Smith said, the differential rate of income tax in Scotland continues to damage the economy, making it harder for businesses to attract talent. Further, despite that tax taking £1.7 billion out of the economy in Scotland, the actual benefit to our public finances is only £616 million, as Audit Scotland has made clear. As Alexander Stewart said, both Governments are letting us down.

Today, we needed a budget for growth, a budget for jobs and a budget for household incomes. That is what the Conservatives would have given us. Instead, Labour has let us down.

Points of Order

17:15

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I wish to raise a point of order in relation to the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill, which we are about to consider. As you will be well aware, under the Scotland Act 1998, the Parliament can pass legislation only if it complies with the European convention on human rights. I am concerned that the bill before us breaches article 1 of protocol 1 of the convention and is therefore legislatively incompetent.

The bill seeks to change the law on the liability for non-domestic rates on unoccupied properties in order to cure what appears to be a defect in legislation that the Parliament passed in 2020. There is no legal difficulty in the Parliament legislating that, from this point, liability should change, but the bill is to be retrospective in impact and is to date back to charges that have been levied since 1 April 2023. It is that aspect that causes a legal difficulty.

As matters stand, those who have paid non-domestic rates on unoccupied properties since 1 April 2023 have a clear patrimonial right in Scots law to seek repayment under the principle of unjustified enrichment. The bill seeks to retrospectively extinguish that right in order to protect the public finances. That position is stated plainly in the policy memorandum. At paragraph 29, the Government acknowledges that the revenue was collected

“without a valid legal basis”.

At paragraphs 41 and 42, the memorandum concedes that the bill retrospectively validates those payments and removes the right to repayment solely to avoid the fiscal consequences of its own legislative error.

The law in this area is clear. The retrospective extinguishing of a right of possession under article 1 of protocol 1 without compensation is a serious interference that requires the strongest justification. Case law has determined that such action can be taken without payment of compensation only in exceptional circumstances. The policy memorandum is entirely unconvincing as to whether the arguments put forward by the Scottish Government meet the test of exceptional circumstances. In effect, the Scottish Government is trying to argue that legislative incompetence amounts to exceptional circumstances under the law. I do not believe that that is a credible position that would survive a legal challenge in the courts.

I wrote to the Presiding Officer this morning in more detail to raise my concerns about the legislative competence of the bill in relation to its retrospective impact. I am grateful to the Presiding Officer for her response, which I received this afternoon. Further to that, I would be grateful if you could advise me, Deputy Presiding Officer, what mechanisms are available to members of the Parliament to test the arguments that I have made, particularly given the very shortened timetable for scrutiny of the bill before us, to try to avoid the inevitable legal challenge that will follow if the bill is passed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I thank Mr Fraser for advance notice of his point of order. As he said, the Presiding Officer has provided a more detailed response to the letter that he sent her. For the benefit of Mr Fraser and other members, I observe that the Presiding Officer takes a view on the legislative competence of each bill at its introduction. Her statement is informed by robust advice and forms part of the information that is before the Parliament to assist with the scrutiny of a bill.

On Mr Fraser's last point, members may raise issues that are of interest to them, including matters that are relevant to legislative competence, as part of the debate, if they wish to do so. The Scotland Act 1998 provides for further checks after a bill has been passed. Whether a provision of a bill that is agreed by the Parliament is within the Parliament's legislative competence can be definitively determined only by the court. I hope that that is of some help to Mr Fraser and to other members.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I apologise for not giving you advance notice of the point of order, but it is important that members are aware that, in the past hour, Graeme Dey has had to write to the Presiding Officer and to me to correct the record of yesterday's debate on the emergency bill motion.

In response to an intervention, Graeme Dey—the minister who is urging his own MSPs and members across the Parliament to back a piece of emergency legislation—told me that the Government was first made aware of the flaws in its legislation in August. He is now putting on the official record that that date was not in August or even in July—it was in June. The Government knew about the issue in June.

I said yesterday that people outside the Parliament will not believe that something can credibly be called a piece of emergency legislation if the Government has known about the issue since August. People will be even more confused as to why the Government thinks that something is

an emergency now, at the end of November, when it knew about it in June.

That raises serious questions. First, it was bad enough that the minister was not over the detail in the chamber and gave that answer. I would be keen to know whether the minister had been briefed to say that the date was in August or whether that was just a slip of the tongue.

Secondly, I understand from my business manager and from Craig Hoy, who is leading for our party on this issue, that, in briefings with ministers, Opposition politicians were also told that the date was in August. Therefore, it was not just a minister misspeaking in the chamber and potentially reading a note wrong. When the Government tried to inform other MSPs to get them on side—I remember that some of the discussions were about getting things through as quickly as possible, with no amendments and little fuss—it told Opposition members that the date was in August.

My question is: on what date was the Presiding Officer of this Parliament told? If the Government put the case to our Presiding Officer—the guardian of what we do in the Parliament—that the date was in August, but it now turns out that the date was in June, two months earlier, that raises huge questions, not just about what the Government tells MSPs but about what it tells our Presiding Officer.

Therefore, Deputy Presiding Officer, I ask first whether you will answer that question. Secondly, in light of this new information, will you accept a motion under rule 17.2 of standing orders to suspend standing orders and allow us to rerun the debate on the emergency motion that the Government brought forward yesterday?

I believe and hope that, now that even Scottish National Party members have heard that their own Government knew about the error two months earlier than it said yesterday that it did, they could change their minds. They could say that the Government had more than enough time, before the last week of November, to deal with this issue, because it knew about it not just in the past few weeks or months but before the Parliament even rose for the summer recess. We were still sitting—we had not gone away on recess—but the Government chose to remain silent.

I genuinely think that there will now be SNP members who are uncomfortable that their minister was not over the detail yesterday and, more crucially, that their Government knew about the issue months before it told the Parliament. That is why I believe that it is important for us to have the debate and vote again. A suspension of standing orders under rule 17.2 would be the right way to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ross. That is not a point of order. Nevertheless, to respond to the questions that you asked, I am not aware of the date on which the Presiding Officer was informed.

I am not minded to accept a motion without notice. I am aware that the minister has written to the Presiding Officer to clarify the position, and I think that he copied in the business managers. That is an appropriate means of correcting the record. The other issues that Mr Ross has raised can reasonably be raised during the debate that we are about to proceed with.

Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19891, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

17:24

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): We are in the chamber today to debate stage 1 of a bill that seeks to correct a legislative error and ensure that there is a clear legal basis for local authorities to collect non-domestic rates from the owners of unoccupied properties. I welcome the Parliament's agreement that the bill can be designated as an emergency bill, reflecting the gravity of the situation and its importance to public services and, indeed, to businesses. Ministers have sought to resolve this serious matter as quickly as possible.

The bill will help us to protect public revenues, which play a fundamental role in funding the public services on which we all rely. It will prevent us from potentially having to cut £350 million of funding from our schools or our hospitals or having to increase the rates liabilities for non-domestic properties in future.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Ivan McKee: I will make a wee bit more progress, before perhaps giving way to the member later.

As members know, the Scottish Parliament voted in 2020 to devolve empty property relief to local authorities in order to provide greater local fiscal empowerment for councils by letting them, rather than Scottish Government, decide whether to offer any rates discounts to the owners of unoccupied properties.

To do that, a Government amendment at stage 2 of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill in 2019, approved on a cross-party basis at committee, repealed legislation from 1966 that provided that no rates were payable on unoccupied properties, and also repealed a power that allowed ministers to prescribe by regulation classes of unoccupied property for which such rates were payable.

Empty property relief was devolved on 1 April 2023 and local authorities were given £105 million

of additional revenue funding each year, equal to the forecast cost of that relief before it was devolved. Councils, which are accountable to their local electorate, have full flexibility over how they deploy those extra resources locally.

However, a technical error in the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 was recently identified that means that the amendments did not have the intended legal effect. Although section 19(2) of the 2020 act repealed section 24 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1966, which stated that no rates were payable for unoccupied non-domestic property, the effect of section 16(1) of the Valuation and Rating (Scotland) Act 1956, which sets out that rates shall be payable by occupiers only, was regrettably not taken into account.

In the interest of transparency, I can inform members that a routine inquiry about the basis for rates to be charged to the owner of unoccupied properties was received from a council by Scottish Government officials on 23 June. There was no indication at that time of the implications of the query and it was treated as routine.

In investigating the issue, it became apparent to Scottish Government officials that there might have been an error in the 2020 legislation. Initial concerns were notified to ministers on 21 August, and that concern, following further investigation and legal advice, was confirmed to ministers on 19 September.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): Will the minister give way?

Craig Hoy: Will the minister give way?

Ivan McKee: Ministers agreed that the introduction of legislation be explored, and officials have worked at pace to develop the bill and secure a parliamentary slot since then, taking into account the three-week period that is required for the laying of legislation.

I am happy to take interventions.

Craig Hoy: The minister has, in part, answered my question about the party that has challenged the legislation. Since 23 June, have further parties come forward? Is he able to say to which local authority area the case pertains?

Ivan McKee: No other party has come forward on the issue, because it was not known about. Only one council has come forward. I do not know whether I want to give the name of the council; I will not do that at this stage, because it is up to the council to do that.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Ivan McKee: I have finished with that question, so I will take Martin Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: I seek further clarification of the situation. Will the minister confirm that what he described as a “routine” request was one that was created internally within a local authority—I am content to keep its name private—rather than as a result of an approach that had been made to a local authority by someone who was outwith it, questioning the ability to raise the tax?

Ivan McKee: I would need to check back on the detail on that. As far as the Scottish Government is concerned, the request came from a council, and its council officials asked the question of Scottish Government officials about the basis for the process that we are currently discussing. That was considered internally and then taken forward through the mechanism that I have described.

Who is next?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Given the dates that are involved and the slight confusion around that, is the minister willing to publish all internal correspondence about the error and the timeline surrounding it?

Ivan McKee: In the interests of transparency, we are absolutely willing to co-operate with any requirements in that regard.

Is that everyone?

Jeremy Balfour: I seek clarification. When did the Scottish Government decide that legislation would have to be brought to the Parliament? On what date was that decision made? Even if it had to wait until August or September, given that the Government waited two further months to bring this legislation, does that make it emergency legislation? When did the Government come to the view that primary legislation would be required?

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

Ivan McKee: Thank you.

As I indicated in my earlier remarks, initial concerns were notified to ministers on 21 August. That is the first date that ministers were aware that there was a potential issue. Then, further investigation was undertaken, and, as you would expect, legal advice was sought in order to understand the situation. The outcome of that was confirmed to ministers on 19 September. Ministers then agreed that the introduction of legislation should be explored. That was the point from which we started to take the process forward.

As I indicated, a three-week period is required for the laying of legislation. The October recess also fell in that period. However, when we sat down at the end of September to consider the issue, we were absolutely focused on how quickly

we could bring the legislation to the Parliament—make no mistake of that.

Primary legislation is required to correct the error and provide a clear and certain basis for local authorities to collect rates from the owners of unoccupied properties. Without it, the amounts that have been paid would need to be refunded. The bill is therefore needed to bring the statute book unequivocally into line with the Parliament's intention—and with its position as understood by local authorities and ratepayers, as applied by local authorities, and as voted on by the Parliament in 2019—to devolve empty property relief to local authorities.

The sums that are potentially at stake would fall to the Scottish Government to pay and are estimated to amount to more than £100 million per year if local authorities have to repay the rates that have been collected since 1 April 2023.

There will be no changes to rates bills as a result of the legislation, and the bill, if passed, will not introduce any new additional costs to businesses or individuals compared with the Scottish Parliament's original intended policy. For that reason, we have not consulted on the bill, which simply intends to rectify the position, as it had been understood by the Parliament, local authorities and ratepayers since 1 April 2023.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: He may do so very briefly.

Mark Griffin: I have a technical question to assist my understanding. I understand the position as to the non-domestic rates that have been paid despite there being no legal basis for them to be paid. What is the Government's understanding of arrears or enforcement action that councils will potentially take against owners who have not been paying their non-domestic rates bills during that period? Does the Government have an understanding of the legal status of that debt?

Ivan McKee: I can provide clarification on any specific example that Mark Griffin wants clarification on. In simple terms, everything would continue as if the legislation proposed by the bill had been in place from the date on which the policy was introduced—everything is applied retrospectively. Due to the importance of bringing clarity to the matter, and due to the sums at stake, I hope that members will support this important piece of legislation.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill.

17:33

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives have very real concerns about the emergency bill—concerns about how we got here, the legality of the measures and that, today, two days into our knowing about the situation, the Scottish Government's story is already changing. Will the Government be sure-footed in the answers that it gives moving forward? We do not have confidence that it has been on top of the issue to date.

Ministers are saying today that they have confidence that the tax can be levied retrospectively. However, thanks to Mr Fraser, we all know that the law states quite clearly that retrospective taxes can apply only in exceptional circumstances. I heard what the Deputy Presiding Officer said to Mr Fraser about the legal competence of the bill, but, as the formal response from the Presiding Officer to Mr Fraser makes clear, whether a provision of a bill is within the Parliament's legislative competence can only definitively be determined by a court.

Will the minister produce the legal advice—whether now or during the debate? I know that the Government would not routinely do that, but will the minister do so in order to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that these are exceptional circumstances? If he cannot do so, he should be very worried, because property developers are already in discussion with lawyers and are murmuring the words “unjustified enrichment”. Will the minister also confirm on the record that it is the Government, and not councils, that will be on the hook for the potential cost of £400 million and all other associated costs?

The £400 million in non-domestic rates has been levied on property owners without any legal basis. Although we do not want to delve too deeply into the impact of the original legislation since it was introduced because, at the behest of ministers, the debate and the process will be too short for us to do so, it is worth putting it on the record that the £400 million that has been levied illegally in rates since then has done real and lasting damage to the commercial property market in Scotland, and therefore to towns, jobs and industry.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): The member emphasises that businesses have had to pay the rates, but where would the £400 million come from? Would he support cutting it from local authorities?

Craig Hoy: Mr McKee has managed to magic up £1 billion in public sector reforms in the blink of an eye, so I am sure that he could find another £400 million.

The damage has been very real. Some developers have razed buildings to the ground because they could no longer afford to pay or were not prepared to pay tens of thousands of pounds in tax for buildings that they could not sell or rent. Others have collapsed corporate structures and simply handed back the keys, leaving the councils with the liability for hard-to-maintain properties.

The ministers who were responsible for the defective legislation that the bill seeks to remedy were Derek Mackay and Kate Forbes. Looking back to the consideration of that legislation at stage 2 by the Local Government and Communities Committee, it is clear that ministers did not do what was required of them in terms of legislative scrutiny or legal due diligence. At the time, the Government explicitly referred to repealing section 24 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1966, but it overlooked the existence of section 16 of the Valuation and Rating (Scotland) Act 1956. Kate Forbes and her legal team were asleep at the wheel. In fact, at stage 2 deliberations on what became the 2020 act, Ms Forbes told MSPs that the bill was sound. She said:

“Amendment 42 delivers that by repealing legislation that provides that no rates will be payable on unoccupied lands and heritages. It also repeals a power that allows ministers to prescribe by regulation classes of unoccupied lands and heritage for which such rates are payable.

Although amendment 42 is simple, the implications are significant, both for national non-domestic rates policy and for local empowerment.”—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 4 December 2019; c 36.]

The Government believed that the matter was simple, simply because it did not do its homework properly. It went back to the 1966 statute, but, apparently, it did not go back any further.

Ms Forbes is meant to be the brains of the Scottish National Party operation when, in fact, it was slapdash and shoddy. Who is to be held accountable for that? I see no signs of any heads rolling. However, here we are again. As I said yesterday, the Government’s solution to fix a problem in legislation that was rushed is to rush through legislation.

I also have concerns about the lack of consultation. Ministers are saying that it is because they need to bring forward remedial legislation as quickly as possible following the concerns that were raised with them, but I do not accept in any way that, if they have been able to spend five months giving the matter due consideration, they cannot consult even for a matter of weeks, and that we should be forcing the bill through in two days.

We will not support the bill and we will seek to amend it to the point where ministers must go back and try to get it right. We also question the numbers. Although non-domestic rates on unoccupied property may have brought in £400 million, what damage has that done to the commercial property sector and the construction industry? Would this not be an opportunity to pause for some form of impact assessment to see what damage the legislation has done? If the minister were to speak to those in the industry—many of whom are very angry at the situation that the Government finds itself in—they would tell him, in plain language, what the effects of the tax have been.

On that basis, we cannot support the financial resolution. Given the significant doubts that we have about the possibility of a legal challenge, to support the financial resolution would be to give the Scottish Government a blank cheque while it could face significant legal fees.

I point out that we will try to amend the bill at stage 2 in a number of ways. Douglas Ross, who will speak shortly, will rightly try to ensure that we get greater transparency and accountability. This is the most significant legislative failure in recent years, and the minister should not be seeking to brush that under the carpet. Independent scrutiny is needed to restore confidence in the system and to identify the lessons to be learned.

This bill is, I fear, fraught with difficulty and complexity. I appeal to ministers not to be frivolous with the legislative process now, as they were in 2020. They should pause, think, consult and ensure that they approach it in the proper manner.

17:40

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): On the face of it, this emergency bill is a short and simple bill, designed to rectify an error in the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020. As the law stands, local authorities have had no legal basis to collect non-domestic rates on empty properties since 2023. Had that oversight gone unnoticed, the Scottish Government would now be facing refunds to business property owners amounting to around £350 million.

We intend to support the principle of this emergency bill, not to spare the Government’s blushes but because it is necessary to correct the error, to bring the law back into line with the intent of the 2020 act and, crucially, to ensure that Scottish taxpayers do not end up footing a £350 million bill for a Scottish Government mistake.

We cannot ignore the fact that it seems like sheer luck is all that stood between the Scottish budget and a refund bill worth roughly three quarters of the annual Scottish child payment cost.

That is not a small slip; that is a near miss of staggering proportions.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am curious. The member says that the Labour Party will support the bill. Does he not have any concerns about the legal issues raised earlier by my colleague Murdo Fraser?

Mark Griffin: I do have concerns about the legal issues. However, as the Presiding Officer said, all legislation that is passed in this place will ultimately face the scrutiny of the courts. What I am more concerned about is the Scottish taxpayer having to foot a £350 million bill for a mistake of the Scottish Government's making. That is the consequence of our not passing this legislation.

Costly mistakes from this Government are becoming all too familiar. A billion pounds has been spent on ferries that still do not sail, another billion has been spent on a prison that was supposed to cost £100 million, and millions more have been wasted on legal fees defending the SNP Government's incompetence—and I hope that there will be no more legal fees as a result of this other mistake.

Failure and mismanagement have already drained billions of pounds of public money. It is fortunate that, this time, someone eventually did their homework, because the country is well past the point at which it can afford to keep paying for the Government's errors.

Even though it appears that the issue was caught in time, there may yet be hidden costs for local authorities, such as for legal and financial advice to protect themselves from exposure as collection agents. Like Mr Hoy, I would like a reassurance that hard-pressed councils will not be expected to bear any burden for a blunder that was not of their making. Given the minister's response to my intervention, I am still not clear whether any debt recovery action that has commenced in the past few days—or could potentially commence in the coming weeks—will be sound or whether it could potentially have legal costs attached to it.

The Government will be well aware that we are approaching a moment when the Scottish people will have the opportunity to hold it accountable. Its record on finances and taxation is woeful. We face a looming fiscal gap and, even with this legislative fix, the non-domestic rates system is not functioning as it should. It is a complex labyrinth of exemptions and reliefs—and that may well have been what allowed the error to go undetected for so long.

It is not only in financial legislation that the Government falters. Only last week, we were summoned to the chamber to consider a phantom heat in buildings bill, only for the Government to

admit that it had no intention of introducing such a bill. Those are not the actions of a Government with a clear plan; they are the actions of a Government that has run out of ideas and is rapidly running out of time.

As I have said, we will support the bill, if only to ensure that the Scottish people do not pick up the tab for that mistake. We know that when Governments get it wrong, ordinary people end up paying the price, and we firmly believe that public services should never have to absorb the cost of financial or legal incompetence from a Government here that, increasingly, looks and sounds completely knackered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Lorna Slater. You have up to four minutes, Ms Slater.

17:45

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I do not intend to use my full time.

The Scottish Greens understand the seriousness and importance of the bill and are content that the proposed solution to the drafting error in the 2020 legislation is in keeping with the intention of that legislation and does not change policy or practice. The Scottish Greens will support the bill at stage 1.

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

17:45

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of the general principles of the bill. As we have heard, the bill has been introduced to correct an error in law relating to the liability of owners of unoccupied properties to pay non-domestic rates. It is perhaps worth while to set out what the bill does not do before getting into its purpose and why it is required.

There will be no change to rates bills as a result of the bill. It will not introduce any additional new costs for businesses or individuals beyond what the Scottish Parliament originally intended. I offer that reassurance to my constituents and to businesses in Dundee and, indeed, across Scotland.

I also want to reassure small businesses that the bill will not have an impact on the small business bonus. As of June this year, small business bonus scheme relief had been awarded to more than 116,000 properties, to a value of £247 million. Small business bonus relief of 100 per cent had been awarded to more than 100,000

properties, to a value of £217 million. None of that will be impacted by the bill.

I will move on to why the bill is needed. As we have heard, the bill has been introduced to correct an error in law relating to the liability of owners of unoccupied properties to pay non-domestic rates. The Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 devolved powers to councils to provide discounts to owners of unoccupied properties from 1 April 2023. As a former local government minister, I remain an advocate of empowering our local authorities and welcome the devolution of such powers to councils. I am surprised by the Conservative Party's position on the matter, because, if it were to speak to Conservative local authority leaders, it would find that they would say that they would not want to lose those devolved powers.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is Mr FitzPatrick seriously telling us that we should pass a law that might be illegal and could be struck down by the courts?

Joe FitzPatrick: No. It is clear that a legislative error was made. That has been identified in amendments to the relevant act. The purpose of the bill is to rectify that error, which is why we should do the responsible thing and support it. I understand that there is politics to be made of the issue, but the Conservatives should step up to the plate and do the responsible thing, in the same way that the Labour Party has done. I get that the Labour Party will use the issue to make things difficult for the Government more widely, but, as Mark Griffin said, it is really important that the bill is passed, so that our local authorities do not lose a significant sum of money.

We know that it has been identified that a mistake was made. If the bill is passed, it will apply the necessary changes retrospectively for all levies charged since April 2023, thereby ensuring that the statute book is brought into line with the Parliament's original intention. If the changes were not applied retrospectively, some ratepayers would have an unexpected windfall, but, significantly, around £350 million in public revenue would be lost. At a time of extreme pressure on the public finances as a result of political decisions by Labour and Tory Governments at Westminster, I welcome our SNP Scottish Government's approach to ensuring that every penny of public revenue is recovered and allocated appropriately.

The bill will enable the charging of non-domestic rates to owners of unoccupied non-domestic properties, subject to any reliefs that local authorities might choose to put in place, backdated to 1 April 2023. The Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 was intended to provide greater fiscal powers to local councils, and this bill will ensure that the Parliament's intentions

in the original legislation are realised to their fullest.

17:50

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This is an absolute mess. It is a mess of this Government's own making, and each day brings more questions. I repeat what I said yesterday when the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans said that some of us on the Opposition benches were looking for conspiracies. Well, we are being aided by a Government that is not being up front and honest.

I also want to address something that is at the heart of the nationalist support, certainly, and that I understand is Labour's reason for supporting the bill. I tried to intervene on the minister, but it was the only intervention that he did not take. *[Interruption.]* I do not take it personally, and I will give way to him to allow him to answer this question. If the argument that we must support the bill to protect £350 million of public money is true, the minister will be able to stand up and say that, if his bill passes at stage 3 tomorrow, that £350 million is guaranteed, so there will be no opportunity—no flaws in the legislation—that would allow a legal challenge. As Murdo Fraser and others have said, this is going to end up in the courts, so can the minister, who is seeking support for his bill at stage 1 and, ultimately, tomorrow at stage 3, give the Parliament a cast-iron guarantee that the money referred to in his financial memorandum will go to local services and that it will not, in any way, be effectively challenged in the courts?

Ivan McKee: First, I apologise to Douglas Ross for not taking his intervention. He must have sat down too early—I took interventions from everybody who had their request-to-speak button pressed. Of course, in going through the process, we take legal advice on how we need to proceed, and that robust legal advice underpins what we are taking forward in this legislation. It is essential that we pass the bill to address this issue.

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

Douglas Ross: That was not my question. Let me ask it again. If the bill passes—the bill that the minister is taking forward and that members of his Government's party and the Labour Party are supporting to protect £350 million of public money—can he guarantee to members who support it that that £350 million will be protected, or does he accept that there is a risk of legal challenge and that the £350 million could be challenged in the courts?

Ivan McKee: I know that, if we do not pass the bill, that £350 million absolutely will be lost. I also

know that the legal underpinning for taking this forward is robust, and that is the basis on which we are taking it forward.

Douglas Ross: I am sorry, but it is not a difficult question. The minister and Joe FitzPatrick said that Opposition politicians should not make politics with this matter. However, if we cannot get that guarantee, there is no reason to support the bill, because the money absolutely could be lost. Even if a member supports the bill and the member's argument is to support the bill to protect the money, the money could still be lost, because of the way that this Government legislated and the way that the problem has unravelled.

John Mason: *rose—*

Douglas Ross: Can I get the time back for taking John Mason's intervention, Presiding Officer?

John Mason: Does the member accept that every piece of legislation made in this place can be challenged in the courts? We cannot guarantee that any piece of legislation will not be challenged.

Douglas Ross: What we can guarantee, based on Murdo Fraser's letter to the Presiding Officer, is that this bill will be challenged—not because of what we, as Opposition politicians, are saying but because of what the Government itself is saying in its own accompanying documents to the bill. It will not take a professional lawyer much time to make an argument, because the argument will be to hold up the Government's own documents that accompany the bill—because those admit the deficiencies in the bill that the Government is trying to pass.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Douglas Ross: Can I get the time back for taking Michelle Thomson's intervention, Presiding Officer?

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

Michelle Thomson: We should not confuse risk with probability. The minister is saying that, if we do nothing, we will have complete certainty that the money will be lost. Obviously, with legal advice, anything can be challenged. We need to separate those two points. With all due respect to Mr Ross, I ask what exact remedies he is bringing forward, given that we have this situation. We have a duty to act responsibly in this Parliament, and I am interested in hearing what remedies the Tories have.

Douglas Ross: Here is a remedy: let us take a little bit longer over the legislation. The problem occurred in the first place because, during Covid, we had an expedited process for putting through

legislation. That is why this mistake occurred—a mistake that could cost £350 million. Why not take a bit more time to get more legal advice and inform members more about what is behind the Government's problem and how it is trying to sort it? We should not use another expedited process to pass legislation that could still end up in the courts and potentially cost us £350 million.

There are some areas that I want to focus on, given that you have allowed me more time, Deputy Presiding Officer.

In his intervention on the minister, Jeremy Balfour made a very good point. I have gone through the letter that I received from Graeme Dey today. I will go through the timetable. On 23 June, the Government was made aware of the problem. The matter then went to officials who concluded, on 13 August, that there was likely a problem with the legislation. What on earth were they doing for the rest of June, the whole of July and half of August? If the issue is so big that it needs emergency legislation, surely Scottish Government officials should have been putting it up in lights straight away.

We then find out that, when they decided that there was a problem—on 13 August—they took more than a week to tell ministers. They informed ministers on 21 August. Again, where was the urgency? If we are being told that this is such a crucial piece of legislation that it has to pass in hours and days, why did officials at the Scottish Government think that they had more than a week to tell their ministers about it?

Jeremy Balfour's point was this: after ministers knew about it, when did they start to introduce the legislation? Ministers agreed on 22 September to progress emergency primary legislation to remedy the matter. The minister who responded to Jeremy Balfour said that the Government needed three weeks. It has been more than three weeks since 22 September, although I appreciate that there was a recess. It has been 10 weeks since the Government not just found out about the issue but decided that it needed to do something urgently. I ask the minister please not to tell me and other MSPs that he was treating it as an emergency, given that he sat on it for 10 weeks before he even took it to the chamber.

I know that I have used all my time, Presiding Officer, and I am grateful for your indulgence.

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Ross: If I am allowed to, I will

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow it very briefly, Mr Ross, after which you will need to wind up.

Ivan McKee: Half of what Douglas Ross said was about our rushing things through, and the other half was about our taking too long to fully investigate what the issue was and what its solution was.

Douglas Ross: I ask the minister to listen to what members are saying. If this was the emergency that the Government says it is, its officials should have taken less than two months to bring it to ministers' attention, ministers should not have sat on it for 10 weeks before they brought it to the chamber, and we should not be rushing the bill through. That is the whole point of what I said to Michelle Thomson. We should be taking our time, because we know how bad the Government is at legislating.

Let us not make more mistakes. Let us do this properly. I support the Conservatives in opposing the bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches. I call Lorna Slater.

Lorna Slater: I have no more remarks, thank you, Presiding Officer.

17:57

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is right that the bill is urgent, and it is right that it is essential. From listening to the speeches and interventions, we know that the reality is that at least £350 million would have to be paid if we did not pass the bill.

It is right to note that there is a risk in passing the bill—as with every piece of legislation that the Parliament passes—that it can be taken to court for a question to be raised. That raises the questions that Murdo Fraser wrote to the Presiding Officer about, which we have heard about today. There is a potential human rights challenge, and members have pointed to cases in which the Government has not been successful when such challenges have taken place. A significant number of members are aware of constituents who have suffered as a result.

However, such questions are for the court to settle. If it so wishes and is so inclined, the court may take into account everything that has been said in the chamber to lead to an indication of the thinking of ministers and of those of us who do not sit on the Government benches—and the court may take a decision on that.

Murdo Fraser: I am following Martin Whitfield's argument with interest, but does he agree that, rather than our spending time in passing the bill in the expectation that the issue will then go to a court to be resolved, we should get this right in the Parliament, because that is our job as legislators?

Martin Whitfield: The reality is that, within the legislative procedures that we have in the Parliament, we cannot prevent or stop a challenge, although we can take steps to minimise the risk.

This very short, technical and tightly drafted bill seeks to do everything that it can to bring to legislative fruition what people have understood to be the law for a considerable time. The risk lies in the retrospective element.

With regard to on-going action by local authorities to recover funds, I hope that the Government is in a position to give the same assurance about underwriting potential risks. The figure for that will be much smaller than £350 million, but I hope that the Government will give a realistic figure and say where it would be raised from.

If we delay the legislation so that we can look at the situation again and come up with a solution, we will, in all probability, still come up with a very short bill that looks not dissimilar to the one that we have. However, we would extend the period in which more and greater potential risks could arise to our local authorities, which are the recovery agents.

We need to balance the legal risk on one side with the real financial risk of not passing the bill on the other side. I hope that we will pass the bill tomorrow night. Not to pass the bill would be a true dereliction of duty to every taxpayer out there because, at the end of the day, a Government undertaking still involves taxpayers' money.

I am conscious of time. We will support the bill tonight. We will be looking for explanations and assurances from the Government at stage 2, but supporting the bill is the right thing to do. Maybe this is a salient lesson for the Parliament about how we go about scrutinising legislation.

18:01

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Douglas Ross is right that this is a shambles; it is an absolute shambles. We have dealt with emergency legislation in the Parliament before. Emergency legislation proceeds on a very tight timescale in situations where there is a political consensus about fixing a problem that needs to be fixed urgently. We do not have a consensus now because, in the past few hours, we have unravelled the fact that there are key legal problems with the bill.

My colleague Douglas Ross pointed out that the information that the Scottish Government has provided about timing has been inaccurate. It has had since June, potentially, to resolve this, but it is

trying to force the bill through Parliament in 24 hours.

Martin Whitfield: Do we have consensus across the chamber that we do not want to automatically reimburse £350 million?

Murdo Fraser: I absolutely do not want to see a hole in the public finances, but there is no point in passing a bill that is not going to achieve that because it will be defeated in the courts, and I believe that there is a very real risk that it will be.

The issue is all down to SNP incompetence and incompetent drafting. We should not have to spend parliamentary time sorting out the SNP's mistakes because someone did not do their job properly.

I will look at the substance of the issue. If I remember correctly, the rationale behind removing empty property relief—which was simply another tax raid on businesses—was the belief that it would incentivise landlords to let empty properties more easily. I am interested in knowing whether that has been achieved—maybe the minister can address that in his winding-up speech. Do we know whether there are fewer empty properties now than there were in 2020, when the legislation was passed?

High streets are full of empty retail and office premises. Labour market changes and increased working flexibility mean that there is less demand for office space, whereas retail is under pressure. As Craig Hoy mentioned, landlords are actively demolishing perfectly sound properties because they cannot find tenants in the short term and cannot afford to pay their rates. The policy has not delivered on its ambition, but if the minister wants to correct me with some numbers in winding up, I will listen to him.

I come back to the legal question. It seems that the law in this area is quite clear. We cannot pass retrospective legislation to take away people's rights, except in extreme circumstances. The bill seeks to retrospectively extinguish the existing right in Scots law that, as the law stands, would give people the right to make a claim under the principle of unjust enrichment.

The European Court of Human Rights is very clear about the matter. I have read the Scottish Government's policy memorandum, which makes the case that the public interest in relation to the financial consequences for the state outweighs the property rights under article 1 of protocol 1, but let me state what the European Court of Human Rights has said. It is clear that financial considerations for the state, or the wish to avoid the consequences of a Government mistake, do not of themselves constitute a sufficient justification for extinguishing private law rights. In fact, the Court has treated retrospective legislation

that was designed to rescue the state from its own error with particular suspicion.

In my letter to the Presiding Officer, I referred to the case of *Maurice v France* from 2006. Paragraph 87 of the judgment states:

“the Court has already found that the taking of property without payment of an amount reasonably related to its value will normally constitute a disproportionate interference, and a total lack of compensation can be considered justifiable under Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 only in exceptional circumstances”.

A case is made in the policy memorandum, but that statement in that judgment reflects a series of other judgments from the European Court of Human Rights—including the case of the holy monasteries v Greece in 1994, the case of the former King of Greece and others v Greece in 1994 and the case of *Jahn and others v Germany* in 2001—so we are talking about a settled law.

Jeremy Balfour: I seek clarity from Mr Fraser. Does he believe that there is no legal way for the money to be retained, or does he believe that, if further time was provided for scrutiny, a legal way around the situation could be found?

Murdo Fraser: We simply do not know the answer. Having looked at the case law, I can say that the case that the Scottish Government makes in the bill's policy memorandum is, in my view, hard to sustain, because the case law refers to exceptional circumstances. In this case, the exceptional circumstances relate to legislative incompetence on the part of the Scottish Government. I find it very hard to believe that a court in Scotland would uphold that as a justification for breaching the very strong presumption against retrospective legislation taking away the property rights under article 1 of protocol 1.

Martin Whitfield: Will Murdo Fraser take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will need to be very brief, Mr Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: Are the exceptional circumstances that everyone understood what the law ought to have been from that date?

Murdo Fraser: I fear that, under the law, that is an entirely irrelevant matter, because the court will consider what has actually been legislated for—the letter of the law is what is important.

Why are we in this mess? Who is taking responsibility? Why did nobody in the Scottish Government, the civil service, the ministerial team or the legal directorate spot the mistake? It is hugely embarrassing for the Scottish Government,

and we have yet to hear an apology for the errors that have been made.

I am genuinely sorry that the Labour Party is supporting the bill. Mr Griffin referred to his concern about costs—if the matter ends up going to court, the costs for the taxpayer will mount up and up and up. I believe that, if we pass the bill, the matter will almost certainly go to court, because, given the very large sums involved, people will feel that they have a justifiable legal claim to make.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Murdo Fraser: It is not the job of the Scottish Conservatives, as the principal Opposition party in Holyrood, to help the failing SNP Government to clamber out of the hole that it has dug for itself. If other parties want to come to the Government's rescue, so be it, but we will not.

18:08

Ivan McKee: I thank members who have taken part in the debate. I welcome the recognition of the seriousness of the issue, and the need to move at pace to address the challenge, from the Labour Party, the Green Party and, I believe, the Liberal Democrats, although I cannot see any of their members in the chamber. All those parties support our taking forward this measure. That represents a mature approach and an understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. As a Parliament, we need to work together to address the issue, which is what those in the outside world would expect us to do.

That contrasts with the approach of members on the Conservative benches, who have—to be frank—taken this as an opportunity to grandstand, coming up with no answers and looking for—

Craig Hoy: Will the minister give way?

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Ivan McKee: I will make some progress and come back to Paul Sweeney in a minute.

It is worth reflecting on the original bill. As I understand it, the bill process was not expedited—it took place over a number of months. It went through stage 3 in early February 2020, before Covid had taken effect, and the policy intent was agreed. The interventions from Conservative members this afternoon have been a bit contradictory and incoherent, so I am not sure, but I do not think that their position is that they disagree with the policy intent of devolving the power to local authorities. I also note that that was agreed to unanimously in committee at stage 2.

With regard to the specific measure that Murdo Fraser asked about, we have some data from Perth and Kinross Council. It had 89 exempt properties as at 31 March 2023, and it has indicated that the removal of the exemption has generally had the desired effect: 41 of those properties are now occupied; 29 are still empty; seven have had their rateable value reduced to nil by the assessor; and 12 have been deleted or merged with other properties by the assessor. By and large, that evidence suggests that the policy intent has been fulfilled.

Of course, the intent was primarily to give that power to local authorities. Again, we never tire of hearing from the Conservatives about the need for us to devolve powers to local authorities, so I do not understand their issue with that.

The process that we are currently going through was agreed at the Parliamentary Bureau on a cross-party basis. Representatives from all the parties were at that meeting. They included the Conservatives' business manager, who signed up to the process and supported our having the stage 1 debate on Wednesday—the day of the United Kingdom budget—rather than tomorrow morning. Again, I highlight that there was cross-party support not only for the policy intent in passing the original amendment but for the process that we are currently going through.

Paul Sweeney: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Douglas Ross: Will the minister give way?

Ivan McKee: I will take an intervention from Paul Sweeney, because I think that he was first.

Paul Sweeney: In the spirit of cross-party working, I think that there is cross-party consensus that the policy has generally been successful in Glasgow, but there have been a couple of instances in which it has had unintended consequences, most notably in relation to Govanhill baths and Flemington house in Springburn, where dozens of small businesses were evicted because the owner had to pursue a temporary relief for 12 months. There are cases in which it could be improved. Would it be possible to lodge a light-touch amendment to the bill to signal where best practice should be adopted by local authorities? That would not be militating against their devolved rights but signalling where improvements could be made at national level to preserve listed buildings.

Ivan McKee: I acknowledge the member's concern on that issue, and I recognise the significant work that he does with regard to historic and listed buildings in general. I have received correspondence from the member on that issue. I would say two things. First, this bill is about taking a focused approach so that we can take through the measures that are needed in order to protect

that revenue and provide clarity in the rates system, and I think that it would be a mistake to complicate that further. However, I absolutely recognise the issue that the member has raised regarding the local applicability of the policy, and I am happy to work with him on how we can seek to address that issue through other measures.

Murdo Fraser: Is Mr McKee able to advise us whether Scottish Government lawyers have been able to find any precedents in case law that support the contention that legislative failure amounts to an exceptional circumstance as would be upheld to defeat the presumption under article 1, protocol 1 of the European convention on human rights?

Ivan McKee: I will comment on the issue of retrospective legislation, which I think is at the core of what Murdo Fraser was talking about. Retrospective legislation is not inherently unfair or incompatible with human rights. Such legislation has been passed by the Parliament previously, including the Erskine Bridge Tolls Act 2001, the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2002, the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2013 and the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Relief from Additional Amount) (Scotland) Act 2018. There have been several occasions on which retrospective legislation has been taken forward successfully.

The Scottish Government acknowledges that great care must be taken when changing the law with retrospective effect, and that there is a general public interest in the law not being changed retrospectively. However, sometimes, it can be justified and is proportionate to do so; this is one such case. Crucially, the bill will not raise new revenue; it seeks to protect revenue that has already been collected. The affected ratepayers have already paid the rates that are demanded, so retrospectively validating the rates will not pose a severe or undue burden to them. At most, it will deprive them of a windfall that they had not expected or, indeed, budgeted for. We must weigh up the community interest against that. Failing to ensure that legislation is retrospective would mean a potential loss of up to £350 million in public revenue, as has been highlighted. That could result in either significant cuts to public services or compensatory tax rises being required in subsequent years. In that context, the Government considers that the bill strikes a fair balance between community interest and the rights of individuals. The Government considers the bill to be compatible with convention rights and that it is within the legislative competence of the Parliament.

Liam Kerr *rose*—

Craig Hoy *rose*—

Ivan McKee: I will give way—who was first? Members should decide between them.

Craig Hoy: Will the minister answer the question that Mr Griffin put to him? We know that the Government is on the hook for the £350 million, but is he giving a guarantee to councils that all other associated costs that might arise, including interest, legal costs or fees associated with debt recovery will be underwritten by the Scottish Government?

Ivan McKee: The Government will have conversations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the matter now that it has been raised. We expect that individual councils will be taking legal advice on how they should proceed and on the effect of the retrospective legislation.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ivan McKee: I have probably taken enough interventions.

In conclusion, I urge members to recognise the importance of the matter that the bill seeks to address. It is vital in order to maintain the credibility of the tax system, protect public finances, and enable the non-domestic rates system to continue to operate as it had been understood to be operating by local authorities and ratepayers since 1 April 2023. If passed, the bill will not introduce any new additional costs to businesses or individuals compared to the Scottish Parliament's original intended policy. The Parliament voted in 2020 to devolve empty property relief to local authorities to provide greater local fiscal empowerment for councils by letting them, rather than the Scottish Government, decide whether to offer any rates discounts to the owners of unoccupied properties. The bill will give full effect to the Parliament's original intention by clarifying the legislative position as quickly as possible. I urge members to support it.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In an earlier point of order this evening, before you assumed the chair, I raised the letter that we received from Graeme Dey correcting what he had said on the record yesterday. He had informed the Parliament that the Government first became aware of the error in the law in August, but it turns out that it learned of it in June. My question to the Deputy Presiding Officer was about the information that was provided to other party representatives. Certainly, we were told about the August date. I asked when you had been informed. In the discussions that you have had with the Government about the emergency legislation, did it state to you as the Presiding Officer—the person who we have elected to be representative of all MSPs, not just Government

ministers and MSPs—that the relevant date was August, or were you informed of the June date?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I received notification of the bill being within the Parliament at the beginning of November. I am not aware of the dates to which Mr Ross refers. The bill came into the building at that point for the usual pre-introduction checks.

Douglas Ross: I was not clear: that would be the three-week period that the Government would have to inform you about a bill, which would take us to today. My question was, when the Government informed you of that, did it alert you, as I understand it informed Opposition parties, that it was aware of the error in August, or did it tell you about the true date, which was June?

The Presiding Officer: I do not believe that such dates were discussed with me by the Government. That is not a point of order, Mr Ross, but we will continue with our business.

That concludes the debate on the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill.

Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

18:19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-19928, in the name of Ivan McKee, on a financial resolution for the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill, agrees to—

(a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3A of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any increase in the revenue from non-domestic rates in relation to which Rule 9.12.3B(b) of the Parliament's Standing Orders applies arising in consequence of the Act.—[Ivan McKee]

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

Business Motions

18:19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-19921, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 2 December 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Commonwealth Games—Glasgow 2026

followed by Scottish Government Debate: All Together: Uniting Local and National Efforts, Across Sectors to End Violence Against Women and Girls

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 3 December 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business; Justice and Home Affairs

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 4 December 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: Education and Skills

followed by Education, Children and Young People Committee Debate: Widening Access to Higher Education

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 9 December 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Committee Business

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 10 December 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 Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 11 December 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 Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Debate: British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry

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 1 December 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*]

18:20

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Yesterday's responses to my urgent question on grooming gangs were nothing short of a farce.

Once again, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs passed responsibility on to a junior minister to answer questions on her behalf while she sat in the chamber avoiding any scrutiny.

At a time when Scotland desperately needs leadership on grooming gangs, this Government offers only evasion and silence. Victims are being failed while ministers sit on their hands. I raise the unprecedented intervention by the NSPCC, which has made it clear that Scotland has no real understanding of the true scale or nature of grooming gangs operating in our country. That is an alarming admission from our leading child protection charity.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs claimed that the national child sexual abuse and exploitation sub-group addresses grooming gangs, but its 27-page report does not mention grooming gangs once. Therefore, I ask again: who is investigating grooming gangs in Scotland? It is certainly not this Government.

The cabinet secretary told me that it is for me and others to present a case for an inquiry. The evidence is already overwhelming. The NSPCC has said that the scale of grooming gang activity is unknown. More victims are coming forward every day with harrowing, life-changing testimony. Families are being torn apart by some of the most appalling crimes imaginable. What more evidence does the cabinet secretary need?

Victims do not need a Government that is merely open to an inquiry; they need a Government that is willing to initiate one, to listen to victims, to act and to confront the failures that have allowed those crimes to continue unchecked. Leadership is not about sitting on the fence. Leadership is about stepping up and doing what is right.

A grooming gangs inquiry is not optional; it is essential. It is the only way to uncover the scale of the problem, to protect children and to ensure that victims' voices are finally heard and believed. I take no pleasure whatsoever in raising these issues. However, until this Government stops ducking responsibility, I will continue to speak up for the victims who have been ignored for far too long, even if that means that I need to return to the chamber to raise the issue every sitting day.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I, too, had concerns about the fact that the cabinet secretary was not here to answer what has now become a really important national question. The member and I might slightly disagree on the approach, but we agree that the Government's complacency is a cause for concern to us in the chamber, to victims and to agencies. I called for a case-by-case review, at the very least, but I got no answer to that call.

Does the member share my frustration that we have to try other ways to get answers that we are not getting in the chamber?

Meghan Gallacher: That is exactly why I am here this evening: because there is a frustration. We cannot get answers. We cannot seem to find any mechanism afforded to MSPs that allows us to get answers to the questions that we have asked—I know that Pauline McNeill has asked serious questions in relation to Parliament being misled and comments that have been put on the record by the cabinet secretary. That is why I believe that there has to be a statement or another mechanism to allow MSPs in this place to ask questions and finally receive answers from the Government. Better yet, let us have the inquiry now. Victims deserve justice, they deserve to be heard and they deserve an inquiry. That is why we need an inquiry now.

The Presiding Officer: I call the minister to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

18:24

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I will respond from the perspective of responding to a call for a statement, as I believe was intended, which was covered in the latter part of Meghan Gallacher's contribution.

There has been on-going engagement with the Parliament on this topic and related child sexual abuse and exploitation issues. An urgent question was answered yesterday on the understanding of the scale and nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation in Scotland, which included responses on the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group and its programme of work across workforce data and the consideration of mandatory reporting.

An urgent question from Liam Kerr was also answered on 19 November on Alexis Jay being misrepresented.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the minister take an intervention?

Graeme Dey: I want to make some progress, because I think that I will answer the member's question. The answer on 19 November clarified the position regarding Professor Jay's valued membership of the group, alongside other expert partners, in our continued collective efforts to tackle this horrendous form of child abuse.

An oral portfolio question was answered on Wednesday 12 November, which covered the steps that are being taken to prevent group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation in Scotland. It covered the prevention-focused approach of the strategic group to collectively improve how harms

are identified, reported and responded to by statutory agencies and other partners.

The strategic group met on 25 November. The minutes are being finalised and actions ratified. Based on the advice that will flow from the strategic group to ministers for consideration, we will be able to establish the most effective next steps.

The most effective way to inform Parliament about the work of the strategic group and the response to on-going calls for an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland will be through a comprehensive statement to the Parliament, which will be undertaken as soon as possible, and before recess. For the benefit of members, I say that that is an undertaking that I gave two weeks ago through the usual bureau process, in which the Conservatives participate. Therefore, I am a little surprised that the Tories are calling for something that they have been told is coming.

Pauline McNeill: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

The Presiding Officer: Minister, can I confirm that you were about to take the intervention from Ms McNeill?

Graeme Dey: Sorry, I was not aware of the intervention. I am happy to take it.

Pauline McNeill: I want to draw the minister's attention to the question that I have now asked twice. It is a serious question. An apology has been made because Professor Jay was quoted in a debate in which we made a decision on whether we would have an inquiry.

I have asked whether the Government has since spoken to the expert on child abuse, Professor Jay, and I cannot seem to get an answer. It might be that that all happened at the meeting of the working group on 25 November. Can the minister give me some clarity now? Is Professor Jay now satisfied that the minister has taken her expert advice?

Graeme Dey: I will write to Pauline McNeill, having looked into that matter for her.

The Presiding Officer: I clarify for members that this item of business is about members wishing to change forthcoming items of business. That should be the focus.

The question is, that motion S6M-19921, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, 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.

18:28

Meeting suspended.

18:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on motion S6M-19921, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. Members should cast their votes now.

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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 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, Foysol (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)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19921, in the name of Graeme Dey, is: For 92, Against 26, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 2 December 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Commonwealth Games—Glasgow 2026

followed by Scottish Government Debate: All Together: Uniting Local and National Efforts, Across Sectors to End Violence Against Women and Girls

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Wednesday 3 December 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business; Justice and Home Affairs

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 4 December 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: Education and Skills

followed by Education, Children and Young People Committee Debate: Widening Access to Higher Education

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 9 December 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions
followed by Committee Business
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 10 December 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 Conservative and Unionist
 Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 11 December 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 Equalities, Human Rights and Civil
 Justice Committee Debate: British Sign
 Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry
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 1 December 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.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-19922 and S6M-19923, on stage 1 timetables for bills, and S6M-19924, on a stage 2 timetable for a bill.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 30 January 2026.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 16 January 2026.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 5 December 2025.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

18:32

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-19925, S6M-19926 and S6M-19927, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2025 Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Cross-Border Public Procurement (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Procurement (Iraq Free Trade Agreement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.—
[Graeme Dey]

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

Decision Time

18:33

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are eleven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if amendment S6M-19894.3, in the name of Gillian Martin, is agreed to, amendment S6M-19894.4, in the name of Sarah Boyack, will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-19894.3, in the name of Gillian Martin, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19894, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, on backing oil and gas, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19894.3, in the name of Gillian Martin, is: For 58, Against 60, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-19894.4, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19894, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, on backing oil and gas, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I tried to vote yes, but the app shows that my vote has not been accounted for.

The Presiding Officer: That is, indeed, the case, Ms Boyack. We will record your vote now.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (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]
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)

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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19894.4, in the name of Sarah Boyack, is: For 22, Against 97, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-19894, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, on backing oil and gas, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

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

For

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (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)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19894, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 28, Against 89, Abstentions 3.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-19895.3, in the name of Ivan McKee, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19895, in the name of Craig Hoy, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19895.3, in the name of Ivan McKee, is: For 58, Against 60, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Michael Marra is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jamie Greene will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-19895.4, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19895, in the name of Craig Hoy, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (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]
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-19895.4, in the name of Michael Marra, is: For 23, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Lorna Slater is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jamie Greene will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-19895.1, in the name of Lorna Slater, which seeks to amend motion S6M-19895, in the name of Craig Hoy, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Sarah Boyack: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I tried to vote, and would have voted no, but, again, it did not register.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Boyack. 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-198.95, in the name of Lorna Slater, is: For 64, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Jamie Greene therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-19895, in the name of Craig Hoy, on growing Scotland's economy, 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19895, in the name of Craig Hoy, on growing Scotland's economy, as amended, is: For 65, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament calls on the UK Government to deliver a budget that supports a fairer, greener economy for Scotland by introducing an annual wealth tax on the wealthiest 1% of households in the UK, raising between £70 billion and £130 billion a year, to invest in communities, public services and climate action across Scotland, including reducing the cost of energy and other essentials for those who are struggling with the cost of living and inflation.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-19891, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Neil Bibby: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 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, Foysof (Lothian) (Ind)
 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)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)

(SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19891, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, is: For 94, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-19928, in the name of Shona Robison, on a financial resolution for the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill, 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 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, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 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)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19928, in the name of Shona Robison, on a financial resolution for the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill, is: For 93, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Non-Domestic Rates (Liability for Unoccupied Properties) (Scotland) Bill, agrees to—

(a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3A of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any increase in the revenue from non-domestic rates in relation to which Rule 9.12.3B(b) of the Parliament's Standing Orders applies arising in consequence of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motions S6M-19925, S6M-19926 and S6M-19927, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2025 Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Cross-Border Public Procurement (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Procurement (Iraq Free Trade Agreement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Gender Identity Clinics (Waiting Times)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-19675, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on unacceptable waiting times for accessing gender identity clinics. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with deep concern the figures on what it sees as the unacceptable waiting times at NHS Scotland gender identity clinics (GIC), which were published by Public Health Scotland on 28 October 2025; further notes in particular that Scotland's largest GIC, the Sandyford in Glasgow, which serves eight NHS boards covering nearly half of Scotland's population, is reportedly overwhelmed, with around 4,000 people on its waiting list and fewer than 50 first appointments per year as of March 2025; shares the concern of Scottish Trans that "the most hopeful estimate is that you would wait 80 years for a first appointment" and that "without drastic action, most people on the waiting list will never be seen"; believes that the strategic action framework for 2022-24 for the improvement of NHS gender identity services, which was published in 2021, has failed to deliver its aims, which included piloting new gender identity services to reduce waiting times and improve trans people's experiences, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government to urgently set out a plan of action to ensure that trans people in Glasgow and throughout Scotland are able to access the services they need.

18:50

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank those members who have stayed a little later than expected, as well as all those who signed the motion, allowing us to debate the subject this evening.

MSPs from all sides of the chamber raise the issue of waiting times in our national health service regularly. In a search of the *Official Report* from the past two weeks alone, I saw members rightly expressing concern about failures to meet waiting-time targets of 12 months for some conditions, and 62 days in another case. A member raised the issue of waiting times again at portfolio question time today. There are many examples, and we all understand the impact of the problem on our constituents' lives and the immense challenges that the NHS faces in addressing it.

However, the example that I raise today is extreme. The data from Public Health Scotland, which are mentioned in the motion and were published last month, illustrate a wholly unacceptable situation throughout Scotland, but in particular at the Sandyford in Glasgow, where the

service is utterly overwhelmed. That is Scotland's largest gender identity clinic; it is the service for eight health board areas covering almost half the Scottish population. As at March this year, in comparison with the previous year, there were three times as many people on its waiting list who had been there for more than five years. The clinic was offering first appointments to people who had been waiting for six and a half years.

A six-and-a-half-year wait for a first appointment is bad enough, but that is not what new patients today are facing. With almost 4,000 people on the waiting list and fewer than 50 first appointments being offered in the course of a year, new patients will be looking at the situation in utter despair. At that rate, it would take 80 years to reach the head of the queue. That is not even the worst estimate—independent research has put the figure far higher and shown that the situation there is by far the worst in any part of the United Kingdom.

Whether we measure a theoretical waiting time like that in decades or in centuries, it is hardly helpful. Either way, it is clear that, without transformational change, most people will simply never be seen. They will never even get a first appointment, let alone actually receive the healthcare that they need. More to the point, only those with the resources to go private will be able to do so, and even then, they will find it next to impossible to get an NHS general practitioner who will accept them and treat them.

All that stands in stark contrast to the Scottish Government's stated commitments. In 2021, it committed to

"reform the current model of Gender Identity Services to meet the needs of the community",

bringing the service

"within national waiting times standards."

The "NHS gender identity services: strategic action framework 2022-2024", which promised "transformation" of the service, was published in late 2021 and was due to be implemented between 2022 and 2024. As part of that, a commitment was made to

"test new multidisciplinary models for delivery of gender identity healthcare",

among many other improvements.

How must the people who are waiting for year after year after year feel, knowing that such promises were made and that the situation has simply continued to fall apart? Well, many of them have told me how their lives are affected. I have heard from those who have been left with no option but to seek private treatment, including those who have been forced into debt to do so. I have heard from those who have been refused

treatment from their GP or who have had to change their GP multiple times.

I have heard from those who were offered no support of any kind while waiting, and no clarity at all about how long the wait would be. I have heard from those who suffer the distress of having a complete lack of control over their own lives, not as a result of being trans, but as a result of the indefinite wait for support or treatment.

I heard from one constituent, who is herself a doctor working in the NHS. She was told that the waiting list was two years long when she joined it, only to be told, as two years passed, that the wait would be another two years. She has now been waiting for six years and fears that she may be waiting for many more.

My constituent's description of desperation in seeking private care—as she described it,

“to bridge the gap while waiting”,

only to find that the wait would become interminable—was distressing enough to read. What I found even harder to read was her request that I quote from her experience, but not use her name. She said:

“I mostly just don't want to be potentially harassed at my workplace if this is linked back to me.”

That is from someone who worked to provide emergency care during the Covid-19 pandemic to serve her community and her country.

We need to recognise the context in which all this is happening. Recent years have seen a continually rising tide of transphobia, generating hostility, fear and prejudice. We see legal demands for segregation. We see flat-out denial of trans and non-binary people's identities, of their human rights and of their dignity. We see a campaign to stir up and weaponise transphobia—a campaign that is every bit as ugly and toxic as the homophobia of the 1980s and 1990s, and in the early years of the Parliament. That campaign is coming not only from the far right, but from across the political spectrum.

Turning to the subject of the motion that we are debating, we see outright attempts to abolish trans people's healthcare altogether. I know that the Scottish Government does not intend to support that, but the position now is so severe that, without transformational action, that is what will have happened by default, and the Scottish Government will have allowed it.

We must not permit that—not the Government, and not the Parliament. Every MSP has constituents who are waiting for too long, and waiting for us to act. They have a right to expect better. They want to hear from the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health today what is

going to happen now to resolve the crisis, and so do I.

18:58

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank Patrick Harvie for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also thank Scottish Trans for its briefing.

I have met with constituents on this matter, as I am sure that other members have. Waiting times, in particular at the Sandyford in Glasgow, are far too long. Things are slightly better in Edinburgh, relatively speaking, as the waiting list is around two and a half years. However, that is still an unacceptable length of time for people to be waiting for life-saving treatment and care—and when I say “life-saving”, I mean “life-saving”.

A constituent has stated to me that

“This waiting time is often after gatekeeping by GPs”,

which is an issue that Patrick Harvie mentioned. My constituent went on to say:

“as an example, my GP first refused and I only got referred after I saw another GP two months later. People will unfortunately die from suicide on these waiting lists, and the importance of gender-affirming care can't be understated.”

We should be looking to move towards an informed-consent model of trans healthcare—as was approved at last year's Scottish National Party conference—that trusts trans people in their assertion of who they are, and which does not rely on a medicalised approach. My constituent said:

“Currently, we have to prove that we have gender dysphoria, which not every trans person has, in order to access treatments like hormone replacement therapy or surgeries. Additionally, trans healthcare should be more integrated into general healthcare.”

That is a really important point. My constituent went on to say:

“My current GP, while kind, has no idea what he is doing when it comes to ... my hormones or referrals to other services.”

Partially as a result of this segregation of trans healthcare and partially due to systemic and societal stigma and discrimination, trans folk and LGBTQI people face worse healthcare outcomes within the NHS overall.

What needs to happen? Another important point is that other health boards must begin to take responsibility for their trans and non-binary patients. We talk about postcode lotteries in some types of NHS care, but it is an important issue when it comes to gender-affirming care. Only a couple of health boards provide such services, so the current model of having a small number of services covering large areas of Scotland simply is

not working. Other health boards must begin to provide gender-affirming care to their patients.

The Scottish Government must also look to provide funding and support for these new services in different health boards—I look forward to hearing what the minister says on that particular point—and it must do so on the basis that these services trial new models of care in line with the new standards that have been developed and learning from successful pilots in England.

Scottish Trans has raised the issue of funding. The Scottish Government should ensure that the transgender knowledge and skills framework has the maximum impact possible by increasing the number of staff working in gender identity healthcare.

The commitment in the Scottish Government's strategic action framework that trans and non-binary people were most hopeful about was the commitment to pilot new services that try to deliver gender identity healthcare in more modern ways, with less reliance on specialist centres. This should be the key focus of Scottish Government funding and support.

Trans people and non-binary people in East Lothian deserve access to healthcare and they are currently in a situation where many die before they receive it. This means that they are going without the healthcare that they need to live happy and healthy lives. Many are having to put themselves under significant financial strain to access private healthcare, or having to self-medicate without medical oversight.

The fact that roughly half of trans and non-binary people in Scotland find themselves in those situations after such a significant piece of work to improve services is unacceptable. I look forward to hearing the minister's response to the debate.

19:02

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I put on record my thanks to Patrick Harvie for lodging the motion so that we can have this debate in the chamber.

I will use my time to raise a constituency case with the minister. I have raised it with her in the past, but it is important to get the details on the record, because they highlight a lot of the issues and concerns that Patrick Harvie raised in his speech.

My constituent contacted me in summer 2022. She had already been referred to the adult gender service two years previously, in November 2020, by her GP. She got in touch with me to say that she was in considerable distress—she had had to wait two years and had accrued significant

personal costs in pursuing a private alternative. She said:

“I found it necessary to go down the private healthcare route as the NHS waiting times are three years minimum and more likely five years. I thought the only way I'm ever going to get any of my life is to take things into my own hands.”

As I said, she decided to go private, but she still tried to pursue healthcare through the NHS—we all have a right to access healthcare free at the point of need. However, she said:

“Any time I try to contact them, I get the same reply, which is that I'm on the waiting list and will be contacted when I reach the top, but the list seems to get ever-increasingly longer.”

I was shocked to hear that she had been waiting for two years without any indication of when she would reach the top of the waiting list, so I raised that with NHS Tayside. I was told that the provision of gender identity services was being reviewed by the population health directorate of the Scottish Government with the aims of improving waiting times, improving the support that is available to those who were on waiting lists and delivering new models of gender identity healthcare. Finally, in late 2022, my constituent received a first assessment. She was then placed on the medical review waiting list at the Glasgow adult gender service.

To fast-forward to summer 2025, my constituent was—five years since she was initially referred—still no further forward on the waiting list. Remembering that she had said to me that she thought that the wait would be

“three years minimum and more likely five years”,

I realised that it had already been five years and that there was still no end in sight.

I raised the matter once again—I contacted Sandyford, which is mentioned in Patrick Harvie's motion, but it unfortunately could not provide an approximate date. It conceded that it could not comply with the 18-week referral-to-treatment guidance. It also outlined that the gender identity services have been under considerable operational pressure since 2014—so it is not a new issue—but the clinic has also experienced unprecedented demand, which has outstripped its ability to provide appointments in a timely manner.

I escalated the case to the minister—she may remember it, but I appreciate that a lot of cases come across her desk. Although she confirmed that the Scottish Government's on-going commitment to improving access to and delivery of NHS gender identity services, that does not help my constituent, who has been waiting for more than five years.

It is clear that something in the system is not working. As Patrick Harvie said, the issue is not

just in gender identity healthcare—hundreds of thousands of Scots are stuck on waiting lists on the Government's watch. It is possible to bring down waiting lists, but we need the Government to get a grip.

I ask the minister, in her closing remarks, to let me know what hope she can offer my constituent that she will not be waiting for 80 years—as referenced in the motion—for an appointment, and to update me on what progress has been made on developing the support that is available for those who are waiting. In particular, I would like to hear about progress on any local support in people's home health boards so that they do not have to travel outwith their health board area, and ask her to acknowledge that the scale of the problem warrants urgent action from the Government.

I end with a final quote from my constituent:

"Perhaps nothing will come of it, but at least they will know we are not sitting quiet any longer."

19:06

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The figures that were published by Public Health Scotland in October should shake every one of us in the chamber. They lay bare a crisis that is not abstract or distant but is one that is lived day to day by thousands of our fellow Scots.

There are nearly 4,000 people on the waiting list, and fewer than 50 first appointments each year, with—as Scottish Trans put it starkly—"the most hopeful estimate" being an 80-year wait for a first appointment. Eighty years is a lifetime—a lifetime of being told to wait for the healthcare that someone needs simply to live as themselves. That is not just a failure of a system, but a failure of responsibility: our responsibility.

The strategic action framework had ambitious aims such as piloting new services, reducing waiting times and improving trans people's experiences of healthcare, but we have failed to deliver on each of those. High-quality, gender-affirming healthcare requires specialist expertise. We need specialist clinicians who understand the complexities and nuances of gender identity care. However, we have heard, loudly, from many trans people that they are being funnelled towards specialist services when that is not always necessary.

If mainstream professionals—GPs, nurses and sexual health staff—were properly trained and supported to provide routine transition-related care, many people could get help more quickly, closer to home, without being added to an already-overwhelmed gender identity clinic waiting list. Specialist clinics must be there to meet specialist needs, not because the rest of the system is unprepared.

Training and education are, therefore, absolutely central. Staff themselves, as noted in the recent "Evaluation of the Impact of Scottish Government Funding—Gender Identity Healthcare", highlighted that training is underdeveloped. We are dealing with a recruitment crisis in this field—not because people do not care, but because there simply are not enough clinicians with the prerequisite skills.

When there is recruitment, existing staff are stretched even further because it takes time—months, and sometimes years—to train new staff to competency. We are nowhere near the critical mass of trained professionals that is required.

In addition, GIC work is demanding emotionally, clinically and logistically. Staff regularly work far beyond their contracted hours. Many could earn the same, or more, elsewhere in the NHS, without the relentless pressure that is created by those chronically long waiting lists. If we are to retain skilled staff, grading and pay must reflect the reality of the work that they do. Otherwise, we will continue to lose precisely the people we are most desperately keen to hold on to.

Let us be clear: long waiting lists do not affect all trans people equally. Disabled trans people, minority ethnic trans people, homeless trans people, trans people in rural communities, very young trans people and older trans people face multiple intersecting inequalities. Some travel for hours, taking three or four buses, just to get to their appointment. Far too often, for some who are already dealing with anxiety or the hostile political climate, that journey is unbearable. Inclusive, adaptable and regionally responsive services are not optional; they are essential.

Finally, we must confront the simple fact that Scotland has only four GICs. Sandyford alone covers eight health board areas and is the only service for young people. Scottish Trans has been unequivocal in its view that, even if we expand and fund the existing clinics properly, that model is unsustainable. We need more clinics closer to the communities that they serve, and we need them urgently.

I am grateful to Patrick Harvie for securing this debate. Now we need the Scottish Government to act to ensure that trans people across Scotland can access the care that they need without waiting a lifetime or paying to go private, and to build a healthcare system that is compassionate, responsive and rooted in dignity and human rights. Minister, please act.

19:11

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I speak in support of Patrick Harvie's motion and to express my deep concern

about the waiting times across Scotland's gender identity services. The figures that were published last month are not just numbers on a page; they reflect the lived experience of people in distress, people who are seeking support and people who feel that they have been left waiting for far too long, with a never-ending wait ahead of them. As someone with experience of a five-year wait for neurological child and adolescent mental health services, I understand acutely how difficult it is to be faced with such an unfathomable wait.

No one in this chamber should be comfortable with the situation at the Sandyford clinic in Glasgow, which serves nearly half of Scotland's population geographically, with around 4,000 people on its waiting list and fewer than 50 first appointments a year. That is not the standard of care that any of us would wish to see. It is not what the Scottish Government set out to achieve, and it is not what trans people in Scotland deserve. When organisations such as Scottish Trans say that

“the most hopeful estimate is that you would wait 80 years for a first appointment”—

remember, that is a hopeful estimate—that must give us all pause for thought. It is a stark reminder that, despite our commitments and ambitions, we have not yet delivered the meaningful improvements that are so clearly needed.

Honesty is really important in this area. The strategic action framework that was published in 2021 was meant to bring about earlier intervention, new pathways and reduced waiting times. Although some progress has been made in understanding demand and designing new models, the lived reality for patients tells us that the pace has simply not been good enough. I say that not to cast blame on those who work tirelessly in our NHS, who have been open about the challenges that they face and who are striving to support people under extraordinary pressure every day, but to acknowledge the reality facing our trans community.

Behind each of those 4,000 names on the waiting list for treatment at the Sandyford clinic is a person—perhaps a young person whose mental wellbeing will deteriorate as they wait, an adult who has finally taken the difficult step to ask for help, or a family trying to support their loved one through uncertainty. Those people deserve compassion, respect and timely access to healthcare, just like everyone else.

I hope that the Government is listening, and that the minister hears the frustration—and that she shares it. We must recognise that this is a moment that demands urgency and focus. I join my colleagues in calling for a clear and deliverable plan of action that expands capacity, strengthens

local services and ensures that no part of Scotland is left struggling on its own. It must be a plan that is genuinely co-designed with clinicians and the trans community, and is matched with the resources and the political will that are required to make it a reality.

This discussion cannot be about political point scoring, and it cannot be an extension of the culture wars that we have seen dominate the lives of trans people for the past few years. This is about dignity. It is about ensuring that our values of equality and compassion are reflected not only in our words but in the services that people experience and have timely access to.

My trans and non-binary constituents deserve a service that is based in Ayrshire, and I urge the Government to work with health boards to ensure that they play their part, as it is simply inconceivable that the Sandyford clinic continues to serve such a sprawling catchment area. Modern multidisciplinary services, such as those operating in the Lothians and the Highlands, are needed urgently. Both of those areas now have some of the shortest waiting lists across the entire UK, and they should be emulated. Like others, I have had casework in which trans and non-binary individuals who have come to me for support have had to go private and then could not get shared care. A young trans person told me that their family was going without food because they could not otherwise afford their medicines, because they could not get access to a GP.

I want trans people across Scotland to know that they have not been forgotten, and I want our Government to be committed—not just in principle but in action—to building a service that meets their needs, supports their wellbeing and does so without indefinite waits or impossible delays. I fear that anything else is a dereliction of duty that should be felt by members across the chamber.

19:15

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I join colleagues in thanking Patrick Harvie for securing the debate. I also put on record my thanks to Paul McLennan for his recent motion marking trans awareness week and trans day of remembrance. I know that both motions mean a lot to trans and non-binary Scots, their families and their friends.

The fact that we are having this debate tonight reminds people that they are not alone. I should not be shocked, but when I consider the data in this area and listen to colleagues discuss the waiting times, I find the situation truly shocking. If the issue that we were debating involved people waiting 80 years for cancer treatment or an appointment for diabetes, heart disease or any

other medical issue, it would be on the front page of every paper. There would be an emergency piece of legislation and something would be done. We are here collectively to appeal to the Scottish Government to do something. In my view, the actions that people and organisations, including the Equality Network, are calling for are within the gift of the Scottish Government. We need to look to every health board in Scotland and ask them to step up. There needs to be some accountability.

From the statistics in front of me, I can see that around one in five referrals to the Sandyford clinic involves a person from Lanarkshire—my community. What is NHS Lanarkshire doing? I know that the Scottish Government made additional funding available, but that did not lead to any new services and it did not change the outlook. I share colleagues' fear that, when people are told that the best estimate of the wait for their first appointment is 80 years—an entire lifetime—they will lose hope and there will be an impact on their mental health.

It is important that we remember the human stories behind the statistics. I will not name constituents or people who have been in touch with me, in order to respect their privacy and dignity. However, when we hear people say that they feel that they are being tortured, that they cannot cope with the menstruation that they experience every month, that there is no support and that they have to access the internet and the dark web to get hormones and medication without medical supervision, that is not okay. We need to think about the safety of people right across Scotland.

We also need to support the workforce, who are often at the sharp end of the situation, which has an impact on their mental health as well. I would be interested to hear from the minister tonight what work is being done on workforce planning.

I will reinforce some points that have been made in the debate. It is clear to me that we need an urgent plan from the Government to address and reduce waiting times. We need investment in distributed service models, so that care is not concentrated only at the Sandyford clinic—as Mercedes Villalba said, people need to access healthcare in their own communities. We must address staffing shortages and training gaps.

On the current strategy, there have been multiple health secretaries and many different health ministers, and we cannot keep passing the issue on to the next person. I hope that the minister will hear tonight that, across the Parliament, there are MSPs who are willing to help her with that work and who will raise the issue with her and colleagues to ensure that it is a priority. We need to leave the chamber tonight knowing

that the Government has a plan and that people will be able to find some reasons to be hopeful.

19:20

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Patrick Harvie for bringing this important debate to the chamber. We have heard some passionate and powerful speeches, albeit with shocking content.

I start my contribution by praising a young constituent of mine and his family. I met him during the previous parliamentary session and he made an everlasting impression on me. With full family support, along with support from his school and expert counselling, that youngster transitioned and is now an impressive, fully confident and happy young man who has gone on to university and will no doubt have a promising career. He is a credit to his family.

His transition would have been so much more difficult, if not impossible, without the clinical care and guidance that he received at the Sandyford clinic in Glasgow, which is, as we have heard, the largest in Scotland. His journey was not without difficulties. At one stage, he accessed private care to receive the healthcare that he needed, but he would have had to wait for at least six years, and maybe longer, for his first appointment. To say that that is unacceptable would be an understatement. At such a critical time in a young person's life, it is inconceivable that they have to wait so long for healthcare.

The Sandyford clinic has almost 4,000 people on its waiting list, which is an increase of almost 1,000 people since 2023. I am no arithmetical genius, but I do not need to be one to work out that, with almost 4,000 people waiting and fewer than 50 appointments being offered a year, the most hopeful estimate is that someone would wait for 80 years for a first appointment.

My constituent and her son met the former health secretary, Jeanne Freeman, just before the strategic action framework was established. It was a hugely optimistic time, and I remember the meeting well. The framework, which was meant to transform gender identity services and address long waiting times, included significant Government funding for existing services. Unfortunately, however, the waiting times for a service that covers approximately half Scotland's population are now significantly worse than they were when the framework began.

It is true that the strategic action framework has had a number of successes, including new national gender identity healthcare service standards, a transgender care knowledge and skills framework, and a reduction in waiting times for some of the gender identity services in

Scotland. Lothian and Highland now have some of the shortest waiting times in the UK, but that is of no comfort to all those people who are trying to access Scotland's largest gender identity clinic, who could die before they even get their first appointment.

What is happening here? Why are the waiting times so long? It could be because, as we have heard, Sandyford covers eight of the 14 territorial health boards in Scotland and does not have the capacity to serve all the people who are referred to it. I have also heard anecdotal evidence of alleged staff harassment at Sandyford affecting staff retention. If that is the case, it is beyond shocking.

The second driver of the long waiting times could be model that is used at Sandyford. Scottish Trans believes that the service uses an outdated model that is overly reliant on psychiatry and psychology. Although they are important, clinics such as those in Lothian and Highland have updated their service models to incorporate more multidisciplinary ways of working, and they have had far greater success in reducing their waiting times to some of the shortest in the UK. That was evidenced in the report, "Evaluation of the Impact of Scottish Government Funding: Gender Identity Healthcare", which showed that services that had used Government funding from the strategic action framework to diversify their staff teams and hire healthcare professionals such as nurses and general practitioners were able to shorten their waiting times. One of the commitments in the strategic action framework was to fund new pilot services in Scotland, but that was not achieved—I do not know the reasons for that.

It is crucial that more staff are trained to work in specialist services, including those that want to be able to deliver gender-affirming care, and GPs should also be involved.

Four years ago, when the Scottish Government committed £9 million in funding and the strategic action framework was established, the situation was poor, but it was better than it is now. Trans and non-binary people in all our constituencies and regions deserve to have access to healthcare, but currently they are in a situation in which they are likely to die before they receive it. There could not be a more powerful message to come from tonight's debate, and I urge health boards and the Government to reflect on that.

19:24

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I thank Patrick Harvie for raising an important matter in the Parliament and for the opportunity to respond to the concerns that have been outlined by him and by Scottish Trans. I

also thank members for the respectful manner of all contributions this evening.

I begin by speaking directly to all trans and non-binary people who are affected by the issues that we have discussed tonight. I know that you are facing multiple challenges in this time of debate around gender identity, much of which is harmful and unnecessarily divisive. I reassure you that this Government sees you, supports you and remains committed to improving access to gender identity healthcare. I hear clearly the frustrations, and I share them. I have a simple view—that people are people the world over.

Our commitment was made clear in December 2022, when we published the NHS gender identity services strategic action framework, which outlined 17 actions to improve access to and delivery of gender identity healthcare. Those actions were developed with a multidisciplinary team of professionals and people with lived experience of gender identity services. Fifteen of those actions are now complete, and the remaining two are well under way.

One of those actions was to commission Public Health Scotland, which has been referenced in the debate, to publish waiting times for gender identity services. That is the first data of its kind to be published in the UK, giving Scottish services an opportunity to properly determine where progress is being made and where there are, clearly, on-going challenges to address. We can now properly scrutinise activity levels in gender identity clinics across Scotland. It highlights waiting times in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde specifically, which holds responsibility for a large share of the population, as every member has noted, and therefore faces unique challenges.

However, in acknowledging those challenges, it is important to note increased activity across gender identity clinics and the positive progress that is being made. I appreciate that that needs to go faster and further. Additional investment of more than £5.2 million has been provided directly to health boards. That is having an impact on first appointments in Lothian, Grampian and Highland, and on activity across all areas. In Scotland in 2024-25, 700 individuals had a first out-patient appointment with an NHS gender identity specialist. That is an increase of 101 people. There was also a clear increase in return attendances. In 2024-25, 6,527 return out-patient appointments took place, which is an increase of 1,773.

I whole-heartedly appreciate that those are numbers; however, behind every single one of them is a person. In Greater Glasgow and Clyde specifically, where there has been a focus on moving people through the service to free up capacity to bring people in, the data on adult

return appointments shows an increase of 354 in this reporting year.

However, waiting times are only one indicator of improvement. Members will recall that, in my September 2024 statement, I highlighted that an independent evaluation of the impact of our investment on waiting times and quality of care was under way.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Jenni Minto: I will just finish my paragraph.

The report highlights that funding supported improvements across Scotland's gender identity clinics, including the recruitment of additional staff to expand multidisciplinary teams, improved communications with patients, the development of new resources and processes to support people on the waiting lists, and closer collaboration.

Patrick Harvie: The minister is drawing attention to areas in which she says that improvement is happening. I am sure that she does not deny that the situation that my constituents face is significantly worse than it was when the strategic action framework was published. I think that my constituents would like to know not a few statistics about where things are getting a little better but what is going to be done to transform the areas where things have got so much worse. What can I tell them? Can the minister tell me what I can tell my constituents about what is going to change now?

Jenni Minto: I am finding this debate incredibly difficult. This is something that is close to all our hearts and I want to make a difference. I am trying to act and to make a change. I am working closely with officials and health boards and, if I can continue, I will try to outline what we are doing.

The report also highlights specific barriers to improvement, including the increased public, political and media scrutiny of this area of healthcare. That is felt particularly in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which has the largest service in Scotland and the only one providing care to young people. The often-divisive attention and rhetoric that we see has had a negative effect on staff morale, wellbeing and safety and makes the recruitment and retention of specialised medical expertise particularly difficult, as Maggie Chapman and others have said. The report highlights that, despite challenges and a divisive and polarising climate,

"the staff are exceptionally passionate about, and committed to, supporting patients and delivering the highest quality care possible".

I thank staff across all the services, who often work overtime and take on additional workloads in this difficult and challenging area of healthcare.

The situation is, as is usually the case, more complex than the statistical headlines suggest. However, I absolutely accept that there is more to be done, particularly in GGC, which serves more than 65 per cent of the patient population and provides the only specialist service for young people in Scotland.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): Will the minister accept an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am sorry; I cannot take an intervention. I apologise and will be happy to speak to Jamie Greene afterwards.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is already taking forward a number of actions to improve waiting times, including the introduction of clinical pharmacists; recruitment of an additional psychologist; the introduction of nursing staff to improve waiting times; and engagement with primary care to pilot the increased use of shared care agreements.

The Scottish Government also continues to work with NHS Education for Scotland to ensure that the right training and development are in place across healthcare and with Public Health Scotland to further refine data collection. My officials and I are in discussion with health boards to explore how the additional funding can continue to support gender identity services, including working with health boards to establish appropriate treatment pathways through and between services and health board areas. There is also the collaboration that Paul McLennan spoke of and the support in home health boards that was mentioned by Mercedes Villalba. I know that health boards will have clearly heard this debate.

I am content to meet with members from across the chamber, as Monica Lennon suggested, to see how we can move further. I hope members realise how strongly I feel about the issue. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry; I am not taking any more interventions.

It is right that all health boards collaborate to ensure that their patients can access the dignified care they need, when they need it. Although waiting times for gender identity services may not yet be where I want them to be, I assure all members, Scottish Trans and everyone currently waiting for treatment at a gender identity clinic that we will continue working across organisational and geographical boundaries to build on the improvements that have been made to date and to deliver the caring and compassionate services that people deserve.

Meeting closed at 19:34.

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