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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 February 2026

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

Point of Order

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer has selected an urgent question to be taken in the chamber later today. That urgent question and the one that I submitted were almost identical, and both call on the Lord Advocate to provide the answers. Have you had any indication yet from the Government on who will answer the urgent question?

We should bear in mind standing order rule 13.8, on urgent questions, which states:

“An urgent question concerning the operation of the systems of criminal prosecution ... shall normally be answered by the Lord Advocate or the Solicitor General for Scotland”.

If the Lord Advocate is not going to answer the question, will an explanation be given as to why that is the case?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Ross for his point of order. I left a meeting about eight minutes ago and, at that stage, the Scottish Government had not yet given an indication as to who would deal with the urgent question.

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

14:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business.

Libraries

1. **Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the current state of libraries in Scotland as part of any action it is taking to protect and strengthen these services. (S6O-05515)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As of 1 February 2026, 450 of 461 public libraries across Scotland were open, with a further eight libraries scheduled to reopen. Some remain closed due to refurbishment or reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete inspections.

The Scottish Government places great importance on public libraries and believes that everyone should have access to library services. The Scottish Library and Information Council has convened a short-life advisory group to explore good-quality public library services, and I look forward to receiving its recommendations shortly.

Tess White: Libraries are the beating heart of our communities, but since the Scottish National Party came to power, 16 per cent—that is, 97—of them have closed. Funding has fallen by 30 per cent, but footfall has increased by 40 per cent. In my region, just in the city of Aberdeen, six libraries have closed, with further proposals to cut the number of school librarians, leaving many communities without access to these vital services.

I heard what the cabinet secretary said, and that is welcome, but what specific action—beyond having meetings and discussions—will he take now to stop further library closures? Why are communities, including pupils, paying the price for the SNP's failure to protect local services?

Angus Robertson: First, decisions about local provision are, in the first instance, for local authorities.

I reprise my point that we are being well advised by the Scottish Library and Information Council, which is looking at many of the issues that Tess White raises. I have not yet received its report. Given the member's strong interest in the subject, I would be grateful if she would share her examples with the short-life advisory group, and copy me in, so that I can better understand her points about the region that she represents.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The cabinet secretary may have seen a recent report by *The Ferret* about the growth of book-ban campaigns across Scotland, many of which are motivated by homophobia and transphobia. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if such toxic culture war techniques began to grow here, as they have done in the US, it would be extremely harmful to Scotland's libraries? Does he agree that the Scottish Government should ensure that clear guidance is put in place to enable libraries and librarians to resist book-ban campaigns?

Angus Robertson: I listened closely to what has just been raised, which is a matter of concern. Our proceedings are watched outside the

chamber, including by the likes of the Scottish Library and Information Council. I would be grateful if the member could forward me information about those cases, because that sounds very concerning. I would like to look a lot more closely at that and to draw the issue to the attention of the council.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Cabinet secretary, libraries and community centres often provide a valuable space for events, connection and digital inclusion. Do you agree that they are vital third spaces? Can you say any more about the Scottish Government's work to recognise that role?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Angus Robertson: I recognise the important role that libraries and community centres play in providing access to information technology, improving attainment, supporting children in the early years, helping and engaging older people, empowering our communities and much more besides. The Scottish Government supports public libraries via the Scottish Library and Information Council. In 2026-27, SLIC will receive an additional £100,000, taking its funding to £1.035 million. That includes funding for the public library improvement fund, which enables libraries to undertake a wide range of pioneering projects in communities.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Ind): Following recent reports of violence against Edinburgh library staff, what discussions is the Scottish Government having with Police Scotland and local authorities to ensure that library workers can provide service to the community in a safe and protected environment?

Angus Robertson: I have not had such discussions, but Mr Choudhury's question raises concerns that I would share with him. If he can forward any information about specific incidents that I am not aware of, I will most certainly bring that up in conversation with, among others, the culture conveners of local authorities. We are trying to work closely on cultural provision, and that seems exactly the kind of issue on which we need to have an active dialogue.

Adam Smith Heritage (Cultural and Economic Potential)

2. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with local and national bodies to maximise the cultural and economic potential of the Adam Smith heritage in Kirkcaldy. (S6O-05516)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government directly funds Museums Galleries Scotland and Historic

Environment Scotland to support the sector by providing advice and grants to organisations across Scotland. In 2026-27, we will provide £6.25 million of resource funding to MGS, which includes funding to continue the flagship museum futures programme as well as £1.6 million in capital funding. In addition, we support Historic Environment Scotland, which offers a grant scheme of around £13.5 million a year.

I encourage the Adam Smith heritage centre to engage with MGS and HES on sector-specific support, as well as VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise, to help to maximise its potential.

Claire Baker: This year marks the 250th anniversary of the publication of "The Wealth of Nations". When it was written and published, Adam Smith was living in Kirkcaldy, and the anniversary presents a great opportunity for Kirkcaldy to have the planned celebrations in the lang toun. Given that events are also planned in Edinburgh and Glasgow, how is the Scottish Government working with partners such as VisitScotland to help to co-ordinate the events to ensure that Kirkcaldy has its deserved prominence and to encourage visitors to include a visit to Kirkcaldy in their plans?

Angus Robertson: Claire Baker raises excellent suggestions to make the most of that important anniversary, domestically—of course, in Kirkcaldy in the first instance—and internationally. There is tremendous potential in that. I have shared examples of where funding might be accessed for the year, but I want to satisfy myself that, across Government agencies, and working with local authority partners, including Fife Council, every opportunity is considered to make the most of this important anniversary year.

Local Arts, Heritage and Culture Services (Local Government Funding)

3. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what the obligations of local government are in relation to the funding of local arts, heritage and culture services. (S6O-05517)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Local authority cultural provision is entirely a matter for each local authority. It is the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their budgets and to allocate the total financial resources that are available to them on the basis of local needs and priorities, having first fulfilled their statutory obligations and the jointly agreed set of national and local priorities. That means that local authorities are accountable to the public who elect them and have the financial freedom to operate independently.

Rhoda Grant: When councils are setting their budgets across my region, the first cuts that they reach for are cuts to support funds for arts and cultural services. Those services tackle isolation, support mental health, strengthen communities and provide an economic boost.

Unfortunately, they are at serious risk of being stripped out of local areas altogether, and some cultural organisations in the Western Isles say that, without Government funding, they will have to close, which means that jobs will be lost. What protections can the Scottish Government offer to the arts and culture sector, which faces another year of catastrophic funding cuts?

Angus Robertson: Rhoda Grant would acknowledge that the Government is currently providing the biggest uplift in cultural spending in Scotland in the history of devolution, other than during Covid. When it comes to multiyear funding of organisations and project streams, the Scottish Government is playing its part. It is very disappointing if local authority partners see culture and arts as the first area to cut.

The 2026-27 budget delivers record funding of almost £15.7 billion for local authorities, which is a real-terms increase of 2 per cent. That includes funding of £124.7 million for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, which is an increase of £6.7 million. It is for locally elected representatives to decide on the delivery of services in their local communities, but I recognise the deep concerns that have been raised by cultural organisations in the Western Isles.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I welcome the record local government settlement in the budget and the Scottish Government's continued commitment to uplifting the culture budget. Does the cabinet secretary agree that our communities are richer for our culture, and can he say any more about how that investment will support the arts and creative industries across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government is delivering an additional £20 million in funding for culture in 2026-27, which is the next major step in honouring our commitment to provide an additional £100 million annually for culture by 2028-29. That takes the total annual increase in the culture budget to £70 million since 2023-24, and the additional funding has allowed Creative Scotland to offer multiyear funding to a record number of cultural organisations.

Multiyear-funded organisations now have a base in 27 local authority areas, and 35 per cent of organisations operate beyond their home postcodes, which provides communities across Scotland with access to the arts.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Regardless of what the cabinet secretary has said about the Scottish Government's direct funding for the arts, the reality—as Rhoda Grant has pointed out—is that much local arts funding comes from local authorities. At the moment, those local authorities are setting budgets with inflation-busting council tax increases, while slashing services and cutting grants to cultural organisations. Who does the cabinet secretary blame for that?

Angus Robertson: The issue is not about blame. There needs to be an optimal working relationship between the Scottish Government and local authorities, which we will achieve through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I find it disappointing that there are arts and culture closures in different local authorities, but that picture is not universal. Closures are a choice that locally elected representatives make.

Often, I hear calls from Mr Fraser's side of the chamber that there is too much centralised control and that there should be local decision making—on this issue, I agree with those members. This is an area in which local authorities have responsibility. We will work in partnership with them, because I want to protect culture and arts services across Scotland, but we will do that only through partnership and local government delivery, just as the Scottish Government is delivering for culture and the arts.

Free-to-air Television Broadcasting

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its discussions with the United Kingdom Government regarding free-to-air television broadcasting in Scotland, including in relation to sporting events such as the 2026 Glasgow Commonwealth games and 2027 Tour de France. (S6O-05518)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government engages regularly with the UK Government on broadcasting and will continue to represent Scotland's interests. As part of that, ministers press for greater inclusion of Scottish sporting events in the listed events regime.

In August and December, we wrote to the UK Government to express our disappointment about the Commonwealth games not being broadcast free to air. I urge the UK Government to use its powers to ensure that Glasgow's games are broadcast free to air. Broadcast rights for the Tour de France are a matter for the event owner, but we

are working with partners to maximise the grand départ's reach.

Kenneth Gibson: Scotland has a formidable track record of organising major sporting events, such as the 2014 Commonwealth games, the UEFA Euro 2020 championship and the 2023 cycling world championships. The next 18 months will add another Commonwealth games and the grand départ—I am using the cabinet secretary's pronunciation—of the Tour de France to that list. Although that is hugely exciting for those who follow sports in Scotland, exclusive live broadcasting rights for both events are held in the UK by a subscription channel, which costs £30.99 a month. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is inconceivable that those two global events might take place behind a paywall? Will he join me in calling on the UK Government to work with the Scottish Government to ensure that they are free to air for all people in Scotland?

Angus Robertson: The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and I wrote to the UK Government in August and December last year to express our concerns and disappointment about the Commonwealth games not being broadcast on free-to-air television. I urge the UK Government to use the powers at its disposal to ensure that Glasgow's Commonwealth games are broadcast on free-to-air television so that they can be enjoyed by everyone.

Broadcast rights for the Tour de France are a matter for the event owner, ASO. We are committed to working collaboratively with all partners to develop opportunities to maximise the exposure and reach of the grand départ to ensure that it can be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

Constitutional Policy and Strategy (Spending)

5. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much it anticipates it will spend on matters relating to constitutional policy and strategy in 2025-26 and 2026-27. (S6O-05519)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Constitutional work includes work on a range of issues, including intergovernmental relations, the British-Irish Council, legislative consent, elections and constitutional reform. Details of the funding allocated to each ministerial portfolio in both financial years were published in the respective budgets.

Craig Hoy: This time last year, we were told by the Liberal Democrats that the price of their support for the budget was the deletion of expenditure on independence. However, without sounding like Colin Beattie, we know that spending

on independence is woven right through the Government's accounts. Is Alex Cole-Hamilton, as he prepares to back this year's budget, about to be duped yet again by the Scottish Government, or are the cynical Lib Dems about to sell out their principles yet again as they cosy up ever closer to John Swinney in the hope of ministerial preferment after the next election?

Angus Robertson: I am responsible for many things, but that does not include the Liberal Democrats.

Constitutional policy development is an essential function of the Scottish Government and is crucial to the implementation of devolution and the new powers that followed. Mr Hoy does not like to be reminded of the fact that the majority of MSPs who were elected to the Scottish Parliament are in favour of Scottish independence. As is absolutely right and proper for a democratically elected Government and Parliament, we will do all that we can to further the aims of Scotland retaking its place in the international community and rejoining the European Union as an independent member state.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Does the cabinet secretary think that Craig Hoy is protesting just a bit too much, given that he was incapable of negotiating anything from the budget, even to defend businesses in this country? Thanks to the Liberal Democrats, businesses will have a reduction in their business rates compared with what was planned. Is Craig Hoy not just a little bit sore?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not entirely sure that any of that directly relates to question 5, so we will move to question 6.

Budget 2026-27 (Small and Medium-sized Cultural Events)

6. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its draft budget 2026-27 supports the delivery of small and medium-sized cultural events. (S6O-05520)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government supports small and medium-sized cultural events through Creative Scotland's multiyear funding. Creative Scotland will receive an additional £20 million for its multiyear funding programme in 2026-27 as part of our commitment to provide a further £100 million to the culture sector by 2028-29. That will take the funding available to £74 million in 2026-27, which will enable Creative Scotland to support cultural events across Scotland, with 77 per cent of the multiyear funding portfolio going to presenting organisations that deliver

performances, exhibitions and events directly to the public.

Evelyn Tweed: People involved in smaller events in my constituency have raised concerns about lengthy and complicated processes for accessing funding from organisations such as EventScotland. How does the Government engage with organisations that administer funding to ensure easy access for small organisations that run local events?

Angus Robertson: VisitScotland has made significant progress on measures to improve efficiency and better tailor and target the support that it provides. A key focus of VisitScotland remains how it can continue to evolve to best meet the ever-changing demands of the visitor and events economy, while ensuring that public funds are used to maximum effect. The Minister for Business and Employment engages regularly with VisitScotland, and I will ensure that Ms Tweed's views are conveyed to its chief executive when they meet again next month.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Campaigners in Helensburgh in my region have been fighting tirelessly to save the Tower arts centre, which was a popular destination that offered movie screenings and live events. In April, Save the Tower volunteers secured funding from the Scottish land fund, only to find out that the company that owned the venue had been struck off the Companies House register, and they were thus unable to complete the process. It now appears that the company has reappeared on Companies House, but the campaigners need clarity and certainty. What is the cabinet secretary doing to ensure that venues such as the Tower are provided with long-term funding so that they can continue to carry out screenings and events?

Angus Robertson: I agree that the Scottish land fund invests in many projects that we would all support. I am sorry to hear about the local difficulties that Pam Gosal reports in relation to the Tower arts centre. I would be grateful if she could forward details to me so that I and my officials can have a look at that, because it would be beneficial to allow a project that is of such importance to the local community to go ahead.

Local History Authors

7. **Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to authors documenting local history. (S6O-05521)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government funds our national cultural body, Creative Scotland, which has funding programmes that are open to creative

authors. Organisations that receive Creative Scotland multiyear funding, such as the Scottish Book Trust and the Gaelic Books Council, also support creative authors. There is also support for a wide range of book festivals, which enable creative authors to platform their work and engage with audiences.

The Scottish Government also funds organisations that preserve and promote Scotland's arts, culture and heritage, including the National Records of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland.

Mark Griffin: I highlight the recent work by my constituent Hugh Gaffney, who has published "Auchengeich: Gone But Not Forgotten". The book documents the 1959 Auchengeich pit disaster in which 47 miners from Moodiesburn, Chryston and the surrounding areas lost their lives, including my own great uncle. Hugh Gaffney has spoken about wanting to break the written silence regarding one of Scotland's worst mining tragedies and to ensure that the stories of the men, their families and their community are preserved. Will the cabinet secretary go into a bit more detail about how the Government supports the recording of Scottish history, particularly by local authors, so that such stories are never forgotten?

Angus Robertson: All books that are published in this country are available in the National Library of Scotland, and Mark Griffin makes an important point about keeping and preserving local history, particularly regarding tragedies and the loss of life.

There is also a wider question about the promotion of important works, as Mark Griffin has described. I would be happy to discuss the matter further with him to explore whether there is anything else that can be done in relation to that question.

Climate Change Plan (Debate)

8. **Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what potential challenges it anticipates in relation to the scheduling of a chamber debate on the climate change plan before the end of the current parliamentary session. (S6O-05522)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): Subject to parliamentary approval later today, a debate on the draft climate change plan will be held on Thursday 5 March. As such, there are no challenges in relation to scheduling the debate. That demonstrates the importance that the Government, the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy and I place on giving committees and the Parliament their place in the finalisation of the plan.

Edward Mountain: When they prepared that response, the minister's bevy of civil servants added a word that I did not put in the question. I am not talking about the draft climate change plan; I am talking about the climate change plan that had a public consultation that closed at the end of January, and which the Climate Change Committee and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee will respond to at the end of next week. The debate that will be held on 5 March will be on the draft plan, while the real plan—the completed plan—must be laid before Parliament by the end of March. Will the Parliament get a chance to debate that plan or will we just be fobbed off with the draft plan?

Graeme Dey: As I hope that Mr Mountain would acknowledge, the Scottish Government has bent over backwards to facilitate scrutiny of the plan.

As the minister responsible for parliamentary business, I agreed, in conjunction with the bureau, to set aside the time that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport committee sought to debate the plan. I then rescheduled business to accommodate the debate on a date that allowed the committee to take evidence from the CCC in advance. Furthermore, it is our intention to go beyond what the legislation requires and lay a final statement on the plan and, subject to bureau agreement, to have the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy make a statement to the Parliament so that she can be questioned by members.

Facilitating that level of scrutiny has been no easy task, given pressure on parliamentary time. That pressure has been caused in part by the extended nature of some stage 3 proceedings, which is a result of very large numbers of amendments being lodged and pressed to the vote—[*Interruption.*]

Edward Mountain: That is nonsense.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members.

Graeme Dey: —and, it should be said, those amendments often emanated from the same, single source. Perhaps Mr Mountain shares my concerns about the impact of such actions, which make it all the more difficult to facilitate optimum scrutiny of critical items of parliamentary business.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. There will be a short pause before we move to the next item of business to allow front-bench teams to change positions.

Justice and Home Affairs

Automatic Early Release (Parole Services and Victim Support Services)

1. **Davy Russell (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the changes to automatic early release for certain prisoners, what additional support will be available to parole services and services that support victims. (S6O-05523)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Support for those who are being released from prison and for victims of crime is essential. Over the past five years, we have provided £93 million to support victims, including £48 million via the victim-centred approach fund and £57.3 million via the delivering equally safe fund.

People leaving prison after a short-term sentence are legally entitled to request throughcare support. Such support can be accessed through local justice, social work or third sector providers, including Upside, the national voluntary throughcare service, which is funded by an annual investment of £5.3 million.

We will continue to engage with delivery partners and victim support organisations ahead of a possible change to the release point for certain prisoners to ensure that victims are aware of how they can access information and support.

Davy Russell: The cabinet secretary has previously commented that, despite measures to reduce prisoner numbers, such as lowering the automatic early release point to 40 per cent in 2024, the prison population remains stubbornly high. Does she agree that, if prison numbers are too high, targeted investment in early intervention and diversion schemes needs to be increased in proportion to that challenge? Is she confident that taking such measures without beefing up additional resources will not aggravate the high risk levels that are associated with those policies?

Angela Constance: I agree that the prison population is currently too high. Like the countries in the rest of the United Kingdom, we are an outlier in comparison with other European countries. I have often spoken in the chamber about the importance of our increased investment in community justice services. However, Davy Russell's point about preventative measures—whether they are in health, education or tackling poverty—is vital, and such measures must be part of a long-term approach.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on when changes to the parole system

under the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 will commence?

Angela Constance: The 2025 act provides that, when considering release, the Parole Board “must”—rather than “may”—consider whether a prisoner has disclosed the location of the victim’s remains and consider the safety and security of any victim or a victim’s family members. A Scottish statutory instrument was laid on 11 December 2025 to begin the process of commencing those provisions. Another SSI was laid before the Parliament on 13 February this year to make the necessary changes to the Parole Board rules. Those changes will come into force on 25 March.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): What modelling was done, prior to the proposals to let criminals out after just 30 per cent of their sentence, to show the impact on victims, including on the numbers being re-victimised, and on the case loads of agencies that support those victims?

Angela Constance: Modelling was done on what the proposed measure would do to reduce the prison population through a sustained measure.

Liam Kerr makes a valid point about the impact on the case loads of community justice partners. Although it is difficult to predict precisely, it is fair to say that the population of prisoners being considered for release are people who will return to the community in the not-too-distant future. I think that I am in agreement with Mr Kerr in acknowledging that that will increase the short-term demand on services. That is why we are working very closely with our partners in the community to establish the level of need, which is done via co-operation prior to prisoners being released.

Automatic Early Release (Offenders Convicted of Serious Violent Offences)

2. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether offenders convicted of serious violent offences could be eligible for release after serving around 30 per cent of their custodial sentence under the proposed changes to automatic release points. (S6O-05524)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Most prisoners convicted of non-sexual crimes of violence are long-term prisoners who have been sentenced to four years or more, and who are therefore not eligible for early release under the proposed change. The change would apply to all short-term prisoners except for those serving sentences for domestic abuse or sexual offences, which reflects the historic barriers in reporting those offences. I recognise the concerns raised by victims and

victim support organisations and I will continue to engage closely with them. The proposed exclusions seek to balance public safety, the concerns of victims and supporting a sustainable reduction in the prison population.

Alexander Stewart: During last year’s emergency early release scheme, the governor’s veto was the key safety valve, and it was used to prevent 171 prisoners who had been assessed as posing an immediate risk of harm from being released into the community. Now the Government wants to hardwire a 30 per cent automatic release point and dictate where the veto will not apply. Will the cabinet secretary give a guarantee that no prisoner whose early release was previously vetoed on public safety grounds will be let out early as a result of the changes? If that guarantee cannot be given, why is the Government asking victims and the public to carry that risk?

Angela Constance: The governor veto is exclusive to the use of early emergency release. The legislative context for what we can and cannot do for this measure is different from the early emergency release measures. That is because early emergency release is done at pace and the legislation allows for a governor’s veto. I stress that the Government works with community partners prior to the release of short-term prisoners, all of whom will return to our community at some point in the not-too-distant future. That remains vital.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the horrendous case of Rab Thomson, who was jailed for life in 2008 for murdering two of his children at their home in Buckhaven. More than 1,000 people have supported a petition to change the process of eligibility for parole, which would limit applications in extreme cases. Is the Scottish Government giving consideration to changes to such eligibility?

Angela Constance: As the member may be aware, a consultation on parole was carried out at the end of last year. There were, in essence, two parts to it: one was about the efficiency of the parole system and how it supports progression, and the other was about how victims can relate to the parole process. We are currently analysing responses to that important consultation.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Although recorded crime has reduced by 38 per cent since 2006-07 under the Scottish National Party Government, the focus remains on supporting victims. What engagement has the Scottish Government had with support organisations on the changes to automatic release points?

Angela Constance: Protecting victims and public safety remain absolute priorities for me and this Government. That is why, in addition to the

targeted consultation on the changes, my officials and I personally met victim support organisations, including Victim Support Scotland and key delivery partners, to hear their views at first hand.

My thanks go to all the organisations that responded to the consultation and offered a broad range of perspectives. We will work directly with victim support organisations to raise awareness of what the changes mean and to encourage those who are eligible to sign up to the victim notification scheme.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Is the Government concerned that when short-term sentences are eventually automatically reduced to 30 per cent of the sentence, and if it adopts the Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission's recommendation to ban sentences of one year or less, that could result in charges increasing sentences to take account of those measures? Has any work been done with the judiciary to ensure that the purpose of those measures is not defeated?

Angela Constance: The member raises a point about the risks associated with up-tariffing. It is important to note that issue when we are considering any measure. We have a lot of work to do to consider the Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission's recommendations collectively and individually. We will do that with as much rigour and pace as we can.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): When the cabinet secretary announced that she wants to release prisoners who have served only a third of their sentence, she said that there would be "a short consultation". The consultation period lasted only three days and it was conducted with a targeted number of respondents. That was a couple of weeks ago. What was the outcome of that consultation, and will it be made publicly available?

Angela Constance: As told members last week, in the interests of transparency, and with the consent of everyone who participated in the consultation, we will release whatever information we are given permission to release. I assure Mr Ross that we complied with the legislation in relation to whom to consult. The legislation, which was passed by this Parliament, was pretty specific in that regard.

Island Communities (Policing)

3. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that policing of island communities is adequately resourced. (S6O-05525)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Although

deployment of resources is a matter for the chief constable, Police Scotland remains committed to visible, community-based policing across our islands. Officer numbers in the Highlands and Islands remain stable and recruitment is strong: in the past year, Police Scotland welcomed its highest number of recruits since 2013.

Policing remains a priority for the Scottish Government, as our budget for this year and next year clearly shows. As of 30 September 2025, Scotland had around 30 full-time equivalent officers per 10,000 of the population, compared with around 24 officers per 10,000 of the population in England and Wales. Our officers remain the best-paid ones in the United Kingdom.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Island communities have often been seen as being protected from the worst rises in crime and antisocial behaviour experienced in mainland communities. However, among some islanders there is a feeling that the prevalence of low-level crime and antisocial behaviour is increasing. When there is a spate of incidents, island communities cannot just borrow officers from neighbouring commands because those commands are at least a ferry journey away.

Police Scotland is around 1,000 officers down since the Covid pandemic. What is the Scottish Government doing specifically to protect island policing? Will the cabinet secretary commit to having minimum staffing levels for island areas and to publishing details of island-by-island vacancies and response times, so that communities can see whether they are being properly resourced?

Angela Constance: Those specific details are matters for the chief constable and are scrutinised directly by the Scottish Police Authority rather than by ministers.

On the remainder of Mr Halcro Johnston's question, we all have to recognise that there are challenges associated with the geography of our remote and rural communities and, in particular, of our island communities. Police Scotland bears that in mind when conducting recruitment and has specifically targeted events to recruit officers for the Highlands and Islands. However, when I next meet the chief constable I will raise the issues that Mr Halcro Johnston mentioned, with a view to offering him some reassurance.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary referred to recruitment levels across the Highlands and Islands being broadly consistent. It is fair to say that, within the islands, challenges remain in relation to recruitment and retention? Certainly, in Orkney, the force is stretched very thinly. In the face of a rising tide of drug-related incidents, that is putting enormous strain on an already stretched force. Will the

cabinet secretary take that up with Police Scotland and see what more can be done, including on the points that Jamie Halcro Johnston made, to address the capacity issues in island communities such as Orkney?

Angela Constance: My short answer is yes.

Legal Aid Reforms

4. Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the recently announced legal aid reforms will ensure the accessibility of justice. (S6O-05526)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Our reforms to legal aid will strengthen access to justice, which is a central aim of our changes. Parliament has approved reforms to children's and criminal legal aid to remove means and merit testing in the children's hearings system and to reduce financial barriers for young people who are moving on from care. For criminal cases, the reforms will reduce complexity, support early resolution of cases and guarantee timely representation.

The Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025 will remove restrictions that prevent charities, law centres and citizens advice bodies from directly employing solicitors to provide certain legal services. In addition, the legal aid traineeship fund is part of our longer-term commitment to improving the sustainability and capacity of the legal aid profession.

Paul McLennan: Will the minister explain how the reforms will ensure equality of access, particularly in more remote areas?

Siobhian Brown: The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring access to justice in remote areas. Funding is available to allow solicitors to travel to remote parts of the country, which ensures that individuals do not have to rely on local provision alone when they seek publicly funded legal assistance. Furthermore, the Scottish Legal Aid Board funds 16 projects, including in East Lothian, to support people who are facing court action. We fund public legal services through the Civil Legal Assistance Office and the Public Defence Solicitors Office.

All those services can operate across a wide geographical area. In addition, through our ongoing reform programme, we are considering how different funding models can be used to strengthen access to legal aid where it is needed most.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): A recent survey by the Law Society of Scotland found that 41 per cent of solicitors are either planning to stop legal aid work within two years or are unsure whether they will continue. That shows the damage that has been caused by years of

underfunding, which a delayed uplift will not reverse. By what date will the minister end legal aid advice deserts and guarantee access to a solicitor in every part of Scotland?

Siobhian Brown: As the member and Parliament know, I have been working closely with the legal profession over the past couple of years to see what can be put in place to improve access to justice. One of the main things that we can do is provide an uplift. Regulations to do that were laid in Parliament on 28 January. If the measure is approved, it will provide a 13 per cent increase in legal aid fees and fixed payments for solicitors.

As I said to Paul McLennan, once the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025 has been commenced, it will remove restrictions that prevent charities, law centres and citizens advice bodies from directly employing solicitors.

I have set up an independent fee review mechanism group to explore the fundamental changes that are required to create a legal assistance system for the 21st century. In addition, the Scottish budget has made provision to double the number of places for legal aid traineeships from 20 to 40 in order to improve the sustainability and capacity of the legal profession. The work continues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 comes from Clare Adamson, who joins us remotely.

Remand Prisoners (Co-located Support Services)

5. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what co-located services are available to support the welfare of remand prisoners released directly from court. (S6O-05527)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The primary co-located support is available through justice social work services, which provide on-site advice, guidance and onward referral to relevant community services. Everyone who leaves custody, including from remand, can access support with issues such as housing, health and social care, benefits and finances, where necessary. Many justice social work services are co-located with, or have a presence in, court buildings, to allow early engagement and to enable welfare or wellbeing risks to be identified.

In addition, since July 2025, voluntary throughcare delivered by Upside has been available to all individuals who leave remand. As I said earlier, that is a national service that receives annual funding of £5.3 million.

Clare Adamson: In my work with recovery groups, I still hear stories of people being released from prison with their belongings held back in the prison estate, which means that they do not have access to a mobile phone or a means of making an onward journey to their place of previous residence, and they are left feeling very vulnerable. What work has been done to establish the suitability of the current service? Is the cabinet secretary aware of the situations that still arise, especially at weekends, when access to housing can sometimes be difficult?

Angela Constance: I mentioned Upside, which is the new national throughcare service that has expanded its remit to include the male remand population. The focus of its work is to engage quickly with individuals who are released from remand and provide needs-led support as they return to the community.

I have also recently commenced section 13 of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023, which is about developing national throughcare standards that all organisations that are involved in the delivery of throughcare will be required to comply with. That will improve the consistency and quality of throughcare support across the country for those who are released from prison and from court.

Budget 2026-27 (Community Justice Services)

6. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the additional £10 million of funding for community justice services announced in its draft budget 2026-27 will be allocated. (S6O-05528)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): We are committed to strengthening community justice, reinforcing front-line capacity and ensuring that services are well supported. That £10 million will mean a total investment of £169 million in community justice services, and the increase builds on additional funding of £25 million over the past two years. The majority of that investment is for justice social work services, whose funding will increase to £148 million—that is an increase of 55.8 per cent over the past decade.

Karen Adam: For many people with complex needs, including trauma, addiction, mental ill health and neurodivergence, effective community justice can be genuinely life changing, not just for them but for victims and the wider community. We know that community-based interventions, including restorative justice, can reduce reoffending and prevent harm from escalating. Will the cabinet secretary outline what further improvements she expects the funding to deliver for communities across Scotland?

Angela Constance: The majority of our investment in community justice will support local justice social work teams to expand the availability and quality of community-based interventions, including structured programmes, supervision and support for individuals with complex needs. The funding will help to ensure that courts have robust alternatives to custody available across Scotland and that services can maintain safe case-load levels while meeting rising demand.

The member touches on the important role of third sector organisations. I mentioned in my previous answer the importance of the Upside service, and there are third sector bodies that are involved in the restorative justice work.

Police Scotland Tayside Division (Senior Leadership)

7. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on any potential impact of prolonged, non-permanent senior leadership within the Police Scotland Tayside division on operational effectiveness, workforce morale and public confidence in local policing. (S6O-05529)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The divisional commander for Tayside is currently undertaking a leadership course. I am sure that the member would welcome Police Scotland ensuring that its senior officers are supported to take up such professional development to ensure continued effective leadership in the organisation.

Although Police Scotland recruitment and deployment is entirely a matter for the chief constable and her executive team, I am aware that an acting chief superintendent has temporarily stepped into the role of divisional commander for Tayside. Policing in Tayside continues to be delivered effectively, with appropriate leadership oversight in place.

Michael Marra: The cabinet secretary should know that the issue does not involve only the leader of the Tayside police, because three of the four most senior roles for that division do not have permanent leadership. The vacuum could not have come at a worse time, with the Scottish National Party sending local officer numbers plummeting and crime rising over the past five years in Dundee and Perth and Kinross.

In Dundee alone, drug supply is up by 36 per cent, shoplifting is up by 20 per cent, serious assault and attempted murder are up by 9 per cent and sexual crime is up by 24 per cent. Why does the cabinet secretary think that the appropriate response is to give Tayside the biggest cut in local officers out of any division in Police Scotland?

Angela Constance: As I said in my original answer, the deployment of police officers is, by law, entirely a matter for the chief constable. That is detailed in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.

Police Scotland works to an establishment figure of around 16,500. On 15 January, following the recent recruitment intake, Deputy Chief Constable Alan Speirs confirmed that there were 16,500-plus officers in the service.

It is important to note that, overall, police-recorded crime in Dundee, Perth and Kinross and Angus has reduced. However, I often make the point that we also have to look at the changing nature of crime. Although some crimes have reduced over the years, others have increased. That speaks to the importance of good local resourcing and response.

Prostitution

8. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken since 2007 to address prostitution, including legislative measures aimed at tackling demand for paid sex as a means of preventing harm to vulnerable women and girls, and the provision of exit support services for recovery from any complex trauma resulting from prostitution. (S6O-05530)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): There is an extensive list of work, which I will try to summarise in the time available. When it comes to legislation, there is the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015.

As the member was responsible for that area for four years, she will be aware of the 2020 consultation on challenging men's demand for prostitution, which led to a commitment to developing a model for Scotland that effectively tackles and challenges men's demand. A short-life working group was set up in November 2021 to support the design of that development, policy principles were published in 2022 and the strategy was published in February 2024. Joint work with Police Scotland on operation begonia started in December 2024 and was adopted nationally in April 2025.

In addition, we are part of a five-jurisdiction group on commercial sexual exploitation that brings together the four United Kingdom nations and the Republic of Ireland. In the draft Scottish budget for 2026-27, further funding has been announced for support services.

Ash Regan: The world is recoiling at the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women and children that has been exposed by brave survivors in cases

such as those of the grooming gangs and Epstein. However, in Scotland—even within walking distance of this Parliament—men who buy sexual access to vulnerable women do so with complete impunity.

For 19 years, a Government whose equally safe strategy defines prostitution as violence against women has refused to criminalise the men who perpetrate that violence. That is not caution but complicity.

Survivors, front-line services, Police Scotland and very senior legal voices have repeatedly demanded action on reducing demand, yet the minister ignores them and offers only more consultations and commissions. A minister who admits that she has done no work in that area has been asleep at the wheel of her portfolio.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could we have a question, please, Ms Regan?

Ash Regan: Will the minister now apologise to survivors and resign over the complete failure of her political duty to act on expert advice?

Siobhian Brown: The Scottish Government is focused on the delivery of our strategic approach to challenging demand for prostitution, including work with Police Scotland to support the implementation of its national approach on prostitution.

As the member knows, we have already set out the unequivocal position that prostitution is violence against women and girls and that the purchase of sex should be criminalised. *[Interruption.]* The member is aware of the reasons why we could not take forward her bill. Further, we will take forward the Criminal Justice Committee's recommendation that an independent commission be established to consider the issues that were raised throughout stage 1 of that bill and inform future legislation in which the Parliament can have confidence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. To allow front-bench teams to change position, there will be a short pause before the next item of business.

Airports (US Military Use)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20819, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on ending the United States military's use of Scottish airports.

I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:55

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): When Prestwick airport was nationalised, in 2013, the then Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, presented it to the Parliament as an opportunity to revitalise the aviation industry in the west of Scotland. In the hopeful pre-referendum days, we were encouraged to imagine how Prestwick could become a hub for international travel, global business and, possibly, even space flight. We were told that it would be an airport for Scotland and that it would create jobs and build skills and expertise in industries for the future.

Few of us in the chamber today could have predicted how much the world would change in the 13 years that came after. Nor could we have anticipated that, instead of a hub for holidaymakers, the publicly owned airport would become a major de facto military base of an aggressive foreign air force under the control of a rogue and unstable leader. Donald Trump's United States has shown repeated contempt for international law, human rights and democracy at home and around the world. Some of his worst offences are taking place right now—against his own citizens. Innocent people are being shot at point-blank range in broad daylight for standing up to the harassment and threats of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE. Tens of thousands of people—including thousands of children—are being held indefinitely by the state in inhumane conditions and are being denied access to adequate food, fresh air, exercise and even basic sanitation facilities. If that was happening in any other country, we would be denouncing the rise of fascism and calling on the international community to cut ties and take action.

On the global scene, Trump has waded in a new era of heavy-handed neo-imperialism. From the illegal invasion and removal of the president in Venezuela to his repeated threats to the sovereignty of Greenland and Denmark, Trump has made it clear that international norms will not curtail his personal pursuit of wealth, power and control. Only last month, his military ignored a decision by Scotland's Court of Session and kidnapped two foreign citizens from our waters. We later learned that it likely used Scotland's own

publicly owned airports to support the operation. That cannot be allowed to continue. That is not what the communities around Prestwick were promised. It is not how the people of the Highlands and Islands want their lifeline airports to be used, and it is not what the public in Scotland deserve for our nationally owned assets.

Our motion today focuses on Prestwick because that is where the problem is most acute. Between 1 April 2025 and 12 February 2026, the United States military landed at Prestwick airport 565 times. Military flights have landed on most days, sometimes multiple times per day, with the busiest day, in May 2025, witnessing 15 landings. The data shows clear patterns, with the number of flights peaking alongside known US military operations. In January, when the US military seized the *Marinera* oil tanker in Scottish waters, landings by the US military were up 76 per cent on the previous month. Last summer saw sustained activity at the airport, which coincided with the US military's bombing of Iran during the 12-day war with Israel.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The member mentioned the seizing of oil tankers. Does she recognise that the seizing of vessels in Russia's shadow fleet is critical to upholding sanctions and supporting the fighting men and women of Ukraine?

Gillian Mackay: I absolutely recognise that, but when vessels come into our waters, our laws apply. Those people were taken in contravention of what the Court of Session said should happen, so it is right that we call the US Government out on it.

Those are not occasional stopovers. That is the routine and sustained use of Prestwick airport as a de facto military base by the US Air Force for training and live military proceedings. Allowing the continued use of our publicly owned airports in that way risks making us complicit in the current and future actions of a foreign Government that has made it clear that it has no intention of sticking within the bounds of international law.

Passenger numbers for Prestwick airport are now at similar levels to those in the late 1990s and are less than half what they were when the airport was nationalised for just £1 in 2013. I would welcome it if the cabinet secretary could provide more information on the current business plan for Prestwick, because it seems clear to me that the financial sustainability of Prestwick is based not on commercial flights but on on-going and routine use by the military.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Does the member recognise that Prestwick airport supports hundreds of jobs and, with it, the Ayrshire economy, and that military contracts are a

significant source of revenue for the airport? How many Scottish jobs would she be prepared to risk?

Gillian Mackay: I do not dispute the point that Sharon Dowey makes about jobs, but there is no security for those jobs in basing them—and others in the local economy—on servicing the military of a foreign state, given its unpredictable nature and, in particular, the unpredictable nature of Mr Trump.

The airport even publicly advertises itself with a glossy website offering

“a dedicated and discreet military base”

and

“the perfect location for crew rest, fuel stop and training of any size of aircraft at any time—day or night.”

That pitch is accompanied by photos of US Air Force planes. Is this really what the Scottish Government had in mind when it brought the airport into public ownership—hiring out our land, our facilities and our workforce to a foreign military to use at its will, with no questions asked?

The Scottish public are the ultimate owners of Prestwick airport. It should be run for their benefit, not for the benefit of an unstable and volatile United States or a President who has armed genocide, inflicted coups and threatened his neighbours. The Scottish Greens share the Government’s aspiration for Scotland to be an independent country, and a big part of that is having the ability to play our full role on the international stage as a good global citizen and a champion for peace and stability around the world.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Gillian Mackay: Yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly, Neil Bibby.

Neil Bibby: Gillian Mackay talks about Scotland taking its role on the international stage and in the international community. Does that include being a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization?

Gillian Mackay: Greens around the world are very clear that we do not support the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but that is not what we are debating today. We are debating the routine use of public airports for military actions. We absolutely need co-operation on the world stage, but that does not necessarily mean that we need to be in NATO. Given Donald Trump’s actions towards NATO, including removing funding from it and threatening NATO allies, it does not seem as strong as it should be.

Do I need to wind up, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you could begin to wind up.

Gillian Mackay: We must move beyond rhetoric and sentiment on this urgent issue. Evicting the United States Air Force from Prestwick and blocking its passage and refuelling through our publicly owned airports across the Highlands and Islands is the most effective way for Scotland not just to talk a good game on the issue but to explicitly stand in support of everyone around the world who is currently a target for Trump and his hostile regime. It is how we stand up for the people of Greenland and affirm our support for their sovereignty and their right to live in peace without the on-going threat of invasion from their neighbour. It is how we stand up against his illegal and immoral actions in Venezuela, which showed utter contempt for international law.

Donald Trump is no friend of Scotland, and we should not pretend that he is. It is time to end his army’s extensive use of our airports and make sure that Scotland is a force for peace in an uncertain world.

I move,

That the Parliament strongly opposes the actions of the United States (US) under the leadership of Donald Trump; believes that, under Trump’s presidency, the US has become a rogue state that has shown contempt for Scottish and international law through its attack on Venezuela and Scottish waters and its threats to the sovereignty of Greenland and Denmark; notes that two people were recently abducted from Scottish waters by the US military, in defiance of the Court of Session and live legal proceedings; understands that the US military currently uses Scottish Government owned Prestwick airport as a de-facto base, with US military flights landing at Prestwick over 560 times since 1 April 2025; agrees that Scotland must not be complicit in any illegal action by allowing the use of publicly owned assets by foreign military, and calls on the Scottish Government to evict US troops operating from Prestwick airport immediately and to instruct all airports owned by the Scottish Government through Highlands and Islands Airports Limited to deny access and use of their facilities to the US military.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that what limited time we had in hand has been exhausted, so I will have to require members to stick to their speaking time allocations.

15:03

Angus Robertson (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): Last month, the First Minister set out the fundamental challenge that Scotland faces in the light of what the Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney, has described as

“a rupture in the world order”.

I recognise that the rules-based system has not always functioned as many would have wished, but, for all its flaws, it has underpinned global co-

operation between Governments.

International uncertainty today emphasises the need for us to co-operate with other nations. For Scotland, co-operation is vital—co-operation on these isles, co-operation across the North Sea with Europe and co-operation with nations everywhere who share our values. Next week, it will be four years since Russia illegally invaded Ukraine.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The cabinet secretary says that we need to work together with nations who share our values. Professor Phillips O'Brien, whom I know the cabinet secretary is a fan of, has said:

"People need to understand what happened strategically in 2025. The US switched sides"

and

"helped Putin a great deal".

Does the Scottish Government believe that the current United States Administration shares our values?

Angus Robertson: I am glad that the Greens have finally raised Ukraine and Russia in the debate. I will come on to the United States in a moment.

Next week, as I mentioned, it will be four years since Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia predicted victory within days. Now, almost four years later, Ukraine continues its heroic fight for its survival, and Scotland has welcomed many displaced families who have sought refuge here. As a Parliament, time and again, we have stood with the people of Ukraine in defiance of aggression. I ask the Parliament to once again affirm its support for Ukraine and for international law and to condemn the devastation that has been caused by Russia.

If we accept the principles of international law, we must support action where that law is flouted. Regimes that undermine the rule of law and illegally invade their neighbours should face consequences. It is therefore correct that Russia faces sanctions. This Government therefore supports the UK Government's action against Russia's shadow fleet—a fleet that prolongs the suffering by financing Russia's aggression. I believe in international co-operation in partnership with our allies. That is founded on the belief that, if we want to maintain a rules-based international order, we must ourselves abide by those rules.

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

Angus Robertson: I will not take an intervention at this time. I have already taken one.

There is no doubt that the Maduro regime in Venezuela was illegitimate. However, as the First

Minister has said, it is hard to see how international law has been respected. I also recognise that recent statements by the US Government about Greenland have risked destabilising the international order. Across history, smaller nations have been exposed to threats from more powerful nations. In that case, a strong and unified response saw European nations stand behind the principles of sovereignty and self-determination, and that unity has produced results.

The US is our ally. The bonds of friendship between the people of Scotland and the US run deep. I will be clear, however: the US Air Force does not have a base at Glasgow Prestwick airport, has not operated one since 1966 and does not have any personnel based at the airport. Glasgow Prestwick airport does not determine the policy, destination or mission of any aircraft using facilities there. Instead, it provides regulated aviation services in line with UK law, international aviation standards and long-standing agreements between allied nations.

Sometimes, friends and allies act in ways with which we disagree, and we disagreed fundamentally with the US in relation to Greenland—

Ross Greer: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I have already said that I am not taking further interventions.

We disagreed fundamentally with the US in relation to Greenland, and we spoke against threats of economic coercion. We will not hesitate to restate that position while maintaining ties of friendship and family with the US. We recognise that our relationship will be tested, and we will continue to speak out in support of Scotland's interests and Scotland's values.

It is no surprise to any member in the chamber that I support Scotland becoming a sovereign state. That would involve the ability to determine our own defence and security policy and to underline our solidarity with neighbours and treaty partners, including the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as a non-nuclear-hosting nation just like our Nordic neighbours. It would also allow this Parliament and Government to determine the use of our military and civilian air facilities and other facilities.

Members will be aware of my track record in highlighting to the Council of Europe the suspected use of airports for rendition flights, and I fully understand why having legal agency in landing rights for flights is relevant and important. However, at present, foreign affairs, defence, national security and air transport policy powers

are all reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament and the UK Government.

The Green Party motion appears to invite us to consider taking steps in contravention of the Scotland Act 1998, which, clearly, we would not be able to do. The amendment in my name would, instead, reaffirm our commitment—across the whole chamber, I would hope—to support domestic and international law and the rules-based order, which is relevant in the case of the recently interdicted Russian shadow fleet vessel; our commitment to support the future of Greenland determined by Greenland and Denmark; and our commitment to Ukraine and a just peace to which its people are agreeable.

I move amendment S6M-20819.3, to leave out from “strongly” to end and insert:

“supports Scots law, international law and the rules-based order; respects the future of Greenland as a matter for the people of Greenland and Denmark; is unwavering in its solidarity with and support for Ukraine in the face of Russia’s illegal invasion; supports international sanctions against the Putin regime and the interdiction of its shadow fleet, and encourages the international community to secure a just peace acceptable to Ukraine.”

15:09

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

I was astonished but maybe not surprised to see the Scottish Green Party’s motion. It is like being back at a student union debate, with ranting about issues that are well outwith the remit of this Parliament.

I enjoyed my time in student union debates many, many decades ago, but this Parliament should be focusing on issues within its remit. We should be looking at, for example, the pitiful level of economic growth that we have in Scotland and across the United Kingdom and at what that means for living standards; the high cost of renewable energy driving up consumers’ bills; waiting times in the national health service; falling standards in education; or a soft-touch justice system.

We could have been debating any one of those topics this afternoon. Instead, the Greens come to us with a rant against the United States of America, our longest-standing and most reliable ally as a country, and a fundamental part of the NATO alliance.

If the Greens want to debate international affairs, why do they not attack the real rogue states? Where is the mention of China, with its myriad human rights abuses against ethnic and religious minorities, its attacks on free speech and its imprisonment of those who dare to speak out against the regime?

Ross Greer: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry, Mr Greer, but I have only four minutes, due to the Greens’ scheduling of the debate.

Where is the attack on Russia and on the evil Putin regime, which is sponsoring terrorism and has unleashed a horrific war on the innocent civilians of Ukraine that is approaching its fourth anniversary? Where is the Greens’ criticism of the terrorist state of Iran, which is oppressing its own people, murdering civilians who simply want to support democracy and free speech, and supporting terrorism in the middle east and elsewhere? Where is the concern for the victims of conflicts in countries such as Sudan and Myanmar, where hundreds of thousands of innocents have died?

I fully understand that there are concerns about aspects of Donald Trump’s presidency but, in comparison with what is happening elsewhere in the world, those pale into insignificance. The student-union obsessives of the Green Party are hitting the wrong target. When it comes to the situation with Venezuela, let us never forget that the Russians are importing Venezuelan oil in order to break sanctions. We should have no sympathy for sanction-breakers, in any circumstance.

The motion mentions Prestwick airport and its use by US military flights. Thank goodness that the US military is using Prestwick, and paying handsomely for that benefit. It means that the airport, which is in public hands, is at last now showing some profitability and benefitting the Scottish taxpayer. Banning US military flights would achieve nothing if those flights simply divert elsewhere, but it would cost the Scottish taxpayer millions of pounds.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Murdo Fraser will be aware of the vibrant engineering cluster at Prestwick airport, which is employing thousands and looking to create up to an additional 1,500 jobs. Does he agree that it would be a much more grown-up approach if we called for investment in apprenticeships in local colleges so that we could grow the local economy?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Whittle makes an excellent point. If only we were more grown-up in this debate, that is what we could be discussing.

What concerns me is that the very same Green Party, which has such skewed priorities and is bringing back the politics of the student union to this Parliament, could find itself back in Government in a few weeks’ time. If the Scottish National Party were to end up as the largest party after May but short of a majority, Ross Greer and Gillian Mackay might be sitting around the Cabinet table, and the wording of the motion shows what will happen if they are driving Scottish Government policy.

When asked by Ross Greer on 28 January whether he would consider evicting US troops from Prestwick, the First Minister John Swinney did not immediately slap down that ludicrous idea but said that he would “consider” the matter. That is the danger that lies in store, and that is why Scotland should reject both the SNP and the Greens at the election in a few weeks’ time. At least the Scottish Conservatives will stand up for our economic interests, the defence of our country and the NATO alliance.

I move amendment S6M-20819.1, to leave out from “strongly” to end and insert:

“reaffirms its clear support for NATO as the cornerstone of collective defence and the foundation of transatlantic security; recognises that NATO has preserved peace among its members for more than 75 years and that the Alliance’s nuclear deterrent, including the strategic capability of the United States, has underpinned strategic stability among NATO members and deterred direct conflict between major nuclear powers in Europe for eight decades; recognises the United States as a central and enduring partner in safeguarding European security and acknowledges its leadership in providing the air mobility, logistics, intelligence and deterrence capabilities on which the Alliance relies; notes that military aircraft from NATO allies, including those of the United States, routinely and lawfully use Scottish airports such as Glasgow Prestwick Airport for refuelling and transit; further notes that such activity supports jobs, brings revenue and contributes to the financial sustainability of publicly owned airport infrastructure; rejects calls to withdraw cooperation from the country’s closest allies; calls on the Scottish Government to continue facilitating appropriate access for NATO partners to Scottish airport facilities in support of collective defence, national security and the long-term resilience of Scotland’s aviation assets, and regrets that the Scottish Green Party has chosen to use parliamentary time to debate these matters instead of raising the many devolved issues that require immediate attention.”

15:13

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Last week, when I saw that we were due to debate external affairs, I certainly did not think that we would be debating a Scottish Green motion that would evict foreign nationals—and not just any foreign nationals, but US military personnel serving in our collective defence. Well, here we are.

Let me be unequivocal: we have a duty to protect our citizens and our allies, and any nation’s use of Scottish and UK infrastructure must be carried out in accordance with domestic and international law. We would expect that of our own armed forces overseas, and we rightly expect that of any nation using our infrastructure.

Scottish Labour is committed to taking sanctions against the Russian regime and maintaining our obligations that we have signed under international treaties. In 1949, the United Kingdom, under the leadership of Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary

Ernest Bevin, was one of the founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and we in the Labour Party remain committed to the principles of NATO.

Let us be clear what the motion that is before us means: it seeks to prevent the United States military from using Scottish airports. That would send a crystal clear and reckless statement that the Scottish Parliament is not interested in the collective defence of the United Kingdom, the European Union or, indeed, Scotland. A time of global instability is not the time to turn our backs on our NATO allies.

That is why I welcome the UK Government’s commitment to increase defence spending to 3 per cent of gross domestic product. That will support our security, but it will also support Ukraine and security on the continent of Europe, which is threatened by Putin’s aggression. It will help to boost skilled, unionised and high-wage jobs in Scotland’s defence industry, including at Prestwick airport, which is mentioned in the motion.

We can of course have different views on the policies and actions of the current US Administration, but our special relationship with the United States and its people is long-standing and vitally important and must be maintained.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Bibby: I will not take one now, but I will try to do so in my closing speech.

The one airport that is mentioned in the Scottish Greens’ motion on ending US military use is Prestwick. The airport is well known for handling military customers from NATO-aligned countries, most notably the Royal Air Force, the US Air Force and the Royal Canadian Air Force. The motion states that Prestwick airport has been used 560 times by the US military since 1 April 2025. I say respectfully that that is not exactly news. In fact, the US Air Force has used Prestwick airport since we were fighting together to defeat Nazi Germany in world war two, and it has been used by US planes to refuel for decades since then.

We should all be aware that, in 1960, the king of rock and roll, Elvis Presley, landed at Prestwick airport when he was a serving member of the US Army. I am glad that the Greens were not in charge then, as that would have prevented Elvis from making his only trip to the United Kingdom. To quote the man himself, we need a little less conversation and grandstanding from the Greens. Given that their motion is dangerous, virtue signalling and incompetent, it should be returned to sender.

Prestwick airport is also vital for jobs and the economy. As Sharon Dowey said, thousands of

jobs are supported at the airport and it contributes nearly £0.25 billion of economic benefits to Scotland. We should not do anything that puts those jobs at risk.

Ross Greer: Will the member give way?

Neil Bibby: I will try to take an intervention in my closing remarks.

At a time when global events threaten the stability of our democracy and security in Europe, we should be collaborating with our partners, not turning our backs on them. The motion completely undermines our efforts to keep our country safe. We will not support a motion that threatens the safety and security of our citizens, our country and our NATO allies.

I move amendment S6M-20819.2, to leave out from “strongly” to end and insert:

“acknowledges that any use by other nations of Scottish infrastructure must be done in accordance with domestic and international law; welcomes the role that both Scotland and Prestwick airport have played in supporting Ukraine against the Russian invasion; recognises the importance of Scotland’s strategic assets in supporting international security; affirms its support for the UK’s place in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and welcomes the UK Government commitment to increase defence spending to 3% of GDP in an era of global instability.”

15:17

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I will start with a personal reflection. I have always struggled with aspects of NATO. As a Quaker, I am still navigating the tension that exists between an alliance that is built on the existence of a weapons system that I find horrifying and the undeniable success that that organisation has achieved in underwriting the peace that we all enjoy.

Fundamentally, I have reached the conclusion that I want NATO to succeed. As such, I am deeply troubled by the Trump Administration’s threats towards that organisation and our allies. I have watched in horror as he has undermined the alliances that have helped to prevent war, including a third world war, over the decades, and threatened Greenland and Canada, the homeland of my mother. I am appalled by his rhetoric and policies that harm democracy in his country and abroad.

However, here is the difference between my party and the Greens today: we do not confuse our dislike for one political figure with the long-term security interests of our country. It is just not serious politics to do otherwise. NATO has been the single most successful peacekeeping alliance in modern history. It has underpinned stability in Europe for more than 75 years. It has deterred

aggression and protected small nations from being crushed by larger ones.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am afraid that I do not have time.

Right now, NATO’s existence and collaboration with the US are central to the defence of Ukraine and Europe as a whole. Without the support of the United States, the future of Ukraine is bleak. We can wish that things were otherwise. We could hope that Europe alone could shoulder our security burdens tomorrow, but that is just not the case.

The reality is that American military support has been and continues to be decisive. The incongruity of the motion before us today is that, although Green MSPs would have us evict American service personnel from our shores, the fighting men and women of Ukraine would give their eye teeth to have US forces stationed there, which would offer the same security guarantees that our partnership with America has offered since the bombing of Pearl Harbor—a guarantee that has underwritten the long peace that we continue to enjoy to this day.

If we want Putin’s aggression to fail, we need that alliance to hold—we need NATO to succeed. Expelling US troops from Scotland would not strengthen peace; it would fracture an alliance at the precise moment that it needs unity. It would signal to Moscow that western resolve is weakening, and it would hand Donald Trump exactly what he wants—a narrative that Europe is retreating and that NATO is collapsing.

I refuse to play into that. I want NATO to succeed because I believe in our collective security. The animus that I hold for the current occupant of the White House is a matter of public record. I speak out against him, detest his agenda and even travelled to America to campaign against him. However, Trump is not America, and America is not Donald Trump. The promise of the United States is far greater than any single presidency.

The special relationship between our nations is old and strong enough to withstand the erratic and offensive policy agenda of a four-year Administration and the measured criticisms of politicians on this side of the Atlantic. Our relationship with America is vital for security, intelligence sharing, trade, scientific collaboration and global influence. That relationship must endure. We must hold our nerve and look to the near horizon, when our American cousins can come back to their senses and ensure that President Trump leaves office.

Foreign policy is about long-term national interest, not short-term moral theatre. At a time

when authoritarianism is rising across the globe, this is not the moment to weaken the alliance that has kept Scotland, the UK and Europe secure for generations. We can and should be critical of the occupant of the White House. We can condemn actions that violate democratic values, but we must not dismantle the structures that keep our continent safe.

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

15:22

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Given the rise of fascism on the other side of the Atlantic, I want to highlight why this Parliament must exercise oversight over the use of publicly owned airports in the Highlands and Islands by the United States military. Those sites are operated by Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd on the Scottish Government's behalf, and what happens at those airports is a matter of direct public accountability. We own those airports, and when they are used for foreign military operations without our knowledge, that is democratic failure.

The evidence is clear and documented: three US Air Force special operations aircraft landed at Wick John O'Groats airport ahead of a US-led military operation to seize a sanctioned Russian oil tanker. The planes arrived from Royal Air Force Mildenhall and departed roughly one hour later. Three U-28A aircraft then took off from Wick to directly support the seizure of the Marinera tanker. This morning, we heard the news that the captain of the tanker has been indicted in the United States.

The case shows how easily Scotland's sovereignty can be bypassed. Twenty-eight soldiers were detained in the Moray Firth for weeks without charge, a Court of Session interdict was ignored and two men were removed from Scotland without proper legal process. If that can happen here with so little oversight, we must seriously question the unmonitored use of Highlands and Islands airports by the US military and ensure that Scotland's infrastructure is never used for actions beyond democratic control.

Wick is routinely used by US military aircraft that need to refuel on transatlantic and Arctic routes, but there is currently no mechanism in place to distinguish the flights that are connected to sensitive operations. The incident was not isolated to Wick; the same operation involved at least two other HIAL airports. Benbecula airport hosted two US V-22 Osprey aircraft that were used for cargo and troop transport during the US military's seizure of the Marinera, and Stornoway airport hosted a Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft that was used for

surveillance and reconnaissance in US military operations.

Wick, Benbecula and Stornoway are three publicly owned airports. All three were used for one foreign military operation that was triggered by a President gone rogue. There was zero prior awareness from the Scottish Government. We own the airports, and the communities of the Highlands and Islands fund and rely on them. They deserve assurance that their public assets are not being used in ways that are contrary to Scotland's values and legal responsibilities.

This is a pattern, not an anomaly. Our publicly funded infrastructure is being drawn into foreign military actions, and this Parliament is being kept in the dark. In the case of Wick, it was particularly galling for the community to see a lifeline resource being used in that way, given that local residents had been cut off from regular services since October and, even now, can travel only from Wick to Aberdeen.

Our communities deserve to live in peace. Residents in Lewis were so concerned by the noise of the military aircraft that they contacted the airport. At 99 decibels, the sound of a V-22 Osprey is similar to the sound of a chainsaw at close range and eight times louder than a typical helicopter.

All that was happening while Donald Trump openly threatened our NATO ally Greenland, while US-controlled nuclear weapons sit at Faslane and while the current US Administration grows ever more unpredictable. Scotland must not become an unmonitored military staging ground.

The evidence from Wick, Benbecula and Stornoway makes one thing absolutely clear: publicly owned airports in the Highlands and Islands are being used for military activity without sufficient accountability or alignment with Scotland's legal and ethical standards. The communities of the Highlands and Islands deserve assurance that their public assets are not being used in a way that is contrary to Scotland's values and legal responsibilities. The Parliament must ensure that such decisions are subject to scrutiny. Scotland's publicly owned infrastructure must not be used for foreign military purposes without our knowledge or consent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will have to require members to stick to their speaking time allocations.

15:26

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I understand that not everyone in the chamber believes that we should be debating a subject matter of this nature. That is clear from

Murdo Fraser's opening remarks and his amendment, and it was clear last month when the Tories absconded from the debating chamber when the First Minister made a statement on the MV Bella 1. Ironically, if they had remained, they would have heard that the statement related directly to matters of devolved competence.

We should be prepared to debate, discuss and deliberate on this subject matter in the chamber. I do not dismiss the motion as student politics. Our national legislature should be prepared to take a position on international matters, so I thank the Greens for lodging their motion to enable this debate to take place. They were perfectly entitled to lodge the motion, and I have a lot of sympathy with much of it.

Donald Trump's posturing and his repositioning of the United States through a mixture of an aggressive and assertive form of the Monroe doctrine and the threat of American isolationism in relation to Europe should be of the utmost concern to us. The prospect of the upending of long-held arrangements on mutual defence would be alarming at any time, but it is especially so at a time of crisis in eastern Europe.

Donald Trump and his Administration should rightly be criticised for his rhetoric on Greenland, the manner in which he intervened in Venezuela and the unilateral removal of the captain and the first officer of the MV Bella 1 when, as has been mentioned, the Court of Session had imposed an order banning the removal of its crew from Scottish jurisdiction. In each case, the First Minister has been clear that it does not seem as though the norms of international law have been respected or followed, and I agree with that perspective.

The only people who should determine the future of Greenland are the people of Greenland, and if there are concerns about the manner in which a state is operating—there clearly were concerns about the manner in which the Venezuelan Administration was operating—the solution cannot be to unilaterally remove the head of state and hold them captive in another country.

Murdo Fraser's point about Russia using Venezuelan oil is not unreasonable, but we should also reflect on what Donald Trump has said since the intervention in Venezuela. He has been clear about utilising Venezuelan oil for the benefit of American companies. In mid-January, he said:

"We're going to be extracting numbers in terms of oil like few people have seen".

Therefore, a wider debate is needed about the motivations in that region.

Ross Greer: Will Mr Hepburn take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: I will probably not be allowed to, because I am in the last minute of my speech. Is that right, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can do what you want, but you will not get any time back.

Jamie Hepburn: Well, if I will not get any time back, I will do what I want and continue.

On the matter of upholding sanctions, I observe that, just last month, BBC verify reported that dozens of sanctioned Russian tankers have been able to sail through the English Channel unimpeded. There is much more that can be done within the law on this side of the Atlantic to ensure that sanctions are being properly applied.

It is right that we consider how our assets and infrastructure in Scotland are being utilised by international actors. We face challenges; the cabinet secretary was right to set out that Scotland is not a state party and is not signed up to international treaty obligations. We are not responsible for the entry and egress of air traffic through Scotland.

It is not unreasonable to criticise the Trump Administration—I have certainly done that—but it is unreasonable to demand things of the Scottish Government that it is unable to do. That is why I will support the Scottish Government's amendment.

15:30

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Greens do not often secure time for Opposition debates in the Parliament and, on the strength of this motion, that is probably a blessed mercy. Opposition time should be used to confront the real challenges that we face in Scotland, such as our flatlining economy, education standards, drugs deaths that should—and do—shame a civilised country, violence against women and girls, a benefits bill that keeps growing while too many people remain out of work, and the decline of oil and gas, which has cost livelihoods and confidence in the north-east economy. Instead, we are invited to indulge in a symbolic gesture about Prestwick and to brand one of our closest allies a rogue state.

It would be absurd if it were not so irresponsible. War has returned to Europe. Russia's aggression is not theoretical; it is real. Nations on NATO's eastern flank are not posturing; they are seeking protection. In that context, the Greens believe that Scotland's great contribution is to pick a fight with the Atlantic alliance. That is not serious politics—as Murdo Fraser once observed, it is "wired to the moon".

Presidents come and go and personalities change. Donald Trump came, went, returned and will go again. Others will follow, but the alliance endures because it is bigger than any leader and more important than any electoral cycle. To casually label democratic allies as rogue states is not moral leadership; it is diplomatic vandalism. If that becomes the currency of international relations, trust will collapse, trade will suffer and working people will pay the price. Prosperity depends on stable alliances and open markets. That is not ideology; it is economic reality. However, that is perhaps an uncomfortable truth for a party with economic instincts that would take us back to the stone age.

NATO has preserved peace for more than 75 years. Its collective defence and nuclear deterrent, including the strategic capability of the United States, have underpinned stability in Europe for decades. That is not rhetoric; it is the hard architecture of peace. Because they dislike the current Administration in Washington, the Greens propose that this Parliament should grandstand, but alliances are not disposable, and they are not fashion accessories to be discarded when politics shifts. They are sustained through political cycles and maintained with seriousness and steadiness. The United States remains central to Europe's security. Its intelligence, logistics, air mobility and deterrent capabilities are woven into NATO's credibility. That is why countries that are under real threat seek closer integration with the alliance, not distance from it.

Then there is the matter of Prestwick. The issue concerns lawful and routine allied flights, revenue for a publicly owned airport, skilled Scottish jobs and infrastructure that strengthens national resilience. In one breath, the Greens speak of protecting public assets; in the next, they would jeopardise a key income stream for the sake of a cheap headline. That is not strategic thinking; it is gesture and student politics.

The motion is not about sovereignty and it is not about the law; it is about making a statement that will impress the Greens' activists while doing nothing to enhance Scotland's security or prosperity.

Scotland is a proud part of the United Kingdom, and Britain was a founding member of NATO. Collective defence is not optional; it is the bedrock of our security and our prosperity, on which our public services depend. The Scottish Parliament can indulge in ideological theatrics or behave with maturity in a dangerous world. I call on members to support the Conservative amendment and to reject the motion.

15:35

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Let us be clear that this debate is a waste of parliamentary time. The Greens are using their final Opposition party debate of the parliamentary session, which could have been an opportunity to set out how they would fix housing, health, social care, transport or even the climate crisis, to debate instead something that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government have absolutely no control over. This is childish gesture politics from a party that would be an absolute disaster for international security and diplomacy.

The Scottish Government does not have the power to implement what is being proposed. Defence and foreign policy are reserved matters. That is a simple constitutional fact, as the cabinet secretary has recognised—although I take it that he might wish that to be different.

Ross Greer: I am confused as to why Mr Griffin thinks that it is outwith the Scottish Government's competence to dictate the operations of an asset that it owns, when the Scottish Government has already done that. If it was outwith the Government's competence to do that, how was it able to ban Israeli air force flights from the same airport?

Mark Griffin: Ross Greer should know that our airports are complying with international law, and we support that. The UK respects our international obligations, and NATO commitments endure beyond any individual leader—we support all of that, too. If a NATO ally needs to use infrastructure in Scotland, it is essential for our collective security that it is able to do so. Denying access would send a message that Scotland is not serious about the defence of Europe, the UK or itself, and it would raise serious concerns about our collective defence of the north Atlantic corridor, which is under extreme pressure from Russia at the moment. Prestwick airport plays a role in supporting allied operations. That includes support for Ukraine as it resists Vladimir Putin's invasion.

The clear and obvious truth is that Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin could not care less whether the motion passes or falls, because it would do nothing. In serious times, doing nothing and doing so very loudly is a hollow imitation of leadership. The people of Scotland will not care either. They want a Parliament that is focused on fixing public services and delivering shorter waiting times, access to a family doctor, proper mental health support, safer streets, better schools and action on the housing emergency. However, instead of serious policy, we have slogans. Instead of workable proposals, we seem to have lines from a late-night Reddit forum.

We live in serious times. Our duty is to defend international law and our treaty commitments, not throw our toys out of the pram. A Scottish Labour Government will instead commit to testing workable policies to reverse two decades of decline by restoring access to general practitioners, cutting waiting times, rebuilding community policing, banning mobile phones in classrooms and ending the housing emergency. That is serious government.

The Greens have clearly failed in office. Now they play politics with issues that are not toys. They cannot be trusted anywhere near Government. For Scotland's security and the Scottish Parliament's credibility, the motion should be rejected.

15:38

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I refer members to paragraph 7(1) of part 1 of schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998, which states:

"International relations, including relations with territories outside the United Kingdom, the European Union (and their institutions) and other international organisations ... are reserved matters."

As a devolved legislature, we have substantial limitations on our exercise of power—would that it were otherwise. Do I wish that I could cock a snook at Donald Trump and his unholy Administration? Of course I do—probably along with many European leaders, including Sir Keir Starmer, who are all holding their collective noses as Trump blunders around the world. Do I think that he has destabilised the world order? Of course I do. Although he will not have it all his own way—as other international alliances, political and economic, are being formed, some of which are pretty unholy—he has debunked the long-standing myth that the UK has a special relationship with the US. He has caused Europe to pull up its socks and deal with Putin's imperialistic ambitions.

In fact, Finland and Sweden joined NATO not only in the face of the invasion of Ukraine, but also because of the casual, confrontational and dismissive attitude of Trump to NATO. The Scottish Government has spoken out about the Russian invasion to absorb Ukraine and Trump's ludicrous attempts to annex Canada and Greenland—straight from Putin's playlist.

Destabilisation has a substantial impact on devolved issues. Let us think about the threat to energy supplies and the cost of energy, which is at the base of much inflation. Yes, I say to Stephen Kerr, Trump will go—but the world order will not return to the way that it was before his reign.

With regard to airports, there are not only the limitations of devolution; there are also other,

reserved restrictions at play. Aircraft landing at any UK airport require permission from the UK Government, not the Scottish Government. Prestwick airport operates on a commercial basis, at arm's length from the Scottish Government, and operational decisions regarding the day-to-day running of the airport are a matter for its management.

Do I wish that it were otherwise? Of course I do. Could it be otherwise? Of course it could. Small countries can make a difference, especially by sharing their sovereignty with others on a mutually beneficial basis. An independent Scotland in NATO, the EU and the United Nations could do just that.

I want to debunk another myth in relation to NATO membership. Of 32 NATO members, only the United States, the United Kingdom and France possess their own nuclear weapons. Five countries—Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey—host US nuclear weapons under a nuclear sharing arrangement. The majority of NATO nations, such as Canada, Norway and Poland, do not. There is nothing to prevent an independent Scotland, nuclear free, from being a member of the very important alliance called NATO.

The Deputy Presiding Officer : We move to closing speeches.

15:41

Neil Bibby: As I close on behalf of Scottish Labour, I note that the lines of division in the debate have been very clear. Although the Scottish Greens spent their time attempting to undermine our international standing and security, the debate has provided a vital opportunity to reinforce why Scotland and the UK must remain a serious partner in a world in which our resolve continues to be tested by global events and global instability.

We on this side of the chamber will not forget that the United Kingdom, under Attlee and Bevan, helped to forge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. That commitment to collective security is not a relic of the past, but a living necessity. To turn our backs on US military use of our Scottish airports would be to turn our backs on not only NATO and that alliance, but ourselves. It would play into the hands of our adversaries, who are the only ones who would gain from such a reckless act.

I spoke earlier, as did other members, about the economic importance of Prestwick airport. We are talking about 450 jobs directly at the airport, and also more than 3,300 full-time jobs in the cluster surrounding it. That contributes almost a quarter of

a billion pounds in gross value added benefits to our country's economy.

Asking why we should place more importance on some jobs over others is not a logical approach to supporting our economy, and it is irresponsible. Our foreign policy should not be dictated in this way by the Scottish Greens, who do not support NATO. As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, it also should not be dictated by their—or anyone's—disdain for the occupant of the White House. Ironically, the Scottish Greens appear to be positioning themselves with others who wish to cast doubt on NATO and its importance during a period of increasing global instability.

Ross Greer: It would be useful to get clarity on this, because it was not a position that Labour laid out a few weeks ago. I accept that, from Labour's perspective, the US is a military ally of ours. However, does the Labour Party really believe that the US military should be allowed to breach Scots law and British sovereignty in its actions—which is exactly what it did a few weeks ago—or does the member at least agree that there should be consequences when our allies disrespect our domestic laws?

Neil Bibby: I do not accept that that is the case. As I said in my opening speech—I was crystal clear on this point, which is also in my amendment—we expect that any nation that uses Scottish or UK infrastructure should do so in accordance with domestic and international law. I could not be clearer about that. We also accept and support our international obligations, such as NATO, which is a treaty that was signed in 1949. We want to uphold that, but the Scottish Greens want to rip it up.

The cabinet secretary mentioned that we must not forget that four years ago, almost to the day, the democratic European nation of Ukraine was illegally invaded by Russia. It is important that we remember the role that Prestwick airport has played in supporting Ukraine's efforts against Putin's invasion.

When it suits them, the Scottish Greens often come to this chamber to complain about the Government not stepping in to save jobs in Scotland, but they would be happy to potentially put thousands of jobs at risk in and around Prestwick airport.

At a time when Scotland faces many challenges, it is disappointing to see the Scottish Greens use their parliamentary time to lecture us on defence and national security. They could have talked about the social care crisis, hospitals or ferries—they did not. After 19 years of the SNP, with the Greens playing a part in its failure, we need

serious politics for serious times. To quote Elvis Presley once again, perhaps we should have a little less conversation from the Greens on issues that are not even in the competence of this Parliament, and maybe a little more action, please, on the real issues that our constituents face every day.

15:45

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In summing up this debate for the Scottish Conservatives, I have to bring it all together and describe what the debate has been like. That is easy—it has been a complete waste of time. This has been a waste of valuable parliamentary time. Members of the Green Party and the SNP have recently rejected bills because the Parliament does not have enough time to consider them, but the Greens think that it is appropriate to sit here today and debate this issue. It is not.

Stephen Kerr was right to say that we could have spoken about housing, education, health, the economy or many other things. The Greens could have asked us to speak about the climate, but they did not want to.

Ross Greer rose—

Douglas Ross: I will give way if I have some time at the end of my speech.

They do not want to speak about the climate—no, no. They want to speak about reserved issues. As Christine Grahame said, the Scotland Act 1998 is very clear: it is not within the remit of this Parliament to discuss the issues in the motion being debated today.

I listened to Gillian Mackay. She gave a very serious speech, and I was sat here wondering whether she honestly believes that, across the Atlantic, Donald Trump is currently in the Oval office, and people are going to barge in and say, "President Trump! President Trump! You need to get to the situation room. Gillian Mackay said something nasty about you in Holyrood—we must change our policy across the globe!" She should not be so ridiculous. Not even people in Scotland are going to be interested in what the Greens are saying today, let alone President Trump.

I take exception to some of the speeches that have compared this debate to student union politicking. That does a great disservice to our student union debates across the country. People in universities will be very ashamed to be aligned to the Scottish Greens. Listening to some of the Scottish Green contributions, I thought that the children in my four-year-old son's nursery would have a better debate on what they had for their snack each day than we have had today.

Ariane Burgess tried to paint a picture of the people in Wick being under the impression that some planes have been landing but not knowing anything about it. The people in Wick know what those planes are. They see them in the sky and see them landing and taking off. In the same debate that Ariane Burgess was trying to say that this is all happening covertly and no one knows about it, Gillian Mackay told us about a glossy brochure that has been produced for Prestwick airport about the very same thing. The activities cannot be both covert and advertised in a glossy brochure.

We have had some common sense and rational thinking from the likes of Sharon Dowey, who spoke about the thousands of jobs that would be under threat if the Green motion passed. Are the Greens going to go to the south of Scotland, to Prestwick and Ayr, and say, "Vote for us, because we are going to close Prestwick airport and stop these flights coming in"? As Murdo Fraser said, those are the only flights that are generating a profit at Prestwick airport. If the Green motion passes today, all of that, as Sharon Dowey said, will be lost—thousands of jobs and vital resources for the Scottish Government coffers from Prestwick airport.

That is what the Greens want. That is what they are happy with. How could they possibly have sat around their very small table to discuss topics to debate today and thought that this was the one that would attract them support in the election in a few weeks' time?

I conclude—

Ross Greer: Will the member give way?

Douglas Ross: I am sorry—I do not have time.

I conclude by saying that, although it is bad enough that they do this in Opposition, we can imagine how scary it would be if they were back in Government. We know that the SNP was happy to take the Greens into Government before; if it needs to, it will take them back in again. That would be not only a waste of time on Opposition debate days, but a worrying waste of Government time. That is a direction of travel that I do not want to see, which is why we should not only reject the Greens' motion today, but reject them at the ballot box in May.

15:49

Angus Robertson: I thank colleagues for their contributions to the debate.

I am reminded of the fact that, as many members have said, it is almost four years to the day since Russia's full-scale illegal invasion of Ukraine, which reminds us of the importance of

global co-operation and the need for international law. It is right and proper that we can discuss such issues in Scotland's national Parliament.

The Scottish Government and, I believe, all parties in the Parliament resolutely condemn Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, as we have done since its invasion. We have a continuing commitment to achieving a strong, just and durable peace that ensures that Ukraine has a secure future and that deters any future Russian aggression.

We would back a properly constituted international peace plan that respects Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, that is agreed by Ukraine and that restores peace in Europe. The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to supporting Ukraine, not only until a just peace is secured, but through recovery and reconstruction to a brighter future beyond.

I will briefly respond to points that have been made in the debate. Concern has been raised about the actions taken in relation to the MV Bella 1, which is currently in Scottish waters. The First Minister made it clear in his statement to the Parliament that, although the Bella 1 was in Scottish waters, at no point were the UK or Scottish authorities in control of the vessel, and the Scottish authorities had no legal basis whatsoever for boarding the vessel at any time. The Scottish Government was informed that the two individuals had been removed from the Bella 1 by the United States after—not before—they had been removed from the vessel.

Ross Greer: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I will in a second; I just want to finish this point.

The presence of the Bella 1 in Scottish waters emphasises the fact that international events directly impact on the responsibilities of the Scottish Government.

Ross Greer: Does the cabinet secretary not agree that there should be consequences for foreign militaries that breach Scots law and UK sovereignty within our waters?

Angus Robertson: I would like to make the point in this way: if we are genuinely serious about dealing with Putin's shadow fleet—I hope that we all are; I think that we all are—we need to get this right. I agree with Mr Greer on that point. We need to get this right, and that includes respecting Scots law.

The Scottish Government is committed to playing its full part in the defence of our country and the security of our allies. Glasgow Prestwick

airport and certain HIAL airports are important stop-over points for many air forces, including the Royal Air Force and the air forces of other NATO partners, such as the United States and Canada. An important point that has not yet been put on the record is that non-UK military require to obtain diplomatic flight clearance from the UK Ministry of Defence in order to fly and land in UK airspace.

As members recognise, Glasgow Prestwick airport is an asset to the local and national economies. The airport plays a key role in infrastructure development in the Ayrshire region and supports a valuable aerospace cluster.

International uncertainty brings risk to us all—to our economy, to our communities and to our safety. We cannot insulate ourselves. We must be committed to stepping forward as a good global citizen. That is why I urge colleagues to agree to the amendment in my name. That amendment, which should garner support right across the chamber, reaffirms our commitment to supporting domestic and international law and the rules-based order, which is relevant in the case of the recently interdicted Russian shadow fleet vessel; supports the future of Greenland being determined by Greenland and Denmark; and reaffirms our commitment to Ukraine and a just peace that is acceptable to its people.

15:53

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): It is fair to say that this has been a somewhat surreal and—certainly from our perspective—disappointing debate. Some colleagues have given the impression that they thought that Donald Trump might be watching, so afraid have they been even to utter his name—or perhaps they were concerned about whether whoever it is at the US consulate whose job it is to decide which MSPs to offer free world cup tickets might be watching. Certain people are clearly trying to curry favour ahead of the summer.

What I found most disappointing about the way in which the debate has been conducted is that it was an opportunity to stand up for Scotland, which is a slogan that the Scottish Government likes to use on a regular basis. However, the Scottish Government is failing to stand up for Scotland.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Are you content that what was just said in relation to the integrity of members of this Parliament be allowed to stand uncorrected? It was more than suggested—in fact, a direct accusation was made—that some of us are taking the positions that we are taking because of some kind of an inducement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, if I had been dissatisfied with what was said, I would have

intervened. This has been a robust debate and some challenging things have been said around the chamber. Let us continue.

Mr Greer, I can give you the time back.

Ross Greer: The First Minister has taken his attempts to establish a relationship with Donald Trump all the way to the Oval office, yet he still has nothing to show for it. Scots law has been breached by the US military, which clearly could not give a damn about the UK's sovereignty or the laws of this country. The cabinet secretary could not even answer my question about whether the Government actually believes that the current US Administration shares our values.

I have to say that, although there was a lot that I found that I could agree with in speeches by other SNP members, the cabinet secretary's speech could have been made by a unionist. That was what I took from it. He was entirely factually wrong when he said that the only party that can make a decision about flights in and out of these airports is the UK Government, because, despite the fact that the UK Government is a supporter of Israel, Prestwick airport has already banned Israeli military flights. That means that there is a precedent for what we are asking for. Our proposal is based on the risk of international law being breached, and there is no doubt that the US is also a state that is in breach of international law.

I have found it surreal in this debate to hear British unionist colleagues defend a foreign military breaching the sovereignty of the UK. It was surreal to hear from colleagues who talk a lot in this chamber about the rule of law and the importance of law and order in this country, but who seem to be quite happy that there was absolutely no respect for the rule of law when it came to the abduction of the two individuals from that tanker in our waters—two individuals who were subject to our jurisdiction. That is not just subservience to Westminster, but subservience to the White House, which I find absolutely bizarre.

A lot was said by many members about Russia's war on Ukraine. I will again quote Professor Phillips O'Brien, because I know that many members in this chamber of various persuasions have a huge amount of respect for him. He said:

"People need to understand what happened strategically in 2025. The US switched sides, helped Putin a great deal".

That is the state that is using an airport that this Government owns as a de facto military base for more than 500 flights in the past year—a state that has, for all intents and purposes, switched sides.

Alex Cole-Hamilton made a number of fair points about the shadow fleet. Like a handful of other MSPs, I have been sanctioned by the Kremlin specifically for my campaigning to get the shadow

fleet shut down and to end its operations in the UK, including here in Scotland. Again, the issue comes back to the point that Murdo Fraser made about other countries. The Greens do not pick and choose when we believe that international law should be respected or when we believe that human rights should be respected. We believe that every nation should uphold international law and respect human rights. In particular, we should hold our allies to a higher standard than our opponents. If the US is an ally of the UK, why do we not hold it to the same standard that we should apparently hold ourselves to?

Some people in this Parliament are happy to excuse any behaviour and any breach of not just international law but our domestic Scots law for the sake of economic benefits, but I ask them whether they would still take that position if the US had followed through on its threats against Greenland and if Prestwick, Wick or Benbecula had been used as staging points for military operations against one of our other NATO allies. I do not think that they would be saying that; I imagine that they would be saying very little out of shame at the position that they had previously taken.

What I find frustrating is that the Scottish Government knows that this is wrong. I do not expect my Tory or Labour colleagues to say anything different to what they have said, but Scottish Government colleagues know that what is going on is wrong, so I genuinely cannot understand this utterly subservient behaviour.

With regard to what unionist colleagues have said, I note that Murdo Fraser is a lawyer. I would have thought that he would have had respect for the rule of law, but, just a matter of weeks ago, the US military breached Scots law, breached an order of the Court of Session, disrespected our Lord Advocate and breached UK sovereignty, and the Tories did not even turn up to hear about it. They had nothing to say about one of the most significant breaches of Scots law in decades.

Neil Bibby said that foreign militaries must abide by our law, but, once again, just a matter of weeks ago, a foreign military breached our law and the Labour Party had nothing to say about it—there was not even a suggestion that there should be any consequences for that. I simply cannot understand this behaviour. It stinks. It reeks of double standards.

I would call on SNP colleagues to reconsider their positions. We have heard unionists this afternoon deny the legitimacy of even debating the operations of an airport that an SNP Scottish Government owns. That is totally unacceptable, but it is what we have come to expect from our unionist colleagues. SNP colleagues, however, should take the opportunity to stand up for

Scotland, Scots law and international law. So much of what they said during the debate about the actions of Trump's Administration was absolutely correct. What should the consequences be? What is our moral obligation when our ally uses our assets to breach international law, abuse human rights and rob people of due process within our territory? What should be the consequences of such behaviour?

The Scottish Government has the opportunity to stand with the Greens today, to stand up for Scotland and to show the Trump Administration that there are consequences to breaching not just international law but Scots law. Any Government that claims to stand up for Scotland should take that action, to show that there are consequences and to respect not just the sovereignty of the UK as a whole but Scots law and the importance that this Parliament places on it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on ending US military use of Scottish airports. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow front benches to change over.

Mossmorran (Just Transition Fund)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20820, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on a joint transition fund for Mossmorran. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

16:01

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): ExxonMobil's Fife ethylene plant closed on 2 February. Some of the skilled workforce have already left Scotland; others, with the support of their unions and the partnership action for continuing employment initiative, are trying to make sense of their future options.

Fife communities already bear deep scars of unmanaged industrial decline. They have been here before, when the Tories shut the coal mines. Despite the operation of Mossmorran for 20 years longer than its original lifespan, there has been no proactive planning for transition or reinvestment. That is a reckless, head-in-the-sand approach. As the Just Transition Commission has stated, what we are seeing at Mossmorran is

"another major disorderly and unjust industrial closure" in Scotland.

When I met ExxonMobil executives in 2022 to discuss my report on a just transition plan, they were bullish. They told me that, even if North Sea gas production were to decline, that would not worry them, because they could always import ethane feedstock to keep Mossmorran open. Four years on from that meeting, the announcement to close was sudden and brutal. Contractor workers were simply locked out of their workplace on the same day.

Although ExxonMobil tries to blame high taxation, it paid out some \$37 billion to shareholders in 2025. Let us be clear: it is cutting and running from Fife, earlier than planned, with—so far—no industrial legacy for communities and workers who deserve so much better.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): What does Mark Ruskell think changed between his discussions in 2022 and the subsequent decision? What he has encountered from ExxonMobil is a genuinely curious set of affairs.

Mark Ruskell: What was needed was to bring the stakeholders and operators together to look at the future. The report that I issued in 2022 laid out four clear options for investment in the plant, which could have given it a life. It did not have to close. There were options. Both Governments needed to

come together and work to deliver a plan. We knew that the threat of closure was coming. For years, the Greens called on both Governments to prepare for that future, but no work was undertaken. Responses to freedom of information requests revealed that the Scottish Government has not undertaken any work to develop a just transition plan for Mossmorran, despite committing to delivering that work in April 2024. Although the UK Government was in touch with ExxonMobil from April last year about threats to the site, nothing was ready for delivery when the site finally closed.

Over past years, in the absence of a site-specific plan, I have commissioned research. I have held summits with Unite the Union, the GMB, Fife Council, the Scottish Government, Fife College and others to plan for the future. Both plant operators declined to attend. Only after the closure announcement were formal, Government-led task forces hurriedly convened.

The £9 million, three-year funding package that has been promised by the Scottish Government is warmly welcomed, but it is not enough to support a proper just transition. A commitment from ExxonMobil is needed to deliver a real legacy. Funding from the United Kingdom Government is also needed, and that funding needs to hit the ground running. I will listen carefully to the Deputy First Minister's speech for detail about when the funding streams will be open, what conditions she will place on funding recipients and how that money will directly support individual workers and the wider communities.

Although the Prime Minister stated that workers at the Fife plant were going through a hard time, we still do not have any targeted funding package from the UK Minister for Industry, Chris McDonald. There has been ample time to come forward with an initial package. A first step is needed—not a cap on the UK Government's funding but a contribution to what is needed right now in communities.

Hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested into Grangemouth by the UK Government. The workers and communities at Mossmorran deserve a similar commitment. As a minimum, the UK Government needs to step up and at least match the £9 million that has been committed by the Scottish Government at this very early stage. The ExxonMobil site has closed and no targeted funding for a just transition is available or in place. The cycle of too little, too late must stop. A proper legacy must be built now.

Over the decades, the community has made huge sacrifices. The disruption caused by flaring caused misery for decades. Sleep was impossible at times, houses shook with vibration and

community councils even campaigned for rates reduction as compensation in the 1980s. It is therefore right that the community should shape the legacy alongside the generations of workers who served at the site. The legacy should be a complete reset for the Mossmorran site and an opportunity for the communities to help to choose their own future.

With an excellent grid connection and water supply, Mossmorran could have a fresh industrial future. The Grangemouth task force drew up dozens of potential industrial projects, some of which might be more suitable for Mossmorran, but communities need to be able to steer their future. Simply replacing ExxonMobil with A N Other could miss the opportunity for community investment.

We have seen the power of local community enterprise. The Ore Valley Housing Association's wind turbine delivers big investment for social housing and local charities. Options for genuine community wealth building must be built into the master plan for the site; the days of accepting crumbs off the table have passed.

The skills legacy must also be real. Fife's industrial future looks bright. The ingredients are all there, from Rosyth to Methil. There needs to be an industrial strategy for Fife that links opportunities from schools right through to colleges, apprenticeships and universities. A training excellence centre could form part of that legacy. It is time for ExxonMobil to step up, with the UK Government and the Scottish Government, and work with the colleges, unions and Fife Council to deliver that.

I also want to mention the elephant in the room—Shell—whose neighbouring plant was linked to the ethylene plant, providing much of its feedstock. The boat was missed to put in place a just transition plan for the ethylene plant and the natural gas liquids plant, but it is not too late to consider how Shell's plant could survive into the future with investment to decarbonise.

Given the increasing vulnerability of the Acorn carbon capture and storage project, with Mossmorran and the Grangemouth refinery now out of the Acorn business plan, the Scottish Government needs to lead a conversation urgently if it still believes that CCS has a future.

The Scottish Greens have worked with the unions and communities for years to address the problems at Mossmorran and to map out what a future for the site looks like. Now that ExxonMobil has pulled the plug, it is time for both Governments to step up, work together, open up funding streams and build confidence for workers and communities now that Fife has a strong future.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the UK Government and Scottish Government must urgently deliver targeted just transition funding for workers and communities following the early closure of the ExxonMobil Fife Ethylene Plant at Mossmorran.

16:08

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): ExxonMobil's earlier than expected closure of the Fife ethylene plant remains a matter of deep disappointment. My thoughts remain with the workers who are directly affected by the decision.

Members will appreciate that the Government's focus since the announcement was made has been firmly on ensuring that existing workers have a secure and prosperous future. We activated our partnership action for continuing employment, which provides bespoke skills development and employability support to those who face redundancy. We have also been engaging extensively with key stakeholders—in particular, union and workforce representatives—since the closure announcement, to ensure that targeted support is in place to mitigate the worst impact of the site closure.

In addition, Scottish Enterprise is engaging with the company to understand the land and the site's current status, and is assessing any early interest from investors who may be able to deploy new projects at Mossmorran. That work is at an early stage, but it has moved at rapid pace. I am optimistic that we will see new industry at the Mossmorran site.

The motion calls on the Scottish and UK Governments to provide funding to support a just transition for the Fife ethylene plant workforce. I whole-heartedly endorse the sentiment that lies behind the motion. Members will be aware that the Scottish budget, which received cross-party support, commits to delivering a £9 million, three-year package of support to mitigate the impact of the plant's closures. That includes £3 million in the next financial year to provide support to the workforce, and a further £3 million in the following year, 2027-28, and the third year, 2028-29, as we work to secure a sustainable future for the site.

However, I am very pleased to announce today that the Scottish Government will go further by accelerating the deployment of funding to mobilise a more immediate skills intervention at Mossmorran this month. We believe that Fife College, as the local skills provider, is best placed to deliver that support, and it will begin work to commence targeted training needs and analysis for the first tranche of redundant workers in the coming days and weeks. That critical first step will provide immediate support to eligible workers,

while also informing what training provision can be put in place to support worker transition, as we continue to assess how best to deploy the committed funding next year and in subsequent years.

I also confirm that my officials are working collaboratively with ExxonMobil to understand how the Scottish Government can supplement its funding provision in the next financial year.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the Deputy First Minister for making that announcement. That will be welcomed by the workers. Has there been any conversation with Chris McDonald and the UK Government about what they might bring in alongside that to support communities and the workers?

Kate Forbes: There are two forums where those conversations happen. The task force is meeting again in the next weeks, and Richard Lochhead attended the last one, with Chris McDonald, I believe, and made the case for additional funding. Secondly, I have also made the case, alongside the Secretary of State for Scotland and others, to recognise the value of match funding—at the very least, the £9 million—because it will go further.

I know that other members in the chamber will share my desire for further funding to be provided by the UK Government. The UK Government will point out that its funding support to Ineos O&P at Grangemouth mandates that redundant Mossmorran workers be prioritised for new roles advertised by the business. However, that mandate support does not offer much comfort to those who require financial support right now, so we call on UK ministers to urgently consider how to match the £9 million that is being provided by this Government over the next three years, and to match the funding that I have announced today to support the workers and to secure a prosperous future for the community.

Our amendment recognises the announcement that I am making about accelerating funding to Mossmorran immediately this month, as well as the funding that is committed over the next three years and the need for the UK Government to join us, as it has done in relation to Grangemouth, in matching our funding, and maximising the support to Mossmorran workers.

I pay tribute again to the ExxonMobil and contractor workforce, who have made such a vital contribution to the Scottish economy and to whom we owe our support. I will continue engaging with all relevant stakeholders, partners and cross-party MSPs to shape how we deploy our significant funding support, with a view to securing the best possible future for the site and for the workforce.

It is not too late for the UK Government to join us and match the Scottish Government's support. I am more than happy, after listening to the debate, to respond to any specific questions in my closing remarks.

I move amendment S6M-20820.3, to leave out from “and Scottish Government” to “deliver” and insert:

“must match the Scottish Government's support by urgently delivering”.

16:14

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. It is a welcome opportunity to highlight the on-going crisis at Mossmorran, which will impact not only the area but the wider Fife economy and Scotland as a whole.

The closure of Mossmorran will mean the loss of as many as 400 jobs, affecting many people from neighbouring communities across the Mid Scotland and Fife region, which I represent. Many of those are highly skilled jobs that are vitally important to Scotland's manufacturing industry.

As my amendment highlights, Mossmorran's closure was not only avoidable; it was the direct result of the left-wing consensus across this Parliament and the failure to support Scotland's oil and gas sector. The Scottish National Party Government has for many years been at the heart of that left-wing consensus. That is clear from its draft energy strategy and its just transition plan, which include a presumption against the extension of oil and gas development. Scots should not be fooled by claims that the SNP is softening its position on oil and gas. If the Government really wanted to support the sector, it could prove that by finalising its energy strategy.

Scottish Conservative members have called countless times for the strategy to be published, but it is still a mystery and we do not have it. The SNP has failed to deliver the just transition plan for Mossmorran that had been promised. Even by November last year, when Exxon confirmed the site's closure, with more than 400 jobs at risk, we were still waiting for that plan.

However, the UK Government has also played its part in damaging the oil and gas sector, and it has to take some responsibility for its deeds and actions. Exxon has blamed the UK Government's windfall tax for the decline of Mossmorran and has spoken about

“the challenges of ... a policy environment that is accelerating the exit of vital industries, domestic manufacturing, and the high-value jobs they provide.”

Those are all at risk because of the UK

Government's deeds and actions.

Of course, there have been no stronger cheerleaders for the demise of the oil and gas industry than Scottish Green Party members. For years, they were vocal campaigners for the closure of Mossmorran, and they even described it as a "fossil fuel relic" in the community.

Although we cannot disagree with the wording of the motion that the Greens have lodged, it is rather confusing to say the least. Given the widespread hostility towards the industry across this Parliament, however, it is hardly surprising that more than 13,000 jobs in the oil and gas sector have been lost in the space of just a year.

Mark Ruskell: The member points to my record of calling for a just transition plan for Mossmorran for years. Can he point to a single thing that he, or any of his three other Tory colleagues who cover Fife, has ever done to support the community and the workers at Mossmorran?

Alexander Stewart: I can assure the member that, in the 10 years that I have been in this job in this building, I have attended many events at Mossmorran—

Mark Ruskell: You got your picture taken for your newsletter.

Alexander Stewart: I was there, supporting the community. You are well aware of that, Mr Ruskell, because I was there many times, at many of those meetings—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always through the chair.

Alexander Stewart: As it stands, this is not a just transition—it is a cliff edge. What we have heard from the Greens this afternoon is predictable. Last year's announcement that Mossmorran was to close was an important reminder of how bad Government policy can change the lives of communities across Scotland.

The Scottish and UK Governments require to support those communities and should be looking at securing the Rosebank oil and gas field, because that is vitally important. The Scottish Government's deeds and actions have been detrimental and continue to fail the community, the sector and Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-20820.1, to insert at end:

“; notes that ExxonMobil has blamed the UK Labour administration's windfall tax for accelerating the decline of Mossmorran; expresses disappointment that the left-wing 'Holyrood' consensus, in its opposition to oil and gas, has resulted in tens of thousands of job losses; highlights that the Scottish Green Party previously campaigned for Mossmorran to be closed; calls on the Scottish Government to publish its energy strategy, and further calls on the UK Government to support Rosebank oil and gas field, which

could generate billions of pounds' worth of investment and support jobs in the oil and gas supply chain.”

16:18

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I will come to Alexander Stewart's scripted put-downs and confected ire in a moment, but first I congratulate Mark Ruskell on bringing this important debate to the chamber. The title of the motion is right—this is about a just transition for Mossmorran—but there are multiple layers to what we need to discuss today.

First and foremost, we need to ensure that there is a just transition for the 400 workers who are impacted by the decision. We must be in the mode of looking at all the practical solutions, so I welcome what the Scottish Government has brought forward. I am not in the business today of saying that what the UK Government has done is a full stop and finite; I am absolutely up for discussing what further steps can be taken and for making those representations. However, we need to go further.

Mark Ruskell was absolutely right to express his frustration that this is being framed as a just transition. We cannot continue to adopt a position in which we discover the need to make a just transition after the event—after decisions are made, after disinvestment happens and after jobs are at risk. We must ensure that we have detailed and practical plans ahead of time.

The other point is to do with the nature of Mossmorran. The just transition is not just about the energy sector per se. When we are talking about transition, we must recognise that hydrocarbons have significance beyond energy use. For example, ethylene production here is used for a broad range of products, including dyes, plastics and pharmaceuticals. We must have a plan for how to transition the sector as a whole, including those industrial uses. Between 15 per cent and a third—I have heard that it can be up to 45 per cent—of a barrel of oil can be used for non-energy purposes, and we need a plan for that.

We must take seriously the decision in November 2025 and the closure in February 2026. A task force has been established, which is to be welcomed. It is important that the task force is convened by Fife Council and supported by Fife College. They must sit at its heart, because those organisations have the people on the ground who will deliver the solutions for the workforce. That should be acknowledged.

I want to put on the record what the UK Government has done to date. It engaged with ExxonMobil for more than six months prior to the announcement. It discussed in detail the possibility of plans, but no practical plan was forthcoming. I

have to say that it is a source of frustration to hear the dialogue that Mark Ruskell had with ExxonMobil prior to that. Essentially, people were being told that everything was fine, but that was the point at which dialogue should have commenced. That is deeply frustrating, which is why I intervened.

The UK Government has engaged the Department for Work and Pensions rapid response team to support the workforce and, as acknowledged by the Deputy First Minister, it has guaranteed that workers will get interviews at the UK Government-backed hydrocracker at Grangemouth. Those are important practical steps.

We need to recognise the global context in which this is happening. ExxonMobil is closing ethylene plants in France; that cannot be laid at the door of UK policy. Indeed, other firms are closing ethylene plants in other parts of Europe, including in Germany and Belgium. The global context is that there is overproduction and a correction is taking place.

I say to the Conservatives that, frankly, making accusations that this is a left-wing conspiracy does not engage with the issue seriously. At the end of the day, the UK continental shelf is a mature basin. The majority of the extractable resource has been extracted. If we are going to talk seriously, we need to acknowledge that fact, because transition would be a necessity whether net zero was a thing or not. To bandy about reckless language such as that does a disservice to the issue and discredits Conservative members.

I move amendment S6M-20820.2, to insert at end:

“welcomes the convening of a joint taskforce between Fife Council, the UK Government and Scottish Government, trade unions, Fife College, Fife businesses and local community organisations to support the workforce and the wider area, and further welcomes the commitment that workers will be guaranteed interviews at the UK Government-backed Grangemouth cracker; recognises that the taskforce is working on a plan for the site, and considers that this should inform any funding and economic support provided.”

16:23

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I live locally and see the Mossmorran flare lighting up the sky regularly. I hear from local people how important the site is and how it provides—this is quite rare—well-paid jobs. I have visited the site on many occasions; I know how the system works and how important it is for the local economy.

I pay tribute to Mark Ruskell for his work over a number of years on the issue of just transition. To his credit, he has engaged with the issue on a serious basis. However, it is difficult—I hope that

this is a fair reflection—for the Greens, as they are not perceived as a party that supports investment in the economy or in business. Their rhetoric is often quite damaging, particularly around tax and regulation. Mark Ruskell’s work has done some good in that respect, but we need to hear more from the Green Party about how it intends to bring long-term economic growth to the country; otherwise, the fury that it rightly expresses on this occasion will be seen as quite hollow.

Too often, debates such as this one end up being a battle about us—between political parties. Employees at such sites get incredibly frustrated when something that should be about them turns into a debate about who is better than whom in the chamber. It should never be about that.

The discussion needs to be focused on what the employees need now and on how we can exploit the opportunity of the site. It is a good site, with good connections. It is well connected to the A92 and has a grid connection. It is quite rare industrial land, as it is in an area that is well populated and has access to good workers and good local education facilities, as well as reasonable access to the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is a good location. We should be shouting from the rooftops about the potential of the site and saying to future investors, “Come here and seek the opportunity that has been presented by the departure of this company.”

In periods of transition, the real danger is about what happens to the people. The people at the site are talented and, if they go away, they will probably find good jobs. Unfortunately, they might not find good jobs locally. How do we keep them in the area so that we can get the transition running smoothly? Alternatively, if they depart for a short period, how do we get them back quickly into the local economy through those rare well-paid jobs? That is the big challenge.

I agree with Daniel Johnson in one respect. When we react in a knee-jerk fashion after the event, that is far too late. We are brilliant at PACE, but we should never be brilliant at PACE providing employment opportunities for people; we should be looking much more at the long-term economic plan. In fact, I would go further than Daniel Johnson—this is not just about Mossmorran; we should look at the Scottish or even the UK economy in that way.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Hear, hear.

Willie Rennie: We are fighting over the crumbs that come from such events, when we should be looking at a much longer-term plan.

I hear Richard Leonard saying “Hear, hear,” in the background. It automatically makes me

nervous when he agrees with me, but he is right, because we need a plan for the longer term, and that means a proper partnership between the UK and Scottish Governments, which I think has been demonstrated today.

I have attended working groups and meetings on the plan for Mossmorran. The fact that those are now led by Fife Council is a good thing, as it is rooted in the community. Fife College, with its new campus in Dunfermline, is also fully engaged in the process. Those are good things, and that is what we should build on, rather than making knee-jerk reactions to individual events when it is far too late.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, with back-bench speeches of up to four minutes.

16:27

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): What is happening at Mossmorran is not an isolated industrial event; it is a test of whether Scotland is serious about delivering a just transition. I say that as an MSP for North East Scotland, a region that has powered this country for half a century and that now stands at the sharpest edge of energy transition.

Uplift and others are clear that the closure of the Mossmorran plant follows a familiar and worrying pattern, with record shareholder payouts but no credible plan for workers; reactive mitigation after closure announcements but no proactive industrial strategy; and scrambling to respond instead of shaping outcomes. We saw that at Grangemouth, we are seeing it at Mossmorran, and workers across the north-east are watching.

The truth is that what happens at Mossmorran will shape confidence in the transition across my region. After 50 years of drilling, the most productive days of the North Sea are over. That is not ideology; it is geology. Gas production is in steep decline and the number of jobs that are supported by oil and gas has more than halved in the past decade, yet we still do not have a coherent published energy strategy and just transition plan from the Scottish Government. Workers are being told to trust in a transition that has not been properly planned.

I speak regularly to constituents who are offshore workers, engineers, contractors and apprentices. They are not climate deniers. They know that change is coming; what they fear is chaos, unmanaged decline, falling pay and conditions, and decisions that are made in distant boardrooms. Delaying intervention only deepens the long-term costs through unemployment, skills loss and hollowed-out communities. That is not just economic failure; it is a betrayal of people.

I am proud that the Scottish Greens fought for and secured the £500 million just transition fund for the north-east and Moray, but a fund is not a strategy. Funding those who profit from the status quo will not deliver a just transition. Without binding workforce guarantees, clear timelines and alignment between energy policy, industrial planning and skills investment, we will repeat the same mistakes.

Mossmorran should have had a funded transition framework long before its closure was announced. Workers and unions should have shaped its future, not been forced to react to corporate decisions. When ExxonMobil distributes billions of pounds to shareholders while closing a plant that sustained our industrial economy for decades, that is not a market inevitability but a political choice to protect elite interests. Will the North Sea and the north-east be next?

We cannot drill ourselves out of decline. Even with new licences, reliance on imports will rise, and much of what remains is oil for export. Promising long-term security from a shrinking basin is not solidarity; it is false hope. We cannot allow multinational corporations to dictate the pace and shape of the transition. The opportunity is enormous: research from Robert Gordon University shows that job losses in oil and gas can be exceeded by growth in sectors such as offshore wind if we invest in domestic supply chains and manufacturing. That is the prize, but securing it requires urgency, Governments working in lockstep and genuine community and worker leadership and co-design from the outset.

A just transition for Mossmorran is inseparable from one for the north-east. If Mossmorran becomes another unmanaged collapse, trust in the transition will erode further. If it becomes a turning point away from reactive crisis management towards strategic, worker-led planning, we will send a powerful signal that offshore workers will not be abandoned.

This is about dignity and security. It is about ensuring that climate action strengthens, rather than sacrifices, our communities. The north-east is ready to lead—to be the powerhouse of Scotland's new economy. However, the Government must act with us, boldly and coherently, now.

16:31

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the Green Party for lodging the motion. The SNP amendment states that the UK Government “must match” the funding that has been provided by the Scottish Government.

The early closure of the plant at Mossmorran will have a profound impact on the people of Fife and beyond. It has been a cornerstone of Scotland's

industrial landscape for 40 years. It ceased production on 2 February, and it leaves 180 ExxonMobil employees and nearly 250 contractors facing an uncertain future. The issue is not only jobs; it is about families, livelihoods and entire communities that are built around the site. As members have mentioned, we have been here before.

Mossmorran has produced over 25 million tonnes of ethylene and has contributed significantly to Scotland's economy, but ExxonMobil's claims of £1 million weekly losses, high supply costs and a challenging market mean that the plant will be decommissioned by early 2028. However, we cannot ignore the broader context. ExxonMobil is a multibillion-pound-corporation that posted £25 billion in profits last year—its third best performance on record—and I am encouraged by the discussions that the Deputy First Minister is having with the company about the plant's future.

ExxonMobil's decision reflects not only market pressures but a UK policy environment that has accelerated the exit of vital industries. As the company stated, the closure highlights challenges in a policy framework that undermines domestic manufacturing and high-value jobs. Where is the UK Government's response? It has been silent and has failed to step up when Scottish workers need it most. That is why a just transition is not optional but essential. Scotland is committed to reaching net zero by 2045, and we must ensure that no one is left behind as we shift to a green economy.

The Scottish Government has already acted decisively—I am encouraged by what the DFM said about the Government bringing forward some of the £9 million that it is to allocate over the next couple of years. That includes funding for PACE and the task force to aid redundant workers, and the Government continues to invest in the just transition fund. I will touch on that a little bit later, but it is only part of the picture.

Going back to the Scottish Government's amendment, the UK Government must match the Scottish Government's commitment. I heard what Daniel Johnson said, but the UK Government needs to back up its words with finance in order to provide the comprehensive support that is required. Anything less is a dereliction of duty to Scottish workers.

Let me be clear: targeted funding means developing retraining programmes that are tailored to the skills of those highly qualified engineers and technicians and redirecting them towards renewables such as offshore wind and hydrogen production. It means investing—that is the key word—in local communities in order to diversify the

economy and prevent the decline that we have seen in other industrial heartlands. Unions including Unite have rightly condemned ExxonMobil's betrayal and the UK Government's inaction.

The early closure has heightened the urgency. Communities are reeling and will continue to reel. Delays in funding will only exacerbate the pain, so I urge the UK Government to heed the Deputy First Minister's call and commit to providing matching funds immediately. As I said, I commend the actions that the DFM outlined today.

Keir Starmer promised that Scotland would be at the heart of the Labour Government, but he has done little to support our key industries. People in Scotland will be quite right to ask why the workforces in Mossmorran and Grangemouth did not see the same intervention from the UK Government as it made in Scunthorpe. Labour's tax on Scotland's energy is wrecking jobs, undermining energy security and jeopardising our transition to a clean energy future.

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): Will Paul McLennan take an intervention?

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

Paul McLennan: I have only four minutes.

UK energy policy has resulted in higher costs and fewer jobs. The Scottish Government's energy strategy must have a just transition at its heart. The key point for me is that we need the powers of independence to ensure that all the powers that we need to support our industries are in the hands of the people of Scotland.

16:36

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): It will be regrettable if this debate becomes a proxy argument about oil and gas policies, about the efficacy of the action that is taken to tackle climate change or about blaming either Government for the situation. My focus, and the focus of the Parliament, must be on the workers affected by the closure of the plant at Mossmorran—more than 300 people will no longer be employed at the site come April—and on the wider impact on families, supply chains and communities in Fife and across Scotland.

The decision to close Mossmorran was taken by ExxonMobil. It was a commercial decision by a multinational corporation that, only days before the announcement, reported distributing more than £27 billion to shareholders. The company extracted decades of productivity and profit from Fife, but, when the asset no longer suited its global

portfolio, it walked away. We should be clear on where responsibility for the decision lies.

However, we should also be honest about the context. The Mossmorran plant is more than 40 years old—twice its intended lifespan—and the wider chemicals sector is facing significant global pressure. There were indicators as to what was coming: there were contractor redundancies over the summer, press reports suggesting that the site was up for sale and long-standing concerns about the plant's future viability.

The Scottish Government had committed to delivering a just transition for Mossmorran, but, when the closure was announced, no transition plan was in place for the workforce. Instead, we had a reactive response to an unmanaged collapse. That is not what a just transition should look like.

I am pleased that both Governments are clear that their focus is on supporting the workforce and that, through the task force, they are working to manage and oversee the local response. Immediately after the closure was announced, support was committed through the DWP's rapid response service, which will help workers into new jobs. Bringing together Fife Council, both Governments, trade unions, Fife College, local businesses and community organisations in the task force is the right approach. It is co-ordinated, practical and focused on delivery.

Our amendment recognises and welcomes the task force and

"the commitment that workers will be guaranteed interviews at the UK Government-backed Grangemouth cracker".

That is tangible support for skilled workers.

Fife College has already stepped up by engaging quickly to support affected workers, many of whom trained locally and built their careers at Mossmorran. I recognise the cabinet secretary's announcement of accelerated funding in that area.

Fife Council is assessing supply chain impacts and the consequences for local high streets. That matters in communities such as Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly and Kelty, where Mossmorran wages supported families and sustained local businesses. Fife knows all too well the cost of industrial decline without a plan. Too many communities were scarred by the closure of coal mines without adequate transition or investment. We cannot repeat that mistake. A just transition means planning ahead, not scrambling after the fact. It means aligning environmental ambition with industrial strategy and putting workers first.

The task force is now developing a master plan for the site, which should inform any future funding and economic support, including the £9 million

over three years from the Scottish Government and the forthcoming support from the UK Government. We should maximise opportunities for apprenticeships, retraining and new investment, so that the skills that have been built in Fife are not lost.

This moment demands seriousness from both Governments. The UK Government acted quickly and responsibly. It engaged with ExxonMobil for months ahead of the closure, but, despite its best efforts, there was no viable option for securing a long-term future for the site.

The warning signs were clear to see. That is why a just transition plan was needed. The loss of high-value jobs is a significant blow, but that blow might have been mitigated by better planning for those workers' futures. By lacking a transition plan, the Scottish Government has broken and not acted to fulfil the commitment that it made to workers at Mossmorran.

Fife Council is doing work regarding the supply chain and the potential impact that the closure will have on the local high streets and communities. We should work with local employers to maximise opportunities for skills and apprenticeships.

Having recently visited the Navantia yard in Methil, for which the UK Government did a huge amount of work to ensure that it stayed open, I know that some workers have taken up opportunities there. Our focus now needs to be on providing certainty, co-ordination and opportunities for the workers of Mossmorran and on ensuring that commitments to a just transition are delivered in practice.

16:40

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I put it on the record that I was formerly employed at Mossmorran, although that was many years ago.

The closure of the Mossmorran ethylene plant marks a profound moment for Fife, for Scotland's industrial heritage and for hundreds of workers whose livelihoods have been thrown into uncertainty. For more than four decades, Mossmorran has stood as a symbol of Scottish engineering excellence. It was opened in 1985 by Exxon Chemicals alongside Shell's natural gas liquids plant and it represented the kind of skilled, high-value industrial work that Scotland has always excelled in.

However, today, we are confronted with the consequences of a decision that was made far from the communities that it affects. On 18 November 2025, ExxonMobil announced its intentions to close the plant. On 3 February 2026, that closure became a reality.

Workers at Mossmorran did not fail, and Scotland did not fail. What failed was the wider policy environment that was created at the UK level. That is an environment that has left key industry sites uncertain and unable to plan for the long term. For years, Scotland's energy-intensive industries warned that the UK's approach to energy policy and industrial strategy was placing them at a disadvantage. The situation at Mossmorran is now one of the clearest examples of those warnings being realised.

There are highly skilled engineers, technicians, apprentices and contractors there, whose expertise is vital to Scotland's future.

Claire Baker: Does Mr Torrance recognise that ExxonMobil is closing other plants across the globe? It is not just in Scotland. ExxonMobil took the decision to close the site as part of a strategy.

David Torrance: The member will find that ExxonMobil's press statement blamed the UK Government for some of the uncertainty and for the plant's closure.

The Scottish Government has acted decisively. Within days of the announcement of the closure, the Scottish Government committed £9 million over three years, with £3 million being made available immediately to support workers to retrain for job transitions. That funding is urgently needed and targeted, and has been provided in recognition that industrial transition requires active intervention, not passive observation.

In contrast, the UK Government's response has been to give platitudes rather than take action. Although UK ministers have spoken of collaboration and support, there has been no equivalent financial commitment, no dedicated transition plan and no meaningful engagement with the workforce beyond generic statements of concern. That is not good enough. Those workers need more than sympathetic language; they need leadership.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

David Torrance: No, thank you.

The failure to match Scotland's investment sends a troubled message about the priorities of UK-level energy policy and the UK's willingness to support communities that are facing economic upheaval. Even the company pointed to the UK's economic and policy environment as a factor in its decision.

The UK Government talks a good game about supporting Scotland's energy. It talks about partnerships and levelling up, but when the workers of Fife need it, when families need certainty, when apprentices need reassurances and when communities need leadership, the UK

Government refuses to put its money where its mouth is. Scotland deserves better than sympathetic press releases—it deserves a Government that shows up.

The Scottish Government has shown up, not just today or in response to this crisis, but constantly over the years. It has invested in the transition to green industry, skills development, manufacturing innovation and the technologies that will define the next century.

The workers of Mossmorran deserve to be part of that future. Their skills are exactly the skills that are required in Scotland's growing low-carbon sectors, offshore wind, hydrogen production, carbon capture and advanced manufacturing. Those industries all need the expertise that Mossmorran workers have spent decades honing.

Our transition to a greener, more resilient economy requires planning and investment, and for every level of Government to take responsibility. That includes the Scottish and UK Governments, which must do their bit. The people of Fife should not be left to bear the consequence of a policy decision that was made hundreds of miles away. They should not be left to navigate uncertainty while Westminster offers little more than sympathetic soundbites. They should not be left to wonder why multinational corporations can walk away from communities after decades of profit without facing meaningful scrutiny.

The closure of Mossmorran is a moment of reckoning. It forces us to recognise the importance of building a resilient, home-grown industry base, and to reaffirm our commitment to the workers who have powered Scotland's economy for generations. Their skills are valued and their contributions are recognised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:45

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Thankfully, we have not had too much party politicking in this debate—except from David Torrance and his friends on the Tory benches.

I want to impress that what we need in Scotland is an industrial strategy. Like Willie Rennie, I live just a few miles from Mossmorran. I saw it at the planning stages and when it was being built. There were thousands of jobs there. Buses were running from Kelty, where I lived, except during the construction. Mossmorran has been a big part of those communities. However, when I talk to people in communities about a just transition, they say, "In order to have a just transition, you've got to have jobs to transition to." The reality is that there are jobs in Fife right now, but people do not have the

skills to get them. Babcock down in Rosyth is saying that it is having to bring in hundreds and hundreds of foreign skilled labourers because it cannot get local people with the skills. An industrial strategy for Scotland would look at skills as well as jobs.

I want to make a few key points. I will already be on record as thanking the Deputy First Minister and recognising the work that she did at the early stages—and I still recognise it.

The task force that has been set up has had its first meeting, which was very positive, where people came together and talked about how we could move forward. The workforce has been the key priority, and various Government agencies, such as Scottish Enterprise, have been doing a lot of work on that. In addition to the UK Government offering jobs or interviews at Grangemouth, Babcock and other companies have said that they can take workers from Mossmorran. That is really positive. Today's announcement of additional funding for Fife College to support that work is also welcome.

At the first meeting of the task force, I asked the UK Government minister what funding we could expect. I am absolutely clear that the UK Government must put funding into Mossmorran and into the plans that come out of the task force as they develop. I am equally clear that there must be a real commitment that the site, once decommissioned, will continue to be an industrial site that will employ hundreds of people. I was impressed by the progress that was being made at the task force, and I understand that there are companies that have looked at Grangemouth that would be suitable for the Mossmorran site. Before coming into the chamber, I had a discussion with a company that contacted me from England, which will be put on the site, too. The site itself is crucial.

Like other towns in that area, Kelty is a former mining community. My dad was a miner and was nearing retirement, so it was fine when the pits closed and he was made redundant. Those who had skills—such as a friend of mine who was an electrician in the pit—were able to go on working in that area in the North Sea. Others with skills, such as engineers, were able to get jobs. It was the least skilled who struggled. However, the biggest struggle, which caused the poverty, deprivation and social breakdown in our communities, was that there were no jobs for the next generations who would have gone into the coal mines.

We need to ensure that the real legacy from this is investment, through the partnership that is being created with the colleges, the schools and so on, so that young people in that area will have the opportunity to access skills, training and

apprenticeships. That will be the legacy moving forward, so that we never again return to what happened with the pits, and the poverty and deprivation that came from that.

My conclusion is that people are working together. Apart from the Tories—and, it seems, David Torrance—the majority of members in the chamber recognise that we need to do that. Let us keep doing that so that we can have a positive future for Mossmorran and an industrial strategy for Fife and Scotland.

16:49

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I speak today not only as a member of the Scottish Parliament but as the regional MSP for the communities living next to Mossmorran every day. When I became an MSP four years ago, I tried to hit the ground running and to understand the issues in the area. For the people in Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly, Cardenden and the nearby villages, this debate is not just about theory; it is personal. It affects their jobs, homes and apprenticeships, and it is about whether families can keep building their future in Fife.

The motion talks about a just transition but, for many local workers, this is far from just. It does not feel fair or anything like a real transition. To them, it feels like an ending, with nothing taking its place. Both Daniel Johnson and Willie Rennie highlighted an important point, which is that plans for how a transition will work in reality need to be in place ahead of time. The detail on that has been missing.

The closure of ExxonMobil ethylene plant puts about 400 direct and contracted jobs at risk. Each job supports a family, a local business and a community that relies on skilled industrial work. For generations, people in the area have worked in energy and manufacturing. These are not just numbers—they are welders, engineers, technicians and apprentices who have spent years building their skills. What upsets local people most is not the change itself; they know that industries change over time. However, what they do not accept is letting things decline without planning for what comes next.

For years, the Scottish Government promised a plan for a transition. Claire Baker highlighted that in her contribution. However, when the closure was announced, there was no plan. Workers learned about their future from the news. That is not a just transition—it is uncertainty that is being forced on working communities.

I accept the work that Mark Ruskell has done in the industry over the years and I acknowledge that the Greens have brought today's debate to the chamber—but my constituents have long memories. They remember the years of

campaigning to shut Mossmorran down entirely. You cannot relentlessly demand the closure of an industry and tell workers that their livelihoods are incompatible with your vision, and then feign shock when jobs, apprenticeships and local investment begin to disappear. That is not a just transition; that is reckless, and working families are paying the price.

Mark Ruskell: For years, we have called for a plan. I produced a research report in 2022 that outlined five options for Mossmorran. Four of those were about reinvestment in the site and would have delivered a future for the site, but the operators simply were not interested. It is not the case that we have been calling for a closure of Mossmorran; we have been calling for reinvestment and a plan.

Roz McCall: Unfortunately, there is evidence of the Greens standing outside calling for a closure. As much as I accept that Mark Ruskell has done some work on this, that does not fit with the rhetoric that has been coming across.

Across Scotland, we have lost thousands of oil and gas jobs, but new industries have not grown quickly enough to replace them. As a result, skilled workers are leaving the sector, the country, or the workforce altogether. A transition works only if there are new jobs ready before the old ones disappear. I welcome the Deputy First Minister's news today that there is accelerated funding from the Scottish Government for retraining. However, energy policy also needs to be realistic. Today, Scotland still depends on oil and gas for most of its energy. Stopping domestic production does not end demand. It simply means that we import more, which leads to higher emissions, fewer jobs and less economic security.

Communities know the importance of environmental responsibility. Many Mossmorran workers want to help to build the future of energy, including carbon capture, hydrogen fusion, advanced manufacturing and low-carbon fuels. However, they need investment, infrastructure and business and manufacturing growth—and certainly not just talk.

I need bring my remarks to a close. A fair transition must work for all workers, as well as for climate goals. If a transition takes away a community's identity, jobs and future, people will not support it, and they are right not to do so. Constituents are not asking for special treatment. They want honesty and a clear plan. When an industry changes, they want to know what will take its place. Let us stop focusing on decline and start creating the opportunities for Mossmorran, Fife and for Scotland's energy future.

16:54

Kate Forbes: It has been a good debate. What I have heard is consistent with what I have heard from the workforce representatives, the trade unions and other stakeholders: that, right now, we need a plan for the workforce, a plan for the site, a plan for the community and a plan for the country. Let me take those in turn.

I start with the workforce. Today, I announced accelerated funding over and above the £9 million that we have already committed to. That funding will stand up immediate training needs analysis for affected workers. It will provide courses that meet the identified training needs of affected workers. Phase 1 of the project focuses on immediate, direct support for affected workers, and phase 2 will involve more general and tailored training programmes.

As I announced today, we are also providing skills support for both direct and contracted staff, which is a little bit different from what we have done elsewhere. We have heard that a significant proportion of the workers who are affected by redundancy as a direct consequence of the site's closure are contract staff. As with ExxonMobil's direct employees, those are highly skilled workers with in-demand technical competences such as electrical engineering, welding and pipe fitting. The funding that we have announced will extend support to them—an approach that deviates from approaches taken elsewhere. Alex Rowley talked about the support from other employers: I have had direct conversations with Babcock—as has Scottish Enterprise—to provide connections with employers that are looking to recruit. That is the plan for the workforce.

On the plan for the site, immediately on hearing the news, Scottish Enterprise joined me in a meeting with the company to get access to as much of the analysis as possible about the land and the site. Willie Rennie said, "It is a good site"—I think that that is a direct quote—and it absolutely is a good site. It is well positioned and it has access to utilities and to water. Scottish Enterprise has zoned the site into what could be made available more immediately, in order to connect that information with potential interested parties. It also intends to undertake a wider marketing exercise, so that those over and above the parties on the Grangemouth interested parties list will also be aware of the opportunities at the site. That is part of our objective of ensuring that there is long-term employment at the site.

The third area is about the wider community. In our first engagement on the issue, Alex Rowley—alongside you, Deputy Presiding Officer, if I am allowed to say that—made the point about mitigating the social and economic impact on the wider community. We are doing that mitigation in

two ways. One is through the work that Fife Council is leading on, and the other is through the work that Scottish Enterprise is doing. I have invited Scottish Enterprise to consider where it might provide investment now to businesses that are unconnected with Mossmorran and ExxonMobil, where that might create accelerated employment opportunities in the community to mitigate the loss of jobs or the economic impact. I have frequently raised that point with the unions, too, in relation to their suggestions.

The final plan is about the country. We have heard talk of industrial and other strategies. I was struck, as, I am sure, were others, by the comments that Paul Greenwood, the chairman of ExxonMobil, made—I think when he appeared before a UK Parliament committee. He talked about the costs he faced and said:

“My international competitors do not have those costs. I also have to deal with high energy costs and those kind of things”.

There are policies that he talked about wanting to see changed.

We have come through the challenges at Grangemouth. I have talked about the issues that Alexander Dennis faced, and about ExxonMobil and Mossmorran—and there are others, too. I am conscious of the need to ensure that we reduce the costs that some of those businesses face that their competitors across Europe simply do not face. We need to deal with the fact that, on average, energy prices have been 50 per cent higher in this country than they have been elsewhere.

I hope that that gives Parliament a sense of my priorities. Following the announcement that I made today, we will work quickly to deliver that funding as a matter of priority well ahead of the original commitment, which was that it would start in the next financial year. Instead, it will be deployed this month.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Lorna Slater to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Greens.

17:00

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): I am grateful to all members who have contributed to the debate. I hear the sadness and frustration that we all share when jobs are lost, particularly when—this is significant in the case of Mossmorran—opportunities were lost to prepare for the change.

I absolutely welcome the accelerated funding that the Deputy First Minister has announced to support skills and training for workers who are at risk of redundancy, and the plans that she outlined for the site sound promising, but there is a wide feeling in the Parliament that that should have

been done sooner and that we could have been prepared.

The Scottish Greens' Mark Ruskell has been campaigning on the matter for nearly a decade. It was always clear that Mossmorran, as one of Scotland's largest polluters, would not be able to continue with business as usual as the country progressed on its journey to net zero. It was very clear all along that a site-specific just transition plan for Mossmorran was needed to ensure a sustainable green future for workers and the community. The Scottish Government had said that it would provide one.

Now Exxon has cut and run—that is hardly surprising for a global corporation that has only the interests of its shareholders in mind and has no care for the impact that it has on the communities in which it operates or the larger impact that it has on the long-term climate on planet earth. We should have been ready. There should have been a plan, at least in development. Instead, there was nothing.

Daniel Johnson: The member will have heard the evidence that the Economy and Fair Work Committee took on the draft climate change plan. There seems to be a lack of detail in the plan on workforce and wider industrial transition. Does she share my concern that we may be seeing history repeat itself in the lack of planning for the transition?

Lorna Slater: Daniel Johnson makes an excellent point. I absolutely agree that planning for the transition is critical, as we know that it is coming.

In the case of Mossmorran, there was nothing. Workers and the community were left in the dark as to whether help was on the way to ensure that they would not become another community destroyed by mismanaged industrial decline. We must learn from what has happened here. As we move forward with our transition to net zero, we need to recognise that change is coming. If we are to make it a just transition, we need first to accept that a transition is happening.

I am grateful to Uplift for the research that I am about to reference. Uplift says:

“The maturity and geologically challenging nature of the North Sea means that it is now a high cost basin compared to other oil and gas producing regions, with the reserves that are left increasingly small and technically complex to extract ... Only massive state support has kept the UK industry viable”.

The UK is

“one of the most generous tax jurisdictions for offshore oil and gas production in the world ... Today, UK tax reliefs allow companies to write off 84% of their development costs”.

but

“by the industry’s own admission, new North Sea drilling isn’t considered commercially viable without even bigger tax giveaways and more state support ... The UK’s generous tax system has made new drilling profitable for companies, even when oil prices drop, but it means the public is left shouldering most of the downside risks, including the potential for significant net tax losses to the Treasury.”

Jobs in the sector have been in a steady decline for more than a decade, and, despite what other members have said, there is no evidence at all that the windfall tax has accelerated that long-term decline. That does not show up in the jobs data. That decline carried on despite the fact that there was a pro-oil and gas Tory Government at Westminster that continued to hand out licences.

New drilling will not stem the long-term decline in jobs. It will do little to strengthen UK energy security and nothing to lower energy costs or ease the cost of living crisis. Uplift adds that

“North Sea reserves are owned by oil and gas companies, which sell them to the highest bidder at international market prices.”

They are not reserved or sold cheaply specially to the people of the UK just because they come from the North Sea.

Uplift continues:

“In contrast to the declining oil and gas industry, the net zero sector in the UK, which includes renewable energy, grew by 10 per cent in 2024, three times faster than the overall economy.”

The change of direction is clear, and it is time—it is past time—to accept that this transition is under way. It can only be fair and just if we accept the direction of travel and plan for the path ahead. Many in this chamber seem intent on pretending that if we subsidise the sector just a little bit more, it can carry on forever. It cannot. High-emitting industrial sites will need to be converted to other uses, change their operations and upgrade their infrastructure if they are going to continue to operate. We cannot put our heads in the sand and our fingers in our ears and pretend that we can keep going as we are.

The United Nations secretary general recently said:

“The greatest threat to energy security today is fossil fuels. They leave economies and people at the mercy of price shocks, supply disruptions and geopolitical turmoil”—

and that is to say nothing of the increasing risks of climate catastrophe.

The workers at Mossmorran deserve to have the just transition plan that the Scottish Government promised, and the rest of us deserve to have a published energy strategy that sets out how the

Scottish Government intends to manage the rest of the transition to a net zero future.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
That concludes the debate on a just transition fund for Mossmorran.

Urgent Questions

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is an urgent question. I remind members that the legal proceedings referred to in the question are active, and the sub judice rule applies.

I have admitted the question having carefully considered its admissibility in relation to rule 7.5.1 of standing orders, and I have allowed it on the basis that it is limited to the matters that are covered in the question and that no discussion of the specifics of the case will be permitted.

Lord Advocate (Information Sharing)

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government whether the Lord Advocate will provide details of the reasons for her reportedly sharing confidential details of the charges against Peter Murrell with the First Minister, and whether any further information regarding the case has been made available to ministers or special advisers.

The Lord Advocate (Dorothy Bain KC): I did not brief the First Minister in relation to the prosecution of Mr Murrell or the contents of the indictment. My minute was a factual confirmation of the fact that Mr Murrell had been indicted and the nature of the charge, including the value of the alleged embezzlement.

From the point at which an indictment is served, there is no limitation on its terms being made public. The timing of my minute to the First Minister after service of the indictment reflected that. My notification was done to advise Scottish ministers that an indictment had been served, to confirm that the appropriate processes had been followed in relation to law officers not being involved in the decision making in the case, and to remind them that it would not be appropriate to make any public comment on the matter. That process protects the administration of justice and does not, I believe, confer any political advantage.

Michael Marra: In writing to the First Minister, the Lord Advocate provided information that was available to nobody else. That information was then passed on to Scottish National Party advisers. The Lord Advocate set out the scale of the charge and the fact that no trial would be held until March 2027. That information conferred clear political advantage to the First Minister. This absolutely stinks. On what planet is it not political interference?

Did the First Minister or any of his colleagues or his team ever ask the Lord Advocate or her

colleagues for information relating to the case? Why did the Lord Advocate choose to share that confidential information with the First Minister? In fact, why was any detail beyond a simple notice of non-involvement given at all?

The Lord Advocate: The key point that I make is that the minute was sent after an independent prosecutor had taken the decision in the case. The minute does not provide an opportunity to influence; it is only information for the protection of the process. It is about informing of a significant development that is entering the public domain, to ensure that the Government is reminded of its legal responsibilities to restrict its comments. It is done as a matter of course, on a case-by-case basis, by the prosecution service and on the judgment of the independent prosecutor.

The figure that Michael Marra mentioned appears on the indictment and was able to be shared. The sharing of that information does not confer any political advantage or lead to a compromise to the case. The statement was limited to a warning of contempt of court and was accompanied by a notification to the media of a preliminary hearing, to support the principles of open justice.

The Crown Office made a statement, which was limited to a warning of contempt of court and was accompanied by a notification to the media of a preliminary hearing to support the principles of open justice, and then my minute was sent after the decision was made by the independent prosecutor in the case. I cannot answer the question more fully than that.

Michael Marra: The Lord Advocate should know that early access to that information confers political advantage and is not standard practice. Today, former First Minister Jack McConnell said:

“The Lord Advocate is correct to remind ministers that they should not comment in a live case, but I cannot recall ever being briefed ahead of such a case on charges or timetable, and it would always have been particularly unacceptable for such information to be requested for a case where I had any connection to the accused.”

That is categoric and damning. How many other times in the Lord Advocate’s tenure has she seen fit to share with a First Minister that level of information on live court cases? Does she not accept that, in sending that information to the First Minister, she has compromised them both?

The Lord Advocate: The communication to the First Minister was provided after the indictment was served, at a point at which there is no limitation on its terms being made public by the accused. The Crown followed its normal practice of alerting the media to the indictment, in the knowledge that the indictment would be shared

with the media at a later stage, before the case called in court.

Public information about court proceedings is provided through the courts in the normal way. It was appropriate to clarify with the First Minister that I had no involvement in the operational decisions, and to reinforce the need for the strict observance of contempt of court principles. *[Interruption.]* That protects the integrity of the proceedings, and public confidence.

The Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if we could hear one another. Many members wish to put a question. That will not be possible unless we can hear one another and continue our proceedings.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The Lord Advocate was appointed to the SNP Government by Nicola Sturgeon. The Lord Advocate then gave John Swinney information about a serious criminal case involving Nicola Sturgeon's husband. She also gave Mr Swinney key details of court dates, to the SNP's clear electoral advantage. That smacks of corruption. It undermines public trust in the office of the Lord Advocate, who is supposed to be politically neutral. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Russell Findlay: Any remnants of that neutrality are in ruins. Is the Lord Advocate therefore considering her position?

The Lord Advocate: I am not considering my position. The key point that I have made is this: the minute was sent after a decision had been made, in this case, by an independent prosecutor. It was not a minute that sought to influence. It was for information and the protection of the process. It is about informing of a significant development that is entering the public domain, to ensure that the Government is reminded of its legal responsibilities to restrict its comments on a live case.

Such a process is undertaken on a case-by-case basis and on the judgment of the independent prosecutor. I have had no involvement in this case, and I roundly reject any suggestion that I am corrupt or that my position is compromised.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the Lord Advocate reassert that no one has spoken to the Crown on the scheduling of the case? Does she agree that any suggestion that the independent Crown would allow any interference in the scheduling of a case—as the Opposition is desperately trying to suggest—would never be countenanced?

The Lord Advocate: I can explain that Mr Murrell appeared on petition on 20 March 2025. Criminal procedure limits apply to the case, and those were effective on that date. That meant that the case was subject to extended time limits that were put in place to address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. That added a period of six months to the time limits that would have otherwise applied in criminal trials. Therefore, the time limits that apply to the case were provided in terms of the statutory provisions as they stood on 20 March 2025.

As Mr Murrell was granted bail when he appeared on petition, the time limits that applied when the indictment was served on the accused were readily available and publicly understood. A preliminary hearing, or a first diet, must be commenced within 17 months of the date on which an accused first appears on petition. The trial must commence within 18 months of the date on which the accused first appears on petition.

A preliminary hearing is a hearing in which the readiness of the prosecution and the defence are assessed ahead of trial, and it is within those time limits that relevant hearings are fixed. Those hearings are scheduled by the independent judiciary and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. Mr Murrell's case is therefore live proceedings. The independence of the criminal courts is a fundamental part of our justice system. There should not and cannot be political interference in criminal cases.

The Scottish Government has had no discussion about the timing of Mr Murrell's case. I understand from media reports that Mr Murrell's legal representatives sought for the date of his court hearing to be changed, and that was agreed by the independent judge, sitting in the independent court.

It was after the indictment was served on Mr Murrell that I provided the update to the First Minister. The Crown Office has explained that that was to confirm that the Lord Advocate was not involved in the case. The case was active for contempt of court purposes, and no comment should be made in relation to the case.

It simply would not have happened that the Crown Office would have had influence over the decisions in relation to the timing of Mr Murrell's case once it was in the hands of the independent court and the decisions as to its future progress were handled by an independent member of the judiciary. To say otherwise would be completely wrong, and that simply has not happened in this case.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): I absolutely do not buy any accusation that the Lord Advocate is politically corrupt in this matter, but the

Crown was asked why information was communicated to the First Minister about this case, and the answer seems to be that that is normal practice. The question that remains is: how common is it for the Lord Advocate to inform the First Minister about the specifics of an indictment? I still think that that merits an answer from the Lord Advocate.

I will also ask a more direct question. Was the minute to the First Minister from Ms Bain offered in her capacity as the Lord Advocate, as the principal legal adviser to the Scottish Government, or both?

The Lord Advocate: The advice was offered on the basis that I am the Lord Advocate and the head of the independent prosecution service.

In relation to the other point, as I have said before, it is normal practice that the sharing of that type of information is done on a case-by-case basis and on the judgment of an independent prosecutor. That is because of the fundamental importance of protecting live proceedings and ensuring that they are not compromised in any way by inappropriate commentary.

It is an important and fundamental aspect of the rule of law that the importance of the contempt of court provisions and the restriction of comments on live cases bears repeating, in order to curb speculation and inappropriate commentary being applied to any live case.

It would not be appropriate for me to give examples of that happening in any particular live case at this stage, without me understanding the impact on the proceedings, as they may have at this stage, but I am happy to share, following on from this evening, information in relation to instances where a similar process has been undertaken in relation to informing the First Minister of important stages in high-profile and sensitive cases.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): There is already concern about the court delaying the case until 27 May, so will the Lord Advocate be more specific about whether it is normal practice for a First Minister who is not the complainer in a case to be briefed in this way, and will the Lord Advocate tell the Parliament whether there are any other aspects of the trial that will be briefed to the First Minister?

The Parliament needs to know how many times this has happened, because it seems that, if it is the only time, it could be a dangerous precedent to set.

The Lord Advocate: I understand that it is suggested that there has been a briefing. It is important to look at what actually happened. It was the submission of a minute to the First Minister that was in five paragraphs, and the very limited

information that related to Mr Murrell's case only took up a few lines in paragraph 3. We have made the minute available, and it is quite clear that it refers only to the preliminary hearing taking place, the charge and the tradition of law officers not being involved in the decision making. It also says that the case remains live, and that

"Now that the case has been indicted, further procedure and the timetable for the case will be determined by the Court."

That is the content of the minute. There was not a briefing as we might understand it. It provides very straightforward information.

In so far as the other points that Ms McNeill has raised, there have been instances in other cases in which there has been notification, on a case-by-case basis, of the fact that there has been a significant development in a particularly high-profile and sensitive case. That will have been for the purpose that I have said before: to ensure that there is no inappropriate or unlawful comment on live proceedings. It is critical to the rule of law that that is profoundly respected. That was the whole purpose of sending the minute to the First Minister in this case.

We can give other examples of when that has been done, but I am concerned about ensuring that I protect the integrity of all the proceedings that those issues might relate to.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Lord Advocate is offering examples, but what we need are numbers. How many times has this happened before? She can surely give us an answer to that, and, if she is telling us that it has happened more often, have those instances also involved the political party that John Swinney is the leader of? That is the issue here. As the leader of the SNP, he got information that was not available to anyone else. How many such cases are there and, of the other cases, did they also involve the SNP? If not, it is a totally different situation.

The Lord Advocate is trying to put this across as something that is perfectly normal. On the same day that she sent a minute to the First Minister with information about this case, why was the Crown Office telling reporters that the only information that could be made publicly available was the date of the preliminary hearing?

The Lord Advocate: In relation to numbers and examples, referring back to the question that I was asked, I note that I do not see that formulated in the urgent question. However, I can give—
[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another, colleagues.

The Lord Advocate: I can, after this evening, provide more details of how—

Douglas Ross: Will the Lord Advocate take an intervention? The question has not been answered—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, let us hear the Lord Advocate.

The Lord Advocate: I can, after today, give other examples of circumstances where this has happened previously. I would be able to give numbers and examples, as I can—*[Interruption.]*

However, I really need to say this: I have to protect on-going live cases in respect of which there has been a sharing of a significant development that has entered the public domain in a sensitive case. The point is this: it is a case that is highly sensitive, and it is a significant development, and I was seeking to remind the Government to respect the rule of law and to restrict its commentary on such an important matter.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Presiding Officer—

Members: Oh!

Douglas Ross: Presiding Officer, our standing orders make it very clear that if a minister answering questions has information available, they must provide that in their response to the question. The Lord Advocate has said very clearly that she has an answer to my question, but that she will provide it only after this session. That is not acceptable in a Parliament to which the Lord Advocate has been called to provide answers, and it is in breach of our standing orders.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ross. The contribution that members make in the chamber is not a matter for the chair. It is a matter for the minister and for the Scottish Government as to their response.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I echo the colleagues who have rejected the deeply irresponsible allegations of corruption against the Lord Advocate. I accept that there is precedent for informing the First Minister of significant cases, and I welcome that the Lord Advocate is going to supply the Parliament with examples. However, I want to repeat the specifics of Jamie Greene's question. Although I recognise that the Lord Advocate cannot comment on the specifics of a live case, I am keen to understand not why the First Minister was informed of the developments in this case—I understand that there is precedent for that—but why the detail of the £460,000 figure was included. If the Lord Advocate could explain why that detail was included in the update to the First Minister, I would certainly appreciate further clarification on that point.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members to avoid mentioning specifics of the case.

The Lord Advocate: The figure appears on the indictment, and it was, therefore, a figure that I was able to share.

As I have said, the fact is that, from the point at which the indictment was served, there was no limitation on its terms being made public, and the timing of my minute to the First Minister, after service of the indictment, reflected that.

It is important to say that I am answering to the Parliament today, but it really is not appropriate to comment on the substance of a live case beyond matters of process. I simply reiterate that it is critically important to protect this live case to ensure that, at the end of the day, justice is served.

I repeat the position, which is this: the key point is that the minute was sent after an independent prosecutor had taken a decision to indict the case. It was not an opportunity to influence this case at all. It was about informing of a significant development, which was, at that stage, entering the public domain. I was seeking to protect the process, because that is what, as Lord Advocate, I am required to do: uphold the rule of law and protect the process.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The Lord Advocate says that sharing details with the First Minister is normal. Does she, however, accept that now that the correspondence has been shared with the wider public just weeks before election, that risks undermining the confidence in the impartiality of the prosecution service?

The Lord Advocate: I do not accept that, and I think that it is worth while looking back on how this all developed. The minute was sent—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us be courteous. Let us hear one another in a courteous, respectful manner.

The Lord Advocate: The minute was sent because of the significant development of the details of the indictment entering the public domain.

I sent the minute to ensure that we had a transparent process from which we could see that I had communicated the significant development to the First Minister. I ensured that it was made clear that independent prosecutors had been involved in the case and also that there were legal rules that restricted commentary. That is the whole purpose of sending it.

The fact that these questions are being asked here today, following the release of the minute, which resulted from a freedom of information

request, is why the timing has come about—in terms of the forthcoming election. That is not of my making; it is the process that has been involved in the freedom of information request—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us not shout.

The Lord Advocate: It is the process that has been involved in the freedom of information request and the minute becoming available. That is how we are here now in terms of timing. The timing is not one that I have chosen. If that is the criticism, it is not down to me.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): What is in no doubt is the importance of the separation of legal proceedings from the Government and politics. The importance of the independence of the Lord Advocate's position is certainly clear. However, the Lord Advocate, if she was intimating the details on the basis that they were, in her words, "significant", needs to explain how she defines that significance. That is critical to why it was relevant for the First Minister to know that information.

If this is a routine process that happens as a matter of course, the Lord Advocate appears, from her answers so far, to be indicating that she is unable to provide information on how many times it has occurred. Is that the case? Most critically, will she at least say when the last occasion was that she intimated the details of an indictment on a similar basis?

The Lord Advocate: I have explained today that I can provide those details, and I will do so in writing after this evening. I do not have that information today. Because of the fundamental importance of protecting on-going live proceedings, it is critical for consideration to be applied appropriately to the information and, thereafter, for the information to be shared.

I have not said that I am unable to provide the information or that I am refusing to provide it. I am simply saying that, at this stage, standing here, I cannot give a full answer, but I will provide it in writing afterwards.

The member also asked how I characterise a significant development in a case. I characterise that as one that relates to a significant step in process. In this case, a significant step in process had taken place, because an independent prosecutor had decided that the indictment should be served. Therefore, in order to protect the process and the integrity of the proceedings, the information of the significant development was notified to the First Minister in the terms that are set out in the minute. It was reminding the Government to restrict commentary on what was a highly sensitive case. We know that because that is why we are here today. It is a highly sensitive

case that requires to be prosecuted independently and fairly, and I am seeking to ensure that that is exactly what is delivered in such an important case.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Did the Lord Advocate share that information with what is, at the end of the day, a politically staffed office proactively and on her own volition, or was it specifically requested by the First Minister and/or by anyone in his office?

The Lord Advocate: The update was shared after my advisers told me about the significant step in process, and the minute was sent to reflect that. I think that that is clear from the terms of the minute, which is public, and it was not requested.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): The Lord Advocate has emphasised repeatedly that not only did she recuse herself from any involvement in the decision-making process in this particular case but she issued the minute in her name only because that was the fact and the indictment was settled. However, does she not agree with me that the terms of the indictment can be altered after service? That is trite law. Charges can be added with permission of the court and charges can be removed.

I am not making any allegations against the Lord Advocate, and I want to put on the record that, in my dealings with her, I have always found her to be someone of absolute integrity, but I have what I think is surely a legitimate question. Having recused herself, would it not at least have been prudent and politic, if an intimation was to be made to the First Minister, for that to have been made by the named senior prosecutor in charge of leading the case? Had that been done, the Lord Advocate probably would not have been here today facing a number of pretty obvious and serious questions to which the public are entitled to have direct answers.

The Lord Advocate: Mr Ewing is correct about the process that follows on the service of an indictment. It is correct to say that charges can be amended and that they can be added to, in terms of narrative and the like. Mr Ewing is a well-qualified lawyer and he understands all the issues surrounding an indictment, its contents and the legal rules that apply to how it is processed during the course of a prosecution.

The contact with the First Minister was made by the Lord Advocate because it was appropriate for the Lord Advocate to clarify that I had no involvement in operational decisions and to reinforce the need for strict observance of the contempt of court principles. That protects the integrity of proceedings and public confidence.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Reform): Has the First Minister, anyone in the Government, or anyone connected to the Government ever asked to be kept informed about this case?

The Lord Advocate: Not that I know of.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): When did it become standard practice to notify the First Minister's office under the Contempt of Court Act 1981?

The Lord Advocate: I know that it is a long-standing process. I can get the details to the questioner without any difficulty. Examples can be given, dating back some significant time, and I am happy to share them—we can do that after today. I simply do not have the material here.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The reason why the word “significant” keeps being used in connection with this particular case is that it involves the Scottish National Party. When alleged criminality touches the governing party, even the perception of preferential access such as we are talking about—that is what it is—risks undermining public confidence in the independence of Scotland's prosecution service. What steps will the Lord Advocate now take to ensure that public confidence is not further undermined in that way?

The Lord Advocate: It was not preferential access. I did not brief the First Minister in relation to the prosecution of Mr Murrell or the contents of the indictment. The minute was simply a factual confirmation of the fact that Mr Murrell had been indicted, the nature of the charge and the value of the alleged embezzlement. From the point at which the indictment is served, there is no limit on its terms being made public.

I accept that it is a significant case, but the whole purpose of the intimation to the First Minister was because of the significant development of information entering the public domain at that point. I would just be repeating myself to say that the purpose of intimation was quite the opposite of what has been suggested—it was to ensure that the Government was reminded to restrict its commentary for good reason. That was, to protect the integrity of a significant and serious prosecution that has been taken up by independent prosecutors in the Crown Office.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the urgent question.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-20826, 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 24 February 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 February 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Motion of Condolence

followed by Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government

followed by Ministerial Statement: Protecting Children from Harm

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No. 5) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.05 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 February 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Finance and Public Administration Committee Debate: Cost-effectiveness of Scottish Public Inquiries

followed by Criminal Justice Committee Debate: Substance Misuse in Prisons Inquiry

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2026

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 3 March 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Contract (Formation and Remedies) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Reconsideration Stage Proceedings: European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 March 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Liberal Democrats Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 March 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill

followed by Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate: Climate Change Plan

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 February 2026, 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*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Ross to speak to and move amendment S6M-20826.1.

17:40

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am glad that the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General remain in the chamber for this debate, because it is a request about the Lord

Advocate's time. I hope that she accedes to it, and I will give way if she wishes to intervene at any point.

Many questions that were put to the Lord Advocate were not answered in the past 30 or so minutes. More worryingly than that, I believe that, in breach of our standing orders—although I respect the Presiding Officer's ruling following my point of order—the Lord Advocate was aware of answers that she could have provided to parliamentarians but she decided not to give them to the Parliament today. She will write to the Parliament later. Therefore, it would be very helpful if we could have a full statement from the Lord Advocate tomorrow.

The amendment to the business motion that I am speaking to seeks a full statement from the Lord Advocate tomorrow, which would then be followed by questions being put to her. Questions still need to be put. For example, I specifically asked the Lord Advocate why, on the same day as she sent a memo to the First Minister, the Crown Office told reporters that it could not receive the same information that the First Minister received. I will give way to the Lord Advocate if she wishes to answer that question now.

Members: Come on!

Douglas Ross: This is why we need a statement tomorrow.

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Douglas Ross: It is a serious question. How can the Lord Advocate come to the Parliament and say that the information that she provided to the First Minister in a memo was information that she was not then allowed to share with reporters who were asking her office for it? That is a clear issue that we need an answer on. The Lord Advocate refused to provide an answer to that question earlier, which is a very good reason for her to give a statement.

We did not even get to the point about the Lord Advocate potentially being concerned about the Scottish National Party Government. I wrote it down: she said that the SNP Government had to be reminded of the legal issues surrounding the case. Those were the Lord Advocate's words.

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

Douglas Ross: I will give way in a moment.

She felt so concerned about the issue that she had to draft a memo to the First Minister. She was concerned that John Swinney would not understand the—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Douglas Ross: I have said that I will give way in a minute.

The Lord Advocate was so concerned that Scotland's First Minister would speak inappropriately about the case that he had to be briefed about it. We also do not know whether the Lord Advocate has any concerns about the fact that the First Minister, on receiving that email—I note that his chief of staff came into the chamber just a few moments ago—forwarded it on to SNP special advisers 31 minutes later. Did the Lord Advocate, in sharing that information with the First Minister of Scotland, believe that it would be shared with political special advisers? Those are all points that the Parliament deserves to hear about. That is why urgent questions were lodged today, but, even at the end of that process, we have so many unanswered questions for the Lord Advocate.

In conclusion, I repeat that a full statement from the Lord Advocate is needed tomorrow, to provide answers. If the Lord Advocate and SNP members are happy that nothing has gone wrong and that everything is perfectly acceptable and above board, they should come to the Parliament to tell us that. The Lord Advocate should come to the Parliament, give a statement and allow questions to be put, because, even after today's urgent question, many queries remain. Many queries that were put to the Lord Advocate were not answered and MSPs have been promised that many pieces of information will come later today. Therefore, we should be able to challenge the Lord Advocate on those points tomorrow. Ultimately, if there is nothing to see or hide, why not come back tomorrow, deliver a statement and be questioned?

I move amendment S6M-20826.1, to insert after "That the Parliament agrees—":

"(za) the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 19 February 2026—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

followed by Ministerial Statement: Lord Advocate Private Briefing to the First Minister on the Charges Against Peter Murrell".

The Presiding Officer: I call the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:45

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): Douglas Ross's amendment to the business motion seeks a statement from the Lord Advocate tomorrow on communications in relation to Mr Murrell's case. However, as members know from the past half hour, the Lord Advocate has come to the Parliament today to answer the urgent question that Michael Marra lodged on that very subject. The urgent question process allowed that to happen, and 14 members with an interest in the subject had the opportunity to ask the Lord Advocate questions.

Douglas Ross: But we did not get answers.

Graeme Dey: If Mr Ross would show a bit of courtesy and listen, that would be useful.

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

Graeme Dey: We have had more than enough performative nonsense from Mr Ross.

The Lord Advocate answered those questions—

Douglas Ross: She did not.

Graeme Dey:—and committed to provide further information in writing. Therefore, MSPs have had an opportunity to provide scrutiny of the Lord Advocate in this area. Given that—

Douglas Ross: We got no answers.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, please resist the temptation to contribute from your seat.

Graeme Dey: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Members will have the opportunity to explore the issue further at First Minister's question time tomorrow, if they so wish.

Given all of that, I do not consider that the amendment requiring a statement tomorrow should be supported, so I ask members to reject it.

The Presiding Officer: The first question is, that amendment S6M-20826.1, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20826, 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.

17:46

Meeting suspended.

17:48

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S6M-20826.1, in the name of Douglas Ross. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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) (Ind)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20826.1, in the name of

Douglas Ross, is: For 51, Against 71, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20826, 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.

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, Foyso (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) (Ind)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 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)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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-20826, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, is: For 92, Against 31, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 February 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 February 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Motion of Condolence

followed by Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government

followed by Ministerial Statement: Protecting Children from Harm

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No. 5) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.05 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 February 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Finance and Public Administration Committee Debate: Cost-effectiveness of Scottish Public Inquiries

followed by Criminal Justice Committee Debate: Substance Misuse in Prisons Inquiry

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Local

Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2026

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 3 March 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Contract (Formation and Remedies) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Reconsideration Stage Proceedings: European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 March 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Liberal Democrats Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 March 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill

followed by Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate: Climate Change Plan

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 February 2026, 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.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:52

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-20827, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Co-ownership Authorised Contractual Schemes) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

17:52

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I will be brief. On many recent occasions, the Government has introduced SSIs that give exemptions from land and buildings transaction tax for several different purposes, whether it is for freeports, economic investment zones or, as in this case, co-ownership authorised contractual schemes. There have been questions about whether such exemptions could give rise to opportunities for tax avoidance.

When proposing the SSI at committee, the Minister for Public Finance was unable to give a clear explanation as to why the exemptions should be used in this case, nor could he give reassurance that a property transaction could not simply be dressed up as a financial transaction by means of investment vehicles.

I am not convinced that there is no risk of allowing for tax avoidance through measures like this, so the Greens will vote against the SSI.

The Presiding Officer: I call the minister to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:53

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I am happy to proceed, Presiding Officer, while respecting Mr Harvie's principled position.

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

The next item of business is consideration of 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-20828 and S6M-20829, on approval of SIs, and motions S6M-20830 to S6M-20837, on approval of SSIs.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Greenhouse Gas

Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) (Extension to Maritime Activities) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Aggregates Tax (Applicable Rate of Tax) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Care Leaver Payment (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 (Consequential and Supplementary Amendments) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Procurement (India Trade Agreement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Residence and Presence Requirements) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Local Authority Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Reviews and Appeals) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 Amendment Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

Decision Time

17:54

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Angus Robertson is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Murdo Fraser and Neil Bibby will fall, and that, if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Neil Bibby will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-20819.3, in the name of Angus Robertson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20819, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on ending US military use of Scottish airports, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have had a technical problem. I would have abstained.

The Presiding Officer: 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Choudhury, Foyso (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) (Ind)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20819.3, in the name of Angus Robertson, is: For 89, Against 7, Abstentions 27.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendments in the names of Murdo Fraser and Neil Bibby therefore fall.

The next question is, that motion S6M-20819, in the name of Gillian Mackay, on ending US military use of Scottish airports, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament supports Scots law, international law and the rules-based order; respects the future of Greenland as a matter for the people of Greenland and Denmark; is unwavering in its solidarity with and support for Ukraine in the face of Russia's illegal invasion; supports international sanctions against the Putin regime and the interdiction of its shadow fleet, and encourages the international community to secure a just peace acceptable to Ukraine.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20820.3, in the name of Kate Forbes, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20820, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on a just transition fund for Mossmorran, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20820.3, in the name of Kate Forbes, is: For 75, Against 47, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20820.1, in the name of Alexander Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20820, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on a just transition fund for Mossmorran, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
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)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
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)
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)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
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)
Dorman, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
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)
 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)
 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)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20820.1, in the name of Alexander Stewart, is: For 30, Against 92, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20820.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20820, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on a just transition fund for Mossmorran, be agreed. 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, Foyso (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) (Ind)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20820.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 93, Against 28, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20820, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on a just transition fund for Mossmorran, as amended, be agreed. Are we agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the UK Government and must match the Scottish Government's support by urgently delivering targeted just transition funding for workers and communities following the early closure of the ExxonMobil Fife Ethylene Plant at Mossmorran; welcomes the convening of a joint taskforce between Fife Council, the UK Government and Scottish Government, trade unions, Fife College, Fife businesses and local community organisations to support the workforce and the wider area, and further welcomes the commitment that workers will be guaranteed interviews at the UK Government-backed Grangemouth cracker; recognises that the taskforce is working on a plan for the site, and considers that this should inform any funding and economic support provided.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20827, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, 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)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20827, in the name of Graeme Dey, is: For 112, Against 7, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Co-ownership Authorised Contractual Schemes) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: As no member objects, I will put a single question on 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions.

The question is, that motions S6M-20828 and S6M-20829, on approval of statutory instruments, and S6M-20830 to S6M-20837, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) (Extension to Maritime Activities) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Aggregates Tax (Applicable Rate of Tax) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Care Leaver Payment (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 (Consequential and Supplementary Amendments) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Procurement (India Trade Agreement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security

(Residence and Presence Requirements) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Local Authority Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Reviews and Appeals) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 Amendment Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Moray FLOW-Park

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-20329, in the name of Douglas Ross, on recognising concerns regarding Moray FLOW-Park. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the concerns being raised by the communities impacted by the proposed Moray FLOW-Park; notes that Offshore Solutions Group plans to develop anchorage sites in the Moray Firth for floating offshore wind assets; understands that the project is at an early stage, but that concerns around the impact on fishing, the environment and marine life have been expressed and acknowledges the view that these deserve to be addressed, and notes the view that Offshore Solutions Group must both be upfront with communities about the consideration other sites were given for these proposals and must commit to detailed and meaningful discussions with key stakeholders and all communities in the Moray Firth area impacted by these proposals.

18:05

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank all the members who have supported my motion and those who will contribute tonight. By way of background, I note that it has been a bit difficult to bring this debate to the chamber. I previously lodged a motion on the subject for members' business that did not attract cross-party support. Emma Roddick then lodged a motion that attracted cross-party support, but the Scottish National Party did not choose to use it for one of the party's members' business debates. I then copied her motion, just to make sure that we were all on the same page. It might not be the exact wording that I would have used, but it was important for me to bring the debate to the chamber. I also support, and whole-heartedly and completely agree with, the amendment that has been lodged by Fergus Ewing.

Why is it important that we are debating the issue in the chamber today? It is because of the people who are sitting in the public gallery: almost 50 people who have come down from Moray and the Highlands to their Parliament to hear the matter being addressed—[*Applause.*]

That is deserving of applause, because some of us make that journey weekly, and it is not easy. I have led debates in Parliament before that have had a lot of public interest, but I am not sure that I have previously seen 50 people coming down from the Highlands to the Parliament to hear a debate—and that is just a fraction of the people in our part of the world who are interested in this issue. Many

are watching online tonight, and many will be catching up later.

This issue has captured the attention and interest of many people in Moray, Inverness and Nairn and further afield. I have had comments, emails and letters from people from all over Scotland and the United Kingdom, and from others around the world, who are aghast—and absolutely disgusted—at what Offshore Solutions Group is proposing for the Moray Firth.

As I am sure that we will go through in the debate, the proposals are now less than what was previously put forward. I think that that just shows how cack-handed the company that is making the proposals has been throughout the process. We in this Parliament have to recognise that we, as elected members, have been supported every step of the way by some very committed individuals in the area, and by a wider campaign group, who have provided me, as an MSP, with more detailed information and expert analysis than I have ever had on any other issue.

Although I welcome that information and am delighted to receive it, I question why members of the public have had to commit so much of their time and energy to fight against proposals that should never, ever have got to this stage. The proposals are completely unacceptable and are completely out of character for our area. The numbers of people in the public gallery tonight, and the numbers of those who have been corresponding with their MSPs, show that there is widespread opposition to the plans. Indeed, I have met no one who thinks that the proposals are a good idea—well, I have met the developers, who are, I assume, in favour of the proposals, but I have met absolutely no one locally who is.

To go back to the issue of public engagement, my colleague Tim Eagle hosted a very well-attended meeting in Findhorn, with a satellite meeting in Nairn. I have been involved in public meetings in Moray for a long time, and I have never seen such a turnout before. I have never seen so many people wanting to get involved and engaged, and that is because they are worried about what will happen to our area if the proposals go ahead.

I congratulate everyone who has been involved. To single out one person is perhaps not the best thing to do, but I want to credit David Ross and the stop the Moray Firth FLOW-Park Facebook page. When people have asked me questions about the issue, I normally go to that Facebook page to get the answer because, if I do not know the answer, it will be there. Again, that highlights the commitment of the people who have been involved in the campaign.

I have many concerns about the proposals and how they have been put forward, because the process was very underhand. They were announced with minimal fuss to try to dampen the opposition to them—and then the situation exploded. Subsequently, when there were serious questions to be raised, the developers first agreed to come to Tim Eagle's meeting to debate the proposals, and then cried off and said that they would not engage with the local community. If you trust your proposals, you should be brave enough to be up front and answer questions about them.

The Government is involved in the issue, and I am sure that we will hear tonight from the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy that she cannot speak about live cases, but she can speak about Scottish Enterprise giving £1.83 million to the company to develop the proposals to meet Scottish Government targets. The cabinet secretary has been questioned about that in the chamber previously, but there is still huge concern and worry about that level of Scottish Enterprise funding going to an organisation that wants to create destruction in one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland.

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): I thank the member for bringing the debate to the chamber. As the constituency member for Moray, I welcome a number of my constituents to the public gallery and wish them a safe journey after the debate later tonight.

As the member will be aware, I am heavily engaged in the issue, too, and I have spoken to the developers a number of times. Does he agree that one of the easiest solutions to the whole debacle would be for the company, which did not rank the original locations that it looked at in order of preference, to look to a less contentious location for the project to go ahead? That would be an easy way out of this.

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

Douglas Ross: I agree with the member on that, but there is an easier way, which is just to abandon the plans completely and walk away from the Moray Firth, which is not suitable for what is being proposed.

I agree with Richard Lochhead—I put the exact same question to OSG representatives when I met them, and I got a muddled answer from them, as I have done on so many issues. However, they must listen—they must see that their proposal is so inappropriate that it is creating mass protest on a scale that I have not seen in Moray and the Highlands for a long time.

Instead of actually engaging and doing better with its consultation, however, I would say that OSG—even though I did not think that this was possible—has got worse. We have now found out that, earlier this month, OSG released a report, with very little publicity, that argues that the company does not have to do an environmental impact assessment, because it believes that the temporary nature of the structures does not require one.

An EIA is crucial. I sat on planning committees in Moray Council, and I was convener of the committee for a long time. EIAs form an important part of the planning process, but the company thinks that it can just dismiss that requirement and come up with its own plans. Again, I question the cabinet secretary: does she at least accept that undertaking no EIA for the development would not be allowed, should not be allowed and is unacceptable, and that the company must come forward with a full EIA?

I know that my time is just about up, Deputy Presiding Officer. There is so much to say on the issue that I could speak for seven hours, or even seven days, and I do not think that we would get through it all. However, I go back to the people who matter most here: the people who live in Moray and the Highlands, who will be affected by the proposals for years to come; who are fighting with great enthusiasm for the future of our area; and who are here in their Parliament today to hear—we hope—that the Government is on their side.

We need to protect our environment and the nature that it supports. As the nature champion for the bottlenose dolphin, I have had briefings from the Whale and Dolphin Conservation's Scottish dolphin centre at Spey Bay, which is worried about the proposals. There is much in the proposals that we are opposed to and very little on which we can agree. Surely the only course of action is for OSG to abandon the plans and dump them completely. If the company does not do so, the Government must make the strongest possible statement that it opposes the plans, because they are not suitable for the Moray Firth or for Scotland and they should be scrapped completely.

18:14

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am grateful to Douglas Ross for managing to get the debate into the *Business Bulletin*. As he mentioned, a few of us tried previously, so fair play to him for meeting the requirement for cross-party support.

Having sat on a planning committee, I am always extremely careful not to cross the line into prejudicing a quasi-judicial process, which is why I worded my original motion in the way that I did.

However, members are still required to take responsibility for their contributions in today's debate. Nevertheless, being careful not to prejudice the process does not mean that I cannot demand that the developers meet their obligations; that communities' voices are heard; and that the legitimate, evidence-based and very detailed concerns are acted on, especially when they have been brought forward by volunteers in communities, whether those are individuals, community councils or businesses, who are putting the effort into crafting and sharing them with those who are responsible for making the decision. That has not happened in this case, which deeply concerns me.

I am extremely disappointed to have had such strong and varied representation from people in the Highlands and Moray stating that they are not being listened to. If the people who have to live with the reality of a development—whether that is visual interference, an impact on livelihoods, or knock-on traffic, waste or employment impacts—feel that their voices are just being treated like background noise that can be tuned out, the process is broken. OSG's refusal to attend a public meeting illustrated that point for me.

The Highlands is used to promises of gold rushes but, even when short-term jobs or community benefits are offered, we often feel that we are left worse off afterwards. I have seen developers work with communities to identify what their priorities are and how they can mitigate any unwanted impacts. That will never please everyone, but it can be done. Infrastructure must serve the community, not the other way round, and vague gestures relating to green energy do not cut it. Mentioning net zero on your planning application certainly does not excuse you from undertaking impact assessments, consultation and partnership working.

The people whom I met in committee room 5 ahead of the debate—thanks to another colleague, Tim Eagle, who arranged a drop-in event—are not opposed to the future; they just want the local community to shape the future. That is what the Scottish Government's guidance says should happen and that is the point of having local development plans, and I think that it is an entirely reasonable expectation for my constituents to have.

I note that the constituency MSP for Moray, Richard Lochhead, has also asked pertinent questions about which areas are under consideration. There is a lack of information here. People can understand things better with more information but, of course, when they have more information, they can also form arguments that are more relevant and effective. That is why it cannot simply be left to developers to decide whether they

want to share the information that local people deserve to have. When we discussed the issue earlier in the committee room, there was an awful lot of speculation. Much of that might turn out to be unfair, but it might be bang on the money. The point is that nobody, from the campaigners to the MSPs in the room, knows the answer to that.

In my view, planning and consenting should never be decided on a political basis. Fundamentally, I do not believe that politicians who are acting outwith the planning process should decide who gets to build and who does not. We all have interests and biases, and the planning process is designed to focus only on what is relevant to the application. My personal objection to or support for any application should never be worth more than the views of my constituents down the road.

The people in Nairn, Findhorn, Burghead, Buckie, Forres and Elgin who have all reached out to share their material planning concerns are the ones who must have a voice and a say in the process. I will continue to do what I can to draw attention to those objections and call out any failures to engage, lack of transparency or poor communication. All that needs to be done is to listen to the local experts.

18:18

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

First, I congratulate Douglas Ross—as both he and Emma Roddick have mentioned, the debate has been a long time coming. We have raised the issue in the Parliament several times, and, in Finlay Carson’s members’ business debate last week, we asked a question on the point that we should not have to wait for an informal application to go in—we need the Government to step in now.

I welcome everybody who is up in the public gallery. It is a long route down the A9—I do not know whether they came via Aberdeen or down the A9 today, but I am very conscious that we have held them up a wee bit, so I hope that their bus is going to wait for them for their trip home. I am grateful to them for coming to Parliament, because—as Douglas Ross said—it is not always easy for people who live so far away to come down here.

However, people are motivated and really concerned and anxious, and they have come to me in the hundreds. I have a folder in my inbox that is filled with emails from people from across the north-east and the Highlands, all the way to Caithness, who are concerned about the proposals. Douglas Ross got it right when he said that Moray Firth is just not the right location for

these proposals: it never was, and they should not go forward.

I am, therefore, speaking today not just with my voice, but with a shared voice: a voice for all who have worked on the issue and all who have written to me, because there has been concern from communities about how the project has been handled from the very beginning.

As Douglas Ross said, I hosted a public meeting, and I could never have expected that more than 600 people would attend. I had to move the meeting to a different venue; we also had to create a satellite venue, and we still had people who were trying to access it online as well—and OSG did not even turn up. It is not as if the company even gave me a lot of notice—it literally did not turn up the day before, and that is just not on. If you trust your proposals, as Douglas Ross said, you should just come along.

We are now in a position in which more than £1.5 million of public funds are being spent despite the widespread local opposition, and despite unresolved questions about whether the facility is actually needed at the scale that has been proposed. The case for the project rests on the claimed need for wet storage for floating offshore wind foundations, but the available figures suggest that that need is far less certain than has been presented. If that is correct, the central claim of an urgent need for a dedicated flow park becomes much weaker. Surely, at the very least, it demands a transparent, updated, independent needs assessment before any further public money is committed to the project.

I know that a large number of freedom-of-information requests have already been put in to try to clarify the status of the Moray FLOW-Park proposal. I am conscious that the marine directorate has confirmed that there is no EIA scoping and screening, and that engagement—in its own words—is described as being only at an “early stage”. It is worth reiterating the point that no consultation was done prior to the money coming from the public purse and the project going forward.

The responses from Crown Estate Scotland to FOI requests show that it did not progress beyond phase 1 on the project. As Douglas Ross said, we heard today that a report was put out on 6 February. I had not even seen that report, because the company had hidden it away, and it had the audacity not to even come forward to me with it, despite the fact that I had asked it to send me any information. The report seems to be suggesting that the company does not need to do a full EIA on the project, which—to be frank—I think it does.

When communities turn out in such numbers, when detailed challenges are raised and when

funding decisions have broken the £1 million mark, Government should step in early. It should test the case regularly and be willing to say “Stop” if the evidence does not stack up.

That brings me to my question to the cabinet secretary—it has always been my question regarding the need for the Government to step in. We want the proposals stopped, and we want OSG and the Government to come to the table with the local councils and stakeholders and have a real conversation together. Here is my question: will the cabinet secretary agree to ask officials for a short written review looking at the need, the numbers and the strength of local feeling, and on the back of that review, will she meet with key stakeholders in Moray so that we can finally agree a position moving forward, rather than leaving us in limbo as we currently are?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Eagle. I was not aware of the bus timetabling issues, but I will try to ensure that the debate does not overrun unduly.

18:23

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Douglas Ross on securing the debate and pay tribute to the campaigners who have come such a long way to their Parliament to make their case. I am sorry that I missed them earlier—I was late in coming to the drop-in event, and they had already left for the chamber.

I acknowledge the real concerns that have been expressed about the potential application. No application has been lodged, so we debate the issue in a vacuum with little or no information about what is proposed and what the impact will be. On the one hand, flagging up a potential development at an early stage is welcome, in that it gives people more chance to consider its impact. On the other hand, doing so without providing information obviously causes concern, as people cannot see what the impact would be and the effect that it would have on them.

We do not even know to which body the application would be made and what process would be used to assess it. What is clear is that those who are impacted by a potential flow park must be consulted, and the impacts on them and on local businesses must be taken account of. The proposed project has the potential to have an impact on local fishing and tourism businesses that are unable to move their businesses out of the way easily.

I would hope the Offshore Solutions Group would be speaking to those businesses now and hearing their concerns. If it does not, it is going to find itself facing a backlash that no amount of information will diminish. It is simply wrong to allow

speculation that puts people in fear of their livelihoods.

I do not think that simply moving the site would work either, because another community would need to be consulted and may have similar concerns. It is important that a discussion is had before any application is put in.

There are also concerns about public bodies providing funding for the project—the Crown Estate to the tune of £1.5 million, and Scottish Enterprise to the tune of £1.8 million, as has been highlighted by Douglas Ross. Those organisations can spend their funding as it suits them, but it gives people real concern to see funds being invested by the same public bodies that are part of the Scottish Government and which will have a role in making a decision on any application. They will have a direct role in deciding on marine licence applications, or they will be able to use their call-in powers with any application that falls to the local authority. Obviously, that causes concern, because what if the body making the decision on the application has already invested in the proposal? The process not only needs to be fair—it has to be seen to be fair. Clearly, there needs to be much more public information and consultation.

I have spoken in the chamber before about the need for better marine planning that takes account of the needs of all marine users. Too often, we see the fishing community squeezed to make way for innovation, renewables, telecoms and energy connections. A thriving fishing industry provides local wealth and anchors our communities, and we need to value and protect it.

Scottish Labour has argued in the past for a community right of appeal in planning applications, and this case highlights our reasons for doing so. Therefore, I urge the minister to ensure that the community is informed of proposals at every stage and, more important, that it is heard at every stage.

18:27

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): People along the Moray Firth are closely watching this debate not only in the gallery, but in Nairn, Findhorn, Burghead and Buckie, and along the coastline that is often described as the riviera of the north. Those who have got in touch with me have said that they are not anti-climate action or anti-renewable energy; they are just asking reasonable questions about impact, fairness and voice, and their concerns deserve respect.

We are living in a climate and nature emergency, and we know that we must move away from fossil fuels, but it is striking that some of those who are being the most vocal in the chamber tonight continue to support new oil and gas extraction as a silver bullet. We cannot claim

urgency on reducing emissions while expanding the very industry that is driving climate breakdown.

However, supporting renewables does not mean suspending scrutiny. How we transition matters. If floating offshore wind infrastructure risks marine ecosystems, fishing livelihoods, navigation routes or tourism, those impacts must be fully understood and addressed. A healthy climate, thriving wildlife, clean oceans and strong communities all depend on each other. Science shows that our economy is part of the natural world, not separate from it, and it can thrive only when the planet is healthy, too.

There is also a wider context here. The proposed location is close to the Cromarty Firth freeport. The Scottish Greens opposed freeports, because international evidence shows that they often weaken employment protections, displace other sustainable local jobs and fail to deliver genuine community wealth. In my recent discussions with trade unions, strong concerns were raised about pay conditions and enforcement in freeport areas. If the nearby freeport had not been designated, would this spillover proposal exist in this form? Were the full implications made clear during the bidding process?

As we have heard, communities are worried that a lot of public money has already been spent on early exploratory work before they have had any real chance to help shape plans. Even if the Government is not running the project itself, the use of public funding means that it still has a responsibility to set the ground rules, and that should include strong and meaningful involvement from communities right from the start instead of their views being sought once most of the decisions have already been made.

When Crown Estate Scotland was established under the Scotland Act 1998, an inherent conflict was created. The public purse benefits significantly from it, but the Scottish Government, via the marine directorate, has the final say on whether marine developments such as this one go ahead. Where is the community voice in that?

The strength of community feeling on this proposal is clear. The fact that Crown Estate Scotland appears to have misjudged the feelings of local communities so significantly reflects a wider concern that it has lost touch with the communities that rely on it to protect and safeguard their coasts and waters from encroaching business interests, whether it be floating storage parks or polluting salmon farms.

It is clear that Crown Estate Scotland benefits from the proposal through the revenue generated via its lease and proof of concept for future opportunities; it is clear that Offshore Solutions Group benefits through generous grants and

increased revenue for its directors, as well as potential expansions in the future; and it is clear that the Scottish Government will benefit through revenues paid to it. How do the people of the Moray Firth benefit?

We should have begun the transition away from oil and gas in earnest 20 or 30 years ago, and both the UK and Scottish Governments should have done more to include communities from the start. We are now trying to move quickly, but speed cannot replace trust. If Scotland is to lead in offshore wind, let it lead in democracy too, grounded in marine protection, worker protection, community voice and genuine shared benefit. That must be the foundation, not an afterthought.

18:31

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): Of the many reasons that we owe a debt of gratitude to the Roman civilisation, one is that it bequeathed to us the principles of natural justice. One such principle is *audi alteram partem*: one must listen to both sides of the case.

When I, like other members, was inundated with expressions of concern about this particular development, the levels of which were unprecedented in my 26 years as a constituency member, I sought a meeting with Mr Rowley, the head of OSG, to get his side of the case. Before the meeting, I availed myself of the opportunity to look at the company accounts, which are publicly available, and found that it is a microcompany. Microcompanies put in limited accounts to save money; they are generally not able to grow fast and have no, or limited, potential for raising money.

I found out that OSG's net assets were £207,000 in 2023 but had fallen to £131,000 in April 2024. As a former energy minister, I know that no project manager of any billion-pound project would for a moment conceive of taking on a contractor in the supply chain that was a paper company and did not have the capacity, if it failed to carry out the work, to make recompense for that failure. Any project manager who did so would be sacked—none would do so.

I asked Mr Rowley to explain why he thought that he would get contracts, but I got no answer. That leads me to assume that the intention is not to carry out the development, but to get the permission and sell on. Incidentally, no accounts for the company have been lodged for this year—they are late.

I also found out that Scottish Enterprise has extended a grant of £1.83 million to the company, most of which has been paid out, despite the fact that that is about six times more than the company's net worth. How did that happen? When

I asked Adrian Gillespie of Scottish Enterprise—someone with whom I have worked over the years, for whom I have great respect and who has done great things for Scotland—what due diligence was done, there were no clear answers, other than that the grant specialist team had looked again at the application and checked it off.

When I asked whether the Scottish Government had been told, I got a very carefully worded answer—we have seen a bit of that recently—and I am not sure whether the Scottish Government was involved or consulted in any way. I say to the cabinet secretary that there will be freedom of information requests on this matter, so she should open the books and allow us to see the whole story, because if there was any such involvement or consultation, I would like to know about it.

Equally, if there was not, how can it be that in Scotland we extend, through our enterprise company, and through Crown Estate Scotland, which allocated £41,000 at an earlier stage, £2 million without any involvement from the minister? Is that not wrong? If I were the minister, I would be asking, “What is going on here?”

Do we need this project at all? I do not think so, because we have storage in ports and storage on land. The cabinet secretary and I have both visited Aventus Energy; I know the estate that is involved, and I know that there is extensive land and unused capacity there, as David Ross has illustrated in his excellent work. The project is not required at all. When I asked the Crown Estate whether it was required, it said, “We cannot express an opinion. We are only the Crown Estate.” Well, goodness me.

I will conclude, as I have only 20 seconds left, but I would like to say a lot more. I want to pay tribute to the people who have come down here for the debate—that shows just how much anger there is.

This is much worse than Flamingo Land—this application should never get anywhere. Incidentally, it is not a live application; there is nothing to prevent the Scottish Government from stopping this now, because there is no application to prejudice. Of course a marine assessment is required; it is required under regulation 7 of the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007. I just looked at it—it takes about 30 seconds to look it up.

This is one of the worst applications that I have ever seen, and it must never go ahead. If all parties join together—including the SNP, which I used to serve, and did so for 50 years—we will see off this proposal and spare the people of Moray and Nairn any further misery. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ewing. I remind those in the gallery that this is a meeting in public, not a public meeting, and that participation, either through applause or the opposite, is to be discouraged.

I call Gillian Martin to respond to the debate. You have around seven minutes, cabinet secretary.

18:36

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin): I thank Douglas Ross for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I thank everyone who has spoken today. It is very apparent that every party and every representative of the area have received a great deal of correspondence about the matter.

Before I was in politics I had a significant issue with a development in the area where I live, so I understand the strength of feeling when something happens that causes people a great deal of concern. I will not say any more about it than that.

There is an imperative that developers consult and engage early with constituents and the people in whose community they want to base themselves. That is not just something that is required as part of the application; it makes good business sense. Why would someone want to go ahead with a development when they have not engaged with the people they want to support the development? Why would they not turn up to a public meeting that is full of the people they would want to bring onside by answering their questions about the development? That does not make sense to me, as a constituency MSP. If someone in my constituency were proposing a development, and I had received a great deal of correspondence about it, set up a public meeting and been told by the developers that they would come along to answer questions, I would fully expect them to turn up.

Fergus Ewing: The minister has said that early consultation is essential. Given that that has not happened, and that the consultation began a year and a half after £2 million of public money was offered—apparently without the minister’s approval or involvement—will the minister now seek an investigation into how on earth that could have happened, contrary to the clear spirit of Government policy?

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

Gillian Martin: I have written down a number of issues that I will look into, but I want to continue my response to the debate.

Over the past few weeks, I have been made aware, by my colleague Richard Lochhead, who is the constituency MSP for Moray, of substantive concerns that local communities have raised about the Offshore Solutions Group proposal. As he said in his speech, Tim Eagle has also asked me parliamentary questions on the issue in the chamber.

Tim Eagle has asked me to stop the project, effectively. In our exchanges, I have set out the statutory and established regulatory processes that exist, how applications for consent are made and the Government's very clear expectations of developers in engaging with affected communities.

Richard Lochhead has told me—as have many members today—that he has met the company, relayed the opposition and asked the company to explain why the other sites that it considered had not been taken forward.

Richard Lochhead was not able to make a speech as he is a Government minister—we all understand the conventions around that—but he was able to make an intervention, in which he said that no ranking had been made of the other areas that were considered. Other people have made the point that some areas of Scotland are crying out for that type of development—where there is a green port status, for example. It is apparent that representatives in the chamber have put forward to the public and to me their concerns.

I must say that, notwithstanding anything to do with the proposals or any of their detail, which I do not have in front of me—I do not have anything in front of me—I am unable to say that an application cannot be made.

Tim Eagle: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Gillian Martin: I will in a second—I am making a point here. Processes must be gone through—indeed, Emma Roddick made the point that there are examples of good public engagement. It is entirely reasonable for the public and elected members to expect that a developer will engage early in a project and, indeed, will bring the public with them as well.

Tim Eagle: I am not quite sure where the cabinet secretary is going, but I hope that that will be explained in a minute. There was no engagement—we have heard that very clearly in the debate—so you are absolutely right to say that consultation was very poor. Fundamentally, I do not think that the company could continue if the Scottish Government withdrew the funding that Scottish Enterprise is currently giving—and I must believe that it has the power to do so. Given that every party in the chamber and pretty much the entire population of the area do not want it—and the constituency MSP says so, too—why will the

Scottish Government not simply step in? I said earlier that we should pull the funding, stop that project and then come back round the table. That is what we want, and the Scottish Government could do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Gillian Martin: Scottish Enterprise has made the funding available. That is a very important point. There has been no direction from ministers on the matter, and I will not say that I can instruct Scottish Enterprise to do anything. Notwithstanding that, I have made notes today that I will take away.

Douglas Ross: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Gillian Martin: With respect, I have taken many interventions and I am coming to the end of my time.

The applicant must successfully go through several processes, and no minister can pre-empt or distort the process by telling any developer that they can or cannot proceed through that process. I understand that a proposal has not been submitted so far, and that a screening request for one sea-bed area has been made to Scottish ministers to identify whether an environmental impact assessment is required for the proposal.

An environmental impact assessment is a fundamental part of a development of that type, and it has a part on socioeconomic impact that must be answered, too. The Scottish national marine plan makes it clear that projects are expected to put forward the socioeconomic impact of the life cycle of a project.

I will take Douglas Ross's intervention, but that must be the final one.

Douglas Ross: The cabinet secretary's point on the environmental impact assessment was the point that I made in my speech. The cabinet secretary has just said that an EIA is crucial. Does that not indicate to her that that company is not a reputable company to be taking forward the proposal if, earlier this month, it was seeking to go forward with its plans without an EIA? The fact that everyone else believes that an EIA is essential, but the company does not, should surely be a flashing red light for the minister, who could then give ministerial direction to Scottish Enterprise to stop allocating any more funding. She has that power—whether she uses it is her choice.

Gillian Martin: I do have the power to make a final assessment. If a final assessment is made that an application is not fit for purpose, that is a different matter. Ministers are not afforded the ability to prevent the submission of prospective

applications, and it would be entirely inappropriate for me to make a judgment on a project before an application is processed.

Wide public consultation is for the developer to undertake and demonstrate. Everyone has said that they do not believe that that has been done.

Statutory pre-application consultation provides an early opportunity for interested parties to comment on proposals, with further engagement when licence applications are publicised and consulted on. If that is not done, that will impact the quality of the application.

I have gone over time, but I could say a lot more on the matter. I have not gone through all the different procedures that must take place, but any applicant must be familiar with them. As I said, wide public consultation is for the developer to undertake, and that must be demonstrated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I wish those people in the gallery a safe trip back up the road.

Meeting closed at 18.45.

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