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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 9 June 2026

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Our first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Rabbi Moshe Rubin of Giffnock synagogue, the Senior Rabbi of Scotland.

Rabbi Moshe Rubin (Rabbi of Giffnock Synagogue and Senior Rabbi of Scotland): Thank you, Presiding Officer. On behalf of the Scottish Jewish community, I wish you and all newly elected MSPs every success in your service to our beautiful country of Scotland.

It is no secret that Jewish communities across the United Kingdom are facing increasing hostility. Many members of my community go about their daily lives looking over their shoulder, wondering when or where the next antisemitic incident may occur.

Just two weeks ago, while travelling on the M8, I saw a large banner hanging over a flyover. Whatever broad, negative message it sought to convey, it ultimately distilled into a single chilling accusation: “All Roads Lead to the Jews”. That was over the M8. Those words were not intended as a compliment to Scotland’s Jewish community; they were intended to intimidate and blame.

Against that backdrop, it was no surprise that, when I attended the Etgar quiz in Wembley stadium last week, security was highly visible—police officers and security personnel were everywhere. The Etgar quiz is an interschool competition for primary 6 pupils. More than 1,000 children from 28 Jewish schools across the United Kingdom and parts of Europe compete in a celebration of Jewish learning and knowledge. I am delighted to report that Calderwood Lodge, Scotland’s only Jewish school, sent 10 primary 6 pupils and achieved second place in one of the competition’s categories, which is an outstanding accomplishment.

Yet, the deeper purpose of the event was perhaps best expressed by the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Mirvis, when he said that it is to show that Jewish education is fun. That spirit was palpable. More than 1,000 children sang songs of hope and love, danced with unbridled joy, laughed freely and celebrated their identity with uninhibited pride. Children from different Jewish backgrounds, cultures, nationalities and traditions came together in an atmosphere of friendship, peace and hope. For me, that was an extraordinary experience—a miraculous moment. Outside the venue stood barriers, security checks and visible reminders of the threats that exist. Inside were children simply being children—learning, celebrating and looking confidently towards the future.

However, I was left with a question: why should that feel extraordinary? Why should it feel remarkable that children can celebrate who they are without fear? Why should such an atmosphere be considered a miracle rather than the norm? What can we do to make that spirit a reality not only for Jews but for everyone—people of every faith and of none, and people who simply seek to live their lives with meaning, dignity and happiness?

Perhaps that is the challenge that is before all of us. Nature is the miracle of the everyday. Our challenge is to turn the miracle of the extraordinary into the reality of the everyday.

Committee Conveners

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Colleagues, we turn to the election of committee conveners. When more than one nomination for convener of a committee has been received, an election will be conducted by secret ballot. I will give you instructions on this shortly.

When a single nomination has been received, the election of that member as convener of the committee will be confirmed if no other member objects to their election.

As this is a secret ballot, anyone who wishes to object to the election of any candidate should press the point-of-order button on their console when I call out the candidate’s name. Doing so is very important, as it will mean that only I can see whether an objection has been made.

I will now work my way through the names of the individual candidates.

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Stuart McMillan has been nominated as convener of the Climate Action Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Stuart McMillan's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Alyn Smith has been nominated as convener of the Criminal Justice Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Alyn Smith's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Calum Kerr has been nominated as convener of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Calum Kerr's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Duncan Massey has been nominated as convener of the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Duncan Massey's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Karen Adam has been nominated as convener of the Education and Gaelic Committee. If any member objects to her election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Karen Adam's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Katie Hagmann has been nominated as convener of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee. If any member objects to her election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Katie Hagmann's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Patrick Harvie has been nominated as convener of the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Patrick Harvie's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Clare Haughey has been nominated as convener of the Finance and Public Administration Committee. If any member objects to her election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Clare Haughey's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Helen McDade has been nominated as convener of the Health, Care and Sport Committee. If any member objects to her election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Helen McDade's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Neil Bibby has been nominated as convener of the Public Audit Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Neil Bibby's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Paul Sweeney has been nominated as convener of the Public Petitions Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Paul Sweeney's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

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Bob Doris has been nominated as convener of the Public Service Reform Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Bob Doris's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Mark Ruskell has been nominated as convener of the Rural Affairs Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Mark Ruskell's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Craig Hoy has been nominated as convener of the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Craig Hoy's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Willie Rennie has been nominated as convener of the Transport Committee. If any member objects to his election as convener, please press your point-of-order button now.

An objection was noted.

The Presiding Officer: Willie Rennie's election as convener will be subject to election by secret ballot.

Fifteen out of 15 convenerhips will be subject to secret ballots.

I have also received two valid nominations for convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. The nominations are Jenni Minto and Emma Roddick.

The election of candidates will be subject to election by secret ballot. Members may cast their votes in committee room 5, which is located outside the chamber on the first floor. Under rule 11.10B.3 of standing orders, I have designated Irene Fleming, head of scrutiny, to carry out the function of supervising the vote. I have also designated Tracey White, head of legislation and parliamentary operations, as a substitute should Irene become unavailable.

When there are two candidates, members should vote for either candidate or abstain. When there is a single candidate, members should vote "yes" or "no" or abstain. Polling stations are open from 2.30 pm until 7 pm this evening.

The count will take place tomorrow at 9.30 am in committee room 5. Candidates and their scrutineers may monitor the count if they wish. I will announce the results at the start of business tomorrow.

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I just wonder what the process is. Can you explain what happens once a vote has been cast when there is only one candidate, so that we know what we are voting against?

The Presiding Officer: If a candidate receives the majority of votes, that candidate will become the committee convener. If the majority is against it, that candidate will not be the committee convener.

Helen McDade: What happens then?

The Presiding Officer: The process is opened again for further nominations. However, to be clear, any other member who is nominated will have to come from the party from which the original member was selected.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. For guidance, would it be possible for the same person to be nominated again in those circumstances?

The Presiding Officer: Yes.

Stephen Kerr: Thank you.

General Question Time

Active Travel (Funding)

1. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of comments made by the First Minister in the Parliament on 2 June that the Scottish Government prioritises active and safe travel routes and the encouragement of cycling, walking and wheeling, for what reason Transport Scotland reportedly

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reduced the revenue funding for regional transport partnerships' people and place programmes by 60 per cent, during the election purdah period. (S7O-00021)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): I thank Patrick Harvie for his question, because it gives me the opportunity to restate what the First Minister said. We support cycling, walking and wheeling, which is why £226 million-worth of investment is going into sustainable and active travel. I am very proud of that—I am sure that he is, too—as the Government ensures that it balances its budget this year.

Patrick Harvie: I am sorry that the cabinet secretary did not choose to answer that question by explaining why the cut took place and why it took place during the election purdah period. I have returned to my job to meet local community organisations that are doing the work that the Scottish Government says it wants to see happen, and which are seeing that their entire funding has been pulled from under them. Unless that decision is reversed, community groups around the country that are delivering the work that the Government says it wants to see happen will lose their staff, their skills, their expertise and all trust in the Scottish Government prioritising the issue. Will the cabinet secretary reverse that decision urgently?

Stephen Flynn: Mr Harvie will be pleased to know that £3.2 million is still going to regional transport partnerships—£1.6 million will be available for local direct awards and £1.4 million is going to bikeability schemes, which all our weans can benefit from. Of course, that forms part of a wider £226 million-worth of investment from the Scottish Government in sustainable and active travel. That is a good thing for his constituents and a good thing for mine.

The Presiding Officer: Julie MacDougall has a supplementary.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I recently met the chief executive of Forth Valley College. It was incredibly harrowing to hear about how apprenticeship courses are being cut—

The Presiding Officer: That is not relevant to this question. We are on supplementaries to the question that Patrick Harvie asked.

Julie MacDougall: I apologise.

The Presiding Officer: Lloyd Melville has a supplementary.

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): My apologies, Presiding Officer. I pressed my button in error, thinking that I would have to do that for my general question later on.

The Presiding Officer: I realise that everyone is finding their feet, including me. I remind members that they should only press their button if they want to ask a supplementary to the general question that has been asked.

Alex Cole-Hamilton has a supplementary.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD): I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree that one of the safest ways to get students from Kirkliston in my constituency to their catchment high school in South Queensferry is via the council-funded coach service that has been operating well there for several years. A decision by the City of Edinburgh Council to remove that service for up to 200 pupils was halted today. Given that public transport timetables do not marry up with the start of the school day, that decision could have led to hundreds of extra car journeys every day.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that families in Kirkliston who pay Edinburgh council taxes should enjoy the same level of council-funded transport services as those in every other community in the city?

The Presiding Officer: That was not quite on the nose for the general question, but do you want to respond, cabinet secretary?

Stephen Flynn: I am happy to answer.

If Mr Cole-Hamilton wishes to write to me, I will write back to him as swiftly as I possibly can.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Service Delivery Review)

2. Joe Fagan (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board regarding the outcome of the service delivery review that is due to be considered on 22 June. (S7O-00022)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): I met the SFRS board chair on 4 June, when we discussed the overall objectives of the service delivery review and the consultation and outreach process that the SFRS has undertaken. Recent large fires in Glasgow and Fife have been dealt with commendably by our front-line

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firefighters, which illustrates the importance of having a properly resourced fire service. However, the fire risks have changed and the SFRS must adapt its services to meet those changes.

To protect the integrity of the governance process, the Scottish Government has not yet had sight of the final review recommendations, which will go to the board for consideration on 22 June. The SFRS has committed to publishing the rationale for the proposed changes, along with a detailed analysis of the public consultation ahead of that.

Joe Fagan: There is profound concern about the potential outcomes of the service delivery review, not least from the firefighters and their union. Given the gravity of the decisions that are about to be made, does the Government agree that there should be full parliamentary scrutiny and that Parliament should have a say on what happens next, before the review is implemented? To that end, would it consider committing Government time to a debate on the next steps?

Neil Gray: These are independent decisions for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to make, but it is open to Parliament to take a view on those matters—in the way that a view is normally taken, for example, on investigations undertaken through the committee structure—or otherwise. Obviously, it is for other parties to determine what they use their Opposition time for. I know that the SFRS's local senior officers will be engaging directly with MSPs on the review. My understanding is that the review is not about making reductions in the number of firefighters or appliances that have been in place since September 2023, but is about ensuring the correct spread across the country to respond to increasing wildfires, grass fires and flooding as a result of climate change.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Ministers previously told Parliament that almost £1 million of specialist wildfire pumping units would be deployed within weeks. A Scottish Conservative freedom of information request later revealed that they were still not operational, during Scotland's worst wildfire season on record. Does the cabinet secretary accept that that was a failure of operational preparedness? Can he confirm whether all eight units are now fully operational?

Neil Gray: I am more than happy to explore that with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in order to ensure that we are in a position to respond to the changing nature of fire and flood risk across Scotland. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's very successful prevention activities, as well as local authority building standards and planning, mean that house fires have decreased—fortunately—whereas, due to climate change, we see a massive rise in grass fires and flooding, and the review is about ensuring that the resources are in the right place to meet that demand, as Mr Kerr has outlined.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I appreciate that these are independent decisions to be made by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, but I am interested to know whether the Scottish Government is looking at the cumulative impact of those changes on, for example, other rescue services such as the coastguard, for which I understand there were proposals to move to a purely voluntary service. Given the significant impact that that could have on constituencies that have so many coastal communities, such as Argyll and Bute, is the cabinet secretary willing to meet me to discuss the matter further?

Neil Gray: The short answer is yes. I am happy to meet Ms Minto or any other member to discuss the matter further. The challenge of multiple organisations drawing on small rural populations is not new. The SFRS works collaboratively with a range of partners, including the coastguard service, on response and resilience in rural areas. Many fire stations share facilities with organisations such as the coastguard, and Scotland's safety and resilience rely on people carrying out roles such as that of an on-call firefighter. I am grateful to the men and women who carry out those roles for doing so. The SFRS is flexible when setting on-call periods so that, wherever possible, multiple volunteer roles can be accommodated. I am very familiar with that, given my island upbringing—as Ms Minto will be, given her experience as a constituency MSP.

GP Walk-in Centres (North Ayrshire)

3. **Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it expects a general practitioner walk-in centre to open in North Ayrshire. (S7O-00023)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): I have committed to expanding the walk-in service programme and will set out how I will do so in the first 100 days of this Government. Health boards were previously asked to generate proposals that considered their populations' needs, taking into account local issues and circumstances. Our experience so far will inform how we commission the next 14 services.

Patricia Gibson: North Ayrshire's people have Scotland's lowest healthy life expectancy. The average adult remains in full health until just 53 years old. More than 28 per cent of people live with a long-term health condition, which is 6 per cent higher than the Scottish average. In view of those facts, does the cabinet

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secretary agree that there is an urgent and compelling case for a GP walk-in centre in Cunninghame South to allow my constituents greater access to healthcare and advice?

Angela Constance: Ms Gibson has made an important point about reducing health inequality by improving access to healthcare. The Government is committed to providing a North Ayrshire walk-in service, which was one of the 14 additional services that were announced. That brings the total number of walk-in services that we are focused on delivering to 30. As I said, over the next 100 days I will set out how I will do that. Health boards were previously asked to generate proposals to meet their population's needs, and our experience thus far will inform how we commission the next 14 services. I would welcome Ms Gibson sharing any proposals that she has with NHS Ayrshire and Arran.

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): Work is well under way in preparation for Glasgow's first walk-in clinic opening. Can the Scottish Government offer an update on when that wonderful resource for the good people of Cardonald will be open?

Angela Constance: I expect the Glasgow site to open later this month. I very much appreciate the health board's hard work to get the services up and running. I am sure that Michelle Campbell will join me in welcoming the opening of the sites and thanking our hard-working national health service staff for delivering them.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): It is 77 miles from Sanquhar to Stranraer, which is a journey that takes a minimum of two hours by car or at least four hours by bus. Given that my constituents will be expected to make that journey to access the GP walk-in centre in Stranraer, does that not expose the policy as being a pre-election ploy that was designed to distract attention away from a primary care system in crisis?

Angela Constance: It is disappointing that Mr Hoy does not welcome the prospect of a GP walk-in service for Stranraer. The important point is that the purpose of GP walk-in services is to free up capacity in the primary care system, so that people across our constituencies and regions can be seen quickly. That will support GP surgeries to provide continuity of care for patients who have on-going conditions. It is, of course, a pilot programme, and there will be valuable learning from it. The programme will be subject to a full evaluation.

Laurencekirk Junction Improvement Scheme

4. Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress of the business plan for the A90/A937 Laurencekirk junction improvement scheme, including when it expects the scheme to move from the development pipeline to the delivery pipeline. (S70-00024)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): I thank Dawn Black for her doughty campaigning on the matter. I reassure her that the Scottish Government is committed to delivering a new grade-separated junction at Laurencekirk as part of a package of additional investment alongside the Aberdeen city region deal.

I advise Dawn Black that Transport Scotland continues to press forward with the necessary procedural and legislative steps to complete the statutory authorisation process. It is essential that those steps are completed correctly. Delivery of the improvements at Laurencekirk can commence only if the project is approved under the statutory procedures, at which point a timetable for its progress can be set, in line with the Scottish Government's annual budget-setting exercises.

Dawn Black: Given that the scheme was approved, in principle, for funding in 2018 and that the last objections to the project were resolved in early 2025, does the cabinet secretary appreciate the restrictions on life that the lack of a flyover at the notoriously dangerous junction over the A90 dual carriageway between Laurencekirk and the A937 Marykirk Road creates for local people and businesses? Will he meet me and local campaigners to further discuss firm funding and timelines?

Stephen Flynn: Yes. Ms Black will know that I am very familiar with the junction, as I drive through it almost weekly. It is important that we allow the statutory process to be followed. Once that has been completed, I would be more than happy to meet Ms Black and the campaigners.

Adult Disability Payment (Support for Applicants)

5. Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what is being done to help eligible applicants for adult disability payment access the support that they need, in light of the reported fall in the proportion of applications approved from 57 per cent to 34 per cent. (S70-00025)

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The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Since adult disability payment was introduced, 45 per cent of applications have been awarded. More than 498,000 people receive ADP, with £6.1 billion being paid to eligible people. That is testament to a compassionate and person-centred Scottish social security system that enables disabled people to access the support to which they are entitled.

Our approach includes the United Kingdom's first online application for disability benefits. Social Security Scotland can gather supporting information on clients' behalf, and it offers online, paper and telephone applications. In addition, face-to-face help is available in every local authority, and we fund independent advocacy through Advice Direct Scotland.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill: I know that Social Security Scotland's approach is definitely an improvement on the UK Department for Work and Pensions scheme, but that does not mean that it is perfect. There is disparity across local authorities, and there are issues when the lack of social security statements blocks people's gateway to vital services—for example, in relation to national entitlement cards or access to work. Can the cabinet secretary assure me that any reviews or further work will ensure that all disabled people, including neurodivergent people, will be able to access the support that they need?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I welcome the challenge to the Government that Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill has made in relation to ensuring that the agency continues to be a learning organisation. I am very proud of what it has delivered, but we are always keen to improve. I hope that I can reassure her by saying that the agency is looking at the reasons why the approval rate has changed over time. One example of such a reason relates to the age profile regarding repeat applications.

We must also bear in mind that, for the first time ever, we have encouraged applications—we are encouraging people to apply. They then have to go through a robust system to ensure that they are entitled to and eligible for the benefit. If it would help the member, I would be more than happy to meet her, along with representatives of the agency, to discuss some of the wider issues that she raised in her supplementary question. There is a lot to go through that I cannot get through today.

Agricultural Businesses (Support)

6. Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support farmers, crofters and agricultural businesses in Angus South and throughout Scotland, in light of the reported rising input costs, pressure on farmgate prices, increased employer national insurance contributions and concerns regarding changes to agricultural property and business property relief. (S7O-00026)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): The Government is committed to supporting active farming and sustainable food production through direct payments, regardless of choices made elsewhere. The 2026 payment strategy maintains the timings for direct payments and Scottish rural development programme funding, which, over the coming five years, will, per the rural support plan, provide certainty, preparation and investment, ensuring that our farmers and crofters have the confidence to invest and prepare for changes.

The Scottish Parliament voted in favour of calling for the United Kingdom Government to reverse the national insurance increase, acknowledging that that increase will likely result in higher costs, job losses and increased prices.

Lloyd Melville: Having visited agricultural businesses in my constituency, such as Newton farm, I know how squeezed farmers and crofters across Scotland are feeling, often by issues outwith the scope of this Parliament. Can the cabinet secretary set out what engagement the Scottish Government has had with the UK Government on those reserved issues? Does she agree that, if we are serious about food security and sustaining rural communities, family farms need certainty, fairness and practical support?

Gillian Martin: Our engagement with the UK Government is ongoing. We have consistently called on the UK Government to reverse the damaging and ill-thought-out decision to increase employer national insurance contributions. Agriculture is not the only sector that is affected by that.

Our officials are working alongside their UK Government counterparts to ensure that Scottish tenant farmers remain exempt from inheritance tax. We remain committed to supporting our farmers and crofters by giving them certainty through our support for active farming and food production, with direct payments. We have brought forward payment dates to pay farmers and crofters at the earliest possible opportunity to assist with cash flow and to give them certainty, which is lacking in other areas.

North Coast 500 (Economic Impacts)

7. Emma Roddick (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the BiGGAR Economics report, "Building a Sustainable Future for the North Coast 500". (S7O-00027)

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The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): The BiGGAR Economics report demonstrates that the north coast 500 makes a significant contribution to the Highland economy by generating almost £100 million annually and supporting more than 1,300 jobs. Indeed, every £1 invested has returned £36 to the local economy. However, the report also underlines pressure on infrastructure and residents, as well as poor visitor behaviour. We are committed to working with partners to build on the benefits of the route while addressing those obvious challenges.

Emma Roddick: I was very concerned to read that a significant percentage of residents—a majority—in the north coast 500 area are negatively impacted, although, as somebody who lives near the canal in Inverness, I am of course not surprised.

While some people clearly benefit significantly from the route, many more are struggling with negative impacts. The balance between the needs of tourists and residents in the Highlands has not yet been struck. What more can the Government do to encourage and support sustainable tourism and discourage the bad behaviour that we so frequently see on the north coast 500?

Stephen Flynn: There is always that conflict between the desire to ensure that people can enjoy the wonderful scenery that Scotland has to offer and the challenge that that imposes on those who live in the communities concerned. That is why the Government has created the rural tourism infrastructure fund, which I know that some projects on the north coast 500 have benefited from. We will continue to work to ensure that the positive impacts of the north coast 500 are realised and that the negative impacts are mitigated in the best possible way.

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): The north coast 500 has been a success for the north Highland economy, but it has also exposed a road network that is struggling to keep pace. There is a £233 million gap across the Highlands between what the council is spending and what it needs to spend in order to repair our roads. We need long-term investment and not short-term patching.

Will the minister commit to providing the level of funding that is required for this nationally important route? Will he agree that the Highland Council visitor levy, if implemented, should result not only in investment in infrastructure but in support for local businesses and improvements in the competitiveness of our visitor economy?

Stephen Flynn: As much as I am tempted to do so, it is not for me to tell any local authority what to do with its money or, indeed, the money that it might potentially raise through any levy. However, I am sure that David Green's words will have been heard very loudly by the local authority councillors in his area.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (Economic Impacts)

8. **Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any implications of the European Union's carbon border adjustment mechanism for Scotland's economy, including what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding the mitigation of any potential threats for Scotland's exports. (S7O-00028)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government supports the aim of the carbon border adjustment mechanisms, or CBAMs, to reduce carbon leakage. However, we recognise that the mechanisms, whether in the UK or the EU, present challenges for businesses. We have therefore met businesses in affected sectors to understand their concerns, which include compliance costs and competitive disadvantages in exporting to the EU, despite efforts to cut emissions. We have written to UK ministers to share the concerns and have consistently urged the UK Government to link UK and EU emissions trading schemes, which should provide EU CBAM exemptions for Scottish businesses.

Alyn Smith: I thank the minister for his answer, but surely he shares my frustration that the UK finds itself between a rock and a hard place on CBAM and everything else, and that it has very little influence on how CBAM has come to be. Does he agree that Scotland's best future is as an independent state within the European framework?

Tom Arthur: I agree absolutely with Alyn Smith and welcome him bringing his tremendous experience and expertise to this chamber, given his previous roles.

We are certainly committed to engaging constructively with the UK Government, and I will meet my UK ministerial counterpart in the coming weeks. However, he is absolutely right to highlight the catastrophic damage that Brexit has inflicted on not just the Scottish but the UK economy, and that, of course, the best future for Scotland is as an independent member of the European Union.

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): I note from the ongoing CBAM discussions that fertiliser is going to be caught up in some of the border adjustments. That is likely to massively increase the cost of

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fertiliser, which is a key input for our farmers. Has the minister reviewed that particular input, and what measures will the Scottish Government use to help to resolve the issue of those costs for farmers?

Tom Arthur: Duncan Massey raises an important point. The Scottish Government convened a round-table meeting with businesses and affected sectors earlier this year. My predecessor wrote to the UK Government prior to dissolution. He did not receive a reply so, this morning, I wrote to the minister of state, and I hope to meet him in the coming weeks. I give the undertaking to the Parliament that, when I do, I will raise not just the issues that have been brought to the chamber this afternoon but the many other representations that I have received on the matter. I am happy to keep Duncan Massey up to date in that regard.

First Minister's Question Time

Back-bench Members

14:38

Knife Crime

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Following the convictions for the murders of John McNab and Kayden Moy—who was killed on Irvine beach, in my constituency, last summer—the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit has said that knife possession increased by 15 per cent among 11 to 15-year-olds between 2020 and 2025. What further measures will the Scottish Government take to tackle the rise in knife crime and to divert young people away from gang membership?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I express my condolences to the family of Kayden Moy for their tragic loss and the suffering that they have endured.

I very much understand the concerns that Patricia Gibson has brought to the Parliament today. The Government takes a range of different measures to address knife crime, not least of which is the support that we make available for education programmes in our schools and in the wider community under the theme of no knives, better lives, as well as a range of other actions, which can lead to imprisonment for individuals who are convicted of knife crime offences. The Government will always review the steps that are in place to ensure that we have adequate measures.

Prior to the election, along with the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, I convened discussions with a variety of different stakeholders about issues relating to knife crime. From those discussions, I am confident that we have a range of appropriate measures in place, but we must constantly keep those under review. At the weekend, the current justice secretary made comments about looking at the question of an amnesty on knife possession, and the Government will give active consideration to that.

Loganair (Inverness and Northern Isles Services)

Emma Roddick (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my concerns about the planned withdrawal of Loganair services between Inverness and the northern isles and about the potential impact that that could have on jobs in Inverness and Nairn—both jobs that are connected to Dalcross and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and those of the skilled workers who must be able to travel to the inner Moray Firth to support our growing energy sector?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand Emma Roddick's concerns. The issue was raised with me last week, and I indicated then that I expected there to be discussions between Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and Loganair to find a collaborative solution. I am encouraged that discussions between the parties have taken place, because that is the best way to resolve commercial issues.

Ministers will be kept apprised of progress. It is important that we support development in and around Inverness airport to ensure the sustainability of employment, to which Emma Roddick referred. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport is meeting colleagues from across the chamber regularly to discuss the issue.

Unpaid Carers (Support)

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): This is carers week, and this year's carers week report found that almost half of carers in Scotland do not feel that their communities are carer friendly. The need for carer-friendly communities was first highlighted in a carers report in 2015. Does the First Minister recognise that more must be done to support unpaid carers in their communities? Can he identify any businesses, organisations or Government bodies that are working on that? What barriers would he identify to Government delivery on that?

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The First Minister (John Swinney): First, during carers week, I record my appreciation to carers for the essential support that they provide in our communities. Without the love, care and attention of carers in our community, we literally could not provide the support that carers provide to individuals in our community. Carers week reminds us all to encourage the contribution that carers make, and I do so happily today.

The Government is investing more than £88 million in local carer support through local authority funding in line with the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. That is designed to be distributed at local level to meet the varying circumstances that exist in different parts of the country. We are also providing £600,000 of support in the current financial year for local carers centres, which give invaluable support to carers. That is in addition to funding from local authorities and integration joint boards. Through those different channels—whether direct funding for local authorities or direct funding for carers centres—the Government is trying to create capacity at local level to support the delivery of assistance to carers in our communities.

Legal Aid (Asylum Seekers and Refugees)

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): Will the First Minister outline what assessment, if any, the Scottish Government has made of the cost of providing taxpayer-funded legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland? Does he consider it fair that taxpayers are funding legal representation for strangers who are accused of crimes, while many Scots struggle to access legal services themselves?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Decisions on legal aid are taken independently by the Scottish Legal Aid Board, in line with the highest standards of scrutiny and cognisance of the responsibilities that we carry, which are underpinned in the Scotland Act 1998, to be compliant with the Human Rights Act 1998 and with the provisions of the European convention on human rights. Fundamentally, Mr Kerr seeks to erode the rights of individuals in our society, and I make it clear to Parliament that I have absolutely no intention of eroding the human rights of individuals, because those rights are the foundation of a civilised society.

Baird Family Hospital and ANCHOR Centre (Delays)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Yesterday, the north-east received the devastating news that the new Baird family hospital and the ANCHOR centre, for maternity care and cancer care respectively, are to be delayed yet again, so that they will now be seven years overdue and at least £300 million over budget. After this Government's catastrophic mishandling at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital and at Edinburgh's sick kids, will the First Minister now personally step in and channel the full weight of the Government to address this disastrous situation and get the new hospitals open?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand the concern that Mr Kerr brings to Parliament, and I share it, because I am deeply aware of the delays to those projects. The issue has been personally explored and examined by me, so let me assure him that the issue is no stranger to my desk. It is an issue about which I am profoundly disturbed.

Mr Kerr commented on the Queen Elizabeth university hospital and the children's hospital in Edinburgh. I contend that the delay to the opening of the children's hospital in Edinburgh was a direct result of the Government's response to the early concerns that were raised about the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, so I do not think that those two issues are directly comparable.

The implications of the construction issues around the Queen Elizabeth university hospital and the essential scrutiny that is required of all these issues are part of what is raising the issues at the Baird and ANCHOR hospitals, because the questions that are being addressed are about the infection control and safety arrangements that must be in place. I know that Mr Kerr will understand the perspective that I am putting here. Those are the substantive issues that are at stake. However, that is resulting in an extraordinary increase in cost, which I find totally unacceptable.

Ministers are actively engaged on the issue. I have a briefing about it, because the issues have been explored by NHS Scotland Assure, which was set up to address the implications of the Queen Elizabeth university hospital situation. However, I air to Parliament my concern that the management of all these questions—to ensure that patient safety is a paramount consideration in our hospitals—is resulting in the presentation of extreme difficulties in the delivery of capital investment projects in the health service. The Government must address and resolve that issue so that we can continue our investment programme in health.

I assure Mr Kerr that there is no lack of attention to this particular question. Indeed, it is troubling me enormously, and I am determined to ensure that we get to a better place as a consequence. If it would help, I would be happy to meet him, with the health secretary, to discuss the issue.

Learning Estate Investment Programme

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Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The learning estate investment programme has improved the school estate and learning journey for young people across Scotland. As the First Minister knows, Argyll and Bute Council has had an application to LEIP for a joint campus in Mull approved. However, will the First Minister commit to a review of the criteria and funding structures to ensure that they reflect the needs of education and the wider community in islands such as Mull?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am familiar with the issues that Jenni Minto raises. During the election campaign, I discussed them with campaigners when I visited her constituency in Oban. I understand the issues that are at stake here.

On the general question of LEIP funding, I think that the criteria are robust and provide the appropriate governance. I accept that, in island community situations such as Mull, there may be a requirement for greater flexibility, and I am prepared to have that issue examined. I hope that that helps. I know that there are some controversies around the locations of schools, but if it would help Argyll and Bute Council to have some flexibility to resolve those issues, I am happy to confirm that in Parliament today.

Care System (Waiting Times)

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): This week, the NSPCC has warned that there is a “baby blind spot” in the care system. That warning followed recent University of Stirling research that shows that children in Scotland wait, on average, more than two years just to get a decision on where they should permanently live. That is four times longer than in England. The reality of that wait is that babies and young children are left without the stability of a permanent home, and those children are then likely to struggle to attach, as well as to give and receive love in later life.

I note that the Scottish Government is committed to reviewing the effect that delays to permanence have on children, but we do not need another review to tell us what we already know. The Promise was based on a three-year all-encompassing care review. We need to take action—

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Can we have a question, please?

Duncan Dunlop: What action will the First Minister’s Government take now to help those mothers and babies who are in need?

The First Minister (John Swinney): This is an essential part of the work to implement the Promise. As Mr Dunlop knows, because he is very familiar with all this work, there is an intense focus on supporting families. It is also reflected in the Government’s commitment around whole family support to ensure that families in difficulty are supported to stay together when it is safe and sustainable for them to do so and to ensure that the appropriate arrangements are in place to care for and support babies and children.

That is part of the commitment that we take forward. Just last week, I had a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic and with the leaders of The Promise Scotland—the independent adviser, Fiona Duncan, and the chief executive, Fraser McKinlay. I assure Mr Dunlop of the Government’s focused approach to implementing the terms of the Promise to improve outcomes for babies and children in our country.

Women’s Healthcare

Kayleigh Kinross-O’Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): At a time when women’s healthcare in Scotland faces sustained challenges, we are concerned about the undermining of progress by external forces. Will the Government confirm that it is committed to expanding abortion care, tackling gendered health inequalities and taking forward planned maternity service reform?

The First Minister (John Swinney): In the Parliament on Thursday, there will be a statement on maternity arrangements by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care. That addresses one of the points that have been raised.

On the availability of abortion services and women’s health services, I confirm the Government’s commitment to ensuring that we continue to develop and enhance the services and support that are available to women. That is an essential part of the priorities of the health ministers in the Scottish Government, and I assure Ms Kinross-O’Neill of the steps that we are taking.

Discretionary Housing Payment

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): One of the cruellest austerity measures that was introduced was the bedroom tax, which has been continued by the Labour Government. It is mitigated through the Scottish Government’s discretionary housing payment. However, in community surgeries, I frequently come across constituents who face crisis and rent arrears and who have not had an assessment for that

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payment but are eligible for it. Will the First Minister work with local government colleagues to ensure the application of an assessment when people originally apply for housing benefit, so that my constituents get the help that they need?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Whenever individuals face financial hardship and there is legitimate scope for the Scottish Government to intervene, I want to make sure that such support is available. Part of that will involve local authorities making sure that the individuals with whom they engage are properly advised about their rights and entitlements.

This year, the Government is making available a record £115 million in discretionary housing payments to support individuals. We will work closely with local authorities to make sure that that financial support gets to those in our society who require it.

Coalsnaughton (Support)

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): On his visit to Coalsnaughton, in my constituency, the First Minister spoke to residents about the anxiety, uncertainty and disruption that are impacting families who have been evacuated following ground movement beneath their homes, yet there is still no resolution in sight. Although any support that might be provided through the Bellwin scheme would be welcome, the scale, shock and duration of the incident are placing exceptional pressure on one of Scotland's smallest local authorities. What additional resources will the Scottish Government provide to ensure that residents continue to receive essential support and that Clackmannanshire Council is not left to bear the costs of this unprecedented emergency alone?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am grateful to Keith Brown for raising the issue and for accompanying me—along with the justice secretary, who leads on resilience matters—on my visit to Coalsnaughton on Friday. In our discussions with Clackmannanshire Council, we saw at first hand the enormous burden that it is addressing in trying to support the residents who have been affected by the evacuation. In a discussion with families who have been affected, we saw the scale of the disruption in the turning of their lives upside down as a consequence of the incident.

From my discussions with Clackmannanshire Council, I am acutely conscious that it is dealing with an exceptional and unforeseen event. At my request, the Deputy First Minister has approved the allocation of £1 million of financial support to Clackmannanshire Council in advance of any Bellwin formula applications, to make sure that the council is equipped financially to provide the support to individuals that is required in the short term, because significant costs are being carried by a very small local authority in Scotland.

I hope that that initial allocation of £1 million will help to support the local authority in its moment of need, and I assure Mr Brown—as I assure the occupants who have been affected—of the Government's sustained engagement with Clackmannanshire Council and the Mining Remediation Authority in the carrying out of the detailed investigation that is required to provide assurance on what has happened in a concerning incident.

The Presiding Officer: Before I take the next questioner, who will be Stephen Kerr, I remind him that the criminal case in question remains active and the sub judice rule is engaged. He should please refrain from commenting on sentencing, which is still to take place, and from sharing information that is likely to identify victims who have not chosen to put their identity in the public domain.

Danielle MacDonald

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Danielle MacDonald has shown immense courage in waiving her anonymity and speaking publicly about her experiences, so that others might not have to endure the same ordeal. Her case has prompted widespread concern and raised serious questions about how victims are heard, supported and protected when they come forward to seek help.

Will the First Minister meet Danielle MacDonald to hear her concerns directly? What action will he take to restore confidence that victims who ask for help will be listened to and protected?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I would be very happy to meet Danielle MacDonald and hear the points that she wishes to raise with me. Mr Kerr will be aware that, in the previous parliamentary session, quite close to the election, we passed new legislation on support for victims and witnesses. That legislation puts the protection and preservation of victims' interests right at the heart of the criminal justice process.

I took extensive evidence about that bill when I sat on the Criminal Justice Committee, and I was impressed by the steps that the Lord Advocate, Dorothy Bain, took to strengthen protection, support and assistance for victims to ensure that they could properly and effectively present their evidence to courts in criminal proceedings. Steps have been taken to enhance the role and experience of victims and the support that is available to them, but I would be happy to listen to Danielle MacDonald about what further steps would assist

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in ensuring that that policy objective, which I am sure Mr Kerr and I share, is taken forward in a meaningful way for individuals.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Waiting Times)

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): Last weekend, I was contacted by my constituent, Cecile, about her son's interminable wait for support for autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. His emotions have become increasingly dysregulated, and the family has been forced to pay for private assessment and medication as they await any support at all from CAMHS. Cecile told me:

"This is what waiting for support can look like. It is not just a name on a waiting list. It is a child becoming more distressed ... families pushed to their limits before meaningful help is available."

Does the First Minister accept that, despite the best efforts of staff, CAMHS are in a dire state? Will he look into this particular case to accelerate this boy's path to treatment?

The First Minister (John Swinney): On the question of CAMHS waiting times, the national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard has been sustained, with 91 per cent of children and young people starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral.

Some of the issues that Jenny Young has raised are broader issues about access to the appropriate levels of service, and engagement with families at the earliest possible opportunity. On that question, I want to make sure that we offer much earlier intervention at a much lower level of intensity—before individuals are judged to require CAMHS intervention—to provide support to families where children are presenting with dysregulated behaviour.

The Government is looking at some models. For example, as I shared with Parliament last week, I visited the services available from Scottish Action for Mental Health—SAMH—at the nook in Glasgow, which is a walk-in facility that provides immediate assistance to individuals. I am not suggesting that that is the answer to the point that Jenny Young is making, but I am saying that the model of early intervention and ease of access is what we need in order to make sure that children and young people receive support at the earliest possible opportunity. Our population health framework's focus on early intervention supports that policy objective, and we will be working to roll that out during this parliamentary session.

Child Maintenance

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Given that this Parliament is responsible for many of the services that support children and families, including education, family law and devolved social security, and in the light of cases such as those faced by my constituents, where lengthy child maintenance disputes have had a significant impact on families despite tribunals ruling in the families' favour, does the First Minister agree that there is a strong case for considering whether responsibility for child maintenance should also sit here in Scotland, alongside the wider services that already support children and families?

The First Minister (John Swinney): There is a strong argument for the case that Mr Bonnar puts to me because we have extensive responsibilities around care and support for children, and I want to make sure that that support can be as comprehensive as possible. The points that Mr Bonnar puts forward are worthy of further consideration to make sure that there is an integrated approach to supporting children and families in Scotland.

University of Edinburgh (Striking Staff)

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): Striking staff at the University of Edinburgh are having their entire wages removed for participating in a marking and assessment boycott, despite that being just one part of their job. Remaining staff who are already overworked have been told to cover for their striking colleagues or go without pay. Does the First Minister agree with me that that is an unacceptable attempt to undermine solidarity between academic staff and that management must respect the rights of its staff to withdraw their labour?

The First Minister (John Swinney): In such circumstances, it is really important that there is good dialogue and engagement between the leadership of organisations and their workforce. I would encourage that dialogue to try to resolve the issues, so that employees can participate fully in their employment and the needs of students and academic interests can be met. Fundamentally, it is a matter for dialogue between the leadership of the university and the staff and trade unions, and I would encourage that dialogue to take place.

Energy Policy

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Job losses have recently been announced at Aberdeen-based energy firm EnerMech. Sadly, there are stories every single week of oil and gas redundancies in the north-east of Scotland, but Labour will not scrap the energy profits levy that is costing 1,000 jobs a month, and

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Westminster will not allow the people of Scotland to control their own energy. With the powers available to him, what will the First Minister do to support Aberdonians who are bearing the brunt of the senseless Westminster energy policy?

The First Minister (John Swinney): There are a number of powers over energy policy—in fact, a whole range of powers over energy policy—that are reserved to the United Kingdom Government. I have made it very clear to the Prime Minister the importance that I attach to the removal of the energy profits levy, which is sucking the economic life out of one of Scotland’s most dynamic and important industries.

Given some of the issues that we are facing in relation to energy supply and security of supply, by not taking steps the UK Government is causing exactly the damage that Mr Middleton puts to me. I assure Mr Middleton that the Scottish Government will do everything that we can to support the north-east economy with the investment that we are making, which is supporting reskilling and new opportunities for individuals in the north-east of Scotland, and we will continue to press the UK Government to remove the energy profits levy at the earliest possible opportunity.

College Sector Funding (Forth Valley College)

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I recently met the chief executive of Forth Valley College. It was incredibly harrowing to hear about how apprenticeship courses are being cut, with the survival of the Alloa campus being put into jeopardy yet again. Inadequate real-terms funding was one of the main reasons cited for Forth Valley College’s recent hardships. The broken funding system also plays a role in disincentivising employers and colleges from creating new modern apprenticeships. On top of committing to sustainable multiyear funding, as recommended by Colleges Scotland’s “2026 Election Manifesto”, can the First Minister confirm whether the Scottish Government plans to review and overhaul the public funding model for Scotland’s colleges, which is so clearly unfit for purpose?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government has provided additional financial support to the college sector in its most recent budget and we have put in place new resources for the Alloa campus to ensure that Forth Valley College is able to sustain its operations in an area of high economic challenge. The Government is taking steps to ensure the sustainability of the college sector.

However, I point out to Julie MacDougall that it is not coherent for her to come to the chamber and ask for more money for the college sector after her leader questioned me, as he did last week, about £2 billion of cuts in public spending. It just does not work that way. Members cannot come to the chamber and ask for more money for investment in public services and then call for tax cuts to reduce public spending by £2 billion. It simply does not add up. That is what we are getting from Reform, and what we used to get from the Conservatives—we will probably still get it from the Conservatives—but it is just not good enough in delivering balanced budgets for the people of Scotland.

United States (Electronic System for Travel Authorization)

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): In recent days, many members of the tartan army have reported that they have suddenly had their electronic system for travel authorization—ESTA—revoked by the United States Government, forcing them to jump through new hoops or even travel for emergency appointments at the US embassy in London. With thousands of Scots, including many in Coatbridge and Chryston, due to leave for the US to attend the world cup in the coming weeks, what is the First Minister doing to ensure that Scots are not unfairly blocked from entering the United States?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I appreciate how frustrating the situation is for any Scotland supporter who has had their ESTA revoked. Although information about individual cases has not been shared with the Scottish Government, I understand that the decision to award an ESTA may change if further information emerges about an application that was not available at the time of the original decision. Unfortunately, in such cases, detailed explanations are not always provided to applicants.

I am aware that the United States embassy has issued advice to individuals who are affected by ESTA refusals, indicating that they may apply for a visa through the FIFA priority appointment scheduling system, or PASS. I have asked officials to convey our hope that the US can resolve the matter so that Scotland’s fans do not miss out. I have asked for specific representations and engagement to be taken forward with the consul general of the United States in Scotland; that has been undertaken, and we will do all that we can to help out to resolve these issues.

Hospitality Sector (VAT)

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): The First Minister is well aware that hospitality businesses do not have their troubles to seek at the moment, with rising input costs on all fronts. However, the United Kingdom already charges VAT at a far higher rate than most other European countries, and many leading organisations have

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launched the “VAT’s the problem” campaign, calling for a cut in VAT to 10 per cent. Will the First Minister join me in backing that campaign and calling on the United Kingdom Chancellor of the Exchequer to cut VAT for those vital hospitality businesses?

The First Minister (John Swinney): It is interesting—[*Interruption.*]*—*that, with all the moaning and groaning going on among members on other sides of the chamber, nobody seems to want to help the hospitality sector as much as Mr Smith does—[*Interruption.*]

Oh, oh—they are all shouting and bawling. They have all come to life at the last minute, Presiding Officer—how reassuring. It is good to see that there is life left in the old dogs around the chamber.

I simply say to Mr Smith—

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Business rates!

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): His memory has gone, and not for the first time.

The First Minister: Mr Sarwar is shouting and muttering at me. I will simply use one phrase to deal with him: employer national insurance contributions have been a disaster—[*Interruption.*]

For all the years that the bawling Stephen Kerr’s party was in office, it never cut VAT on hospitality, so Conservative party members should not come to the chamber with unreasonable expectations.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): I have to say how pleased I am that Alyn Smith was able to ask that question and liven the chamber up. It was a nice ending to the afternoon’s First Minister’s question time, which has now concluded.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics 2024

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a statement by Gillian Martin on the greenhouse gas emissions statistics 2024. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:10

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): I am here today to discuss Scotland’s progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. However, before I go into that in detail, I want to express how pleased I am to return to Government as the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, a portfolio that is of great importance to the people of Scotland.

I am acutely aware of the responsibility that we all have to limit and mitigate the impacts of climate change and to take effective action on its causes. Those impacts are felt by people at home and abroad. We have sadly grown used to witnessing devastating wildfires in places such as California and across southern Europe. However, in recent years, we have seen similar events here in Scotland, including at Dava moor in the Highlands, which last year experienced the first mega wildfire in any of the four nations of the United Kingdom.

We should be in no doubt that such devastation is caused by climate change. However, climate action is not just about reducing emissions; it is also an economic, social and health opportunity that will make people’s lives better. Climate action is creating thousands of jobs, with many more to come. It will provide warmer homes, it has huge potential to reduce the cost of living and it will strengthen the resilience of communities not only to protect themselves against the impacts of climate change but to make their neighbourhoods much nicer places to live in.

I published the climate change plan before the Parliament dissolved at the end of session 6. Notwithstanding how much time and effort it took to create that plan, comparatively, that was the easy part. We now need to drive the delivery of our ambitious policies to decarbonise our society and capitalise on all the benefits and economic opportunities that are before us.

I say “we” because every vote and decision that the Parliament takes will result in us succeeding or failing. I am talking not only about a failure to reach targets but a failure to harness the clear benefits of climate action. Over the years in the Parliament, many of us have reached consensus on targets. However, when it comes to policies and actions to deliver on those targets, even the most benign of actions face political opposition. That is just not good enough. We all need to ask ourselves whether we are a blocker to progress and delivery or an enabler.

Earlier today, we published “Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2024”, which provides us with detail of Scotland’s latest progress on emissions reduction. Those official statistics show that, in 2024, Scottish

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emissions were 50.5 per cent lower than they were in 1990. That is a further reduction of 1 per cent, or 0.4 megatonnes, compared with our position in 2023.

The majority of sectors that were measured in the statistics saw modest reductions in emissions, with the largest reduction being in industry, where there was a reduction of 0.3 megatonnes of CO₂, which was driven by reduced fossil fuel use. However, there were small increases in emissions related to transport and buildings. Emissions from international aviation and shipping increased by 0.2 megatonnes of CO₂, returning to pre-Covid levels, and emissions from domestic transport and buildings each showed very slight increases.

The statistics also continue to show that, between 1990 and 2024, Scotland had the largest reduction in emissions in the UK, at 50.5 per cent. The overall reduction in UK emissions, including international aviation and shipping, was 49 per cent. Emissions in England fell by 50.2 per cent, followed by Wales at 44.4 per cent and Northern Ireland at 28.5 per cent.

Today, we published two further important climate reports. The official statistics publication "Scotland's Carbon Footprint 1998-2022", which measures our domestic and imported consumption-based emissions, shows that Scotland's carbon footprint increased by 1.6 per cent between 2021 and 2022, with equivalent figures for the UK showing 3 per cent growth over that period. "Nitrogen Use Efficiency in Scotland: Annual Report 2026" provides an update on our progress in improving nitrogen use efficiency across Scotland, which is supporting reductions in that significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Those figures tell us something important: progress continues to be made in Scotland. However, we must accelerate the transition. We are bound by law to take action on reducing our emissions, but it is also an economic and social imperative. The prizes are absolutely worth it. In the past few weeks, the Confederation of British Industry and the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit published a report that outlined that Scotland's net zero economy supports 105,000 jobs and contributes £10.2 billion in gross value added.

Tens of thousands of livelihoods in Scotland are already being supported by the transition to net zero. The climate transition is not just an abstract future; it is a driver of economic growth that is already delivering for Scotland and Scottish people today.

Those economic benefits underline the importance of our continued action to reach net zero and reflect the ambitious action that the Scottish Government has already taken.

We have taken action on warmer homes by providing funding for the installation of more than 2,500 heat pumps just last year through the Home Energy Scotland grant and loan scheme.

In transport, as a direct result of Scottish Government funding and enabling private sector investment, Scotland has one of the most comprehensive public electric vehicle charging networks in the whole of the UK, with more than 12,700 public EV chargers.

We are also supporting new industrial opportunities through carbon capture and storage in Scotland, including by providing £3 million of grant funding towards the Acorn project and working collaboratively with industry and the UK Government. However, we must see the deployment of the £200 million that the UK Government pledged to get that off the ground.

We continue to back our farmers and crofters to reduce emissions and improve their bottom line through sustainable farming practices. Our rural areas are already playing a vital role in Scotland's climate transition, with more than 10,000 hectares of peatland being restored in 2023-24 and 53,000 hectares of woodland being planted in the past five years. That action supports rural jobs, restores our natural environment, enables nature-based solutions to the climate crisis to cut emissions and, critically, enhances climate resilience and community resilience.

The climate change plan, our environment strategy and our circular economy strategy form a co-ordinated plan for taking on the climate and nature crisis. My colleague Stephen Gethins will lead on a heat in buildings delivery plan, which will set out the actions that are necessary to meet our ambitious decarbonisation target in that area. It will provide further clarity on how our buildings are heated and will help to stimulate the clean heat market, thereby encouraging the clean heat supply chain.

That action is not just a crucial step towards decarbonising our buildings; it is about making homes warmer, improving the lives of Scottish families and, critically, reducing the scourge of fuel poverty in this country.

By the end of the year, we will publish a route map for deploying negative emissions technologies in Scotland, which will provide a framework for how carbon removals can be developed and deployed to support Scotland's statutory commitment to reach net zero by 2045. That is another market-creation opportunity. It is also a huge innovation opportunity, as it involves technology that can be built and designed here that we can take to the rest of the world.

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The climate change plan, which we published in March, set out £42.3 billion in direct financial benefits for Scotland. That included savings to households through policies such as discretionary bus travel, which the Child Poverty Action Group estimates can save families in Scotland more than £3,000 in the lifetime of a child, compared with families living elsewhere in the UK.

On top of that, the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute estimated that Scotland's climate change plan would provide £8 billion in wider socioeconomic impact through, for example, improved health through physical activity, better air quality and warmer homes.

Whether it is providing thousands of jobs, improving the air that our children breathe or making it more affordable to travel, climate action is already improving daily life across Scotland.

Those who argue that we should give up on net zero are, in effect, arguing that we should give up on warmer homes for families, give up more than 100,000 jobs in the net zero economy and give up billions of pounds in financial benefits for people and businesses across Scotland. The Government will not turn its back on those opportunities, and I hope that members will join me in that.

Today's statistics show continued progress towards our net zero goals, but we need to go faster and further. From island communities investing in renewables to rural areas restoring peatland, cities improving air quality and massive job creation across the country, the benefits of climate action are being felt in every part of Scotland.

Achieving net zero is an investment in our economy, in our homes and in all our futures. That is why I am focused on delivering fair climate action that supports the priorities of this Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow 20 minutes for questions. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I last led on the environment and rural affairs for Scottish Labour in 2014, and I am afraid that, returning to the annual statement on meeting our 2045 targets today, the analysis and the questions for the Government largely remain the same. The Parliament agreed the 2045 targets not because of ideology but because of science. There is clear evidence that, for the future of our country and others around the world, we must address the impact of climate change and reduce our carbon footprint.

However, our progress so far has not been the result of intentional policy—it has too often been a consequence of what is happening anyway. At a time when progress should be faster, it is stalling, and the carbon footprint figure that was published today has actually increased. Friends of the Earth says that it is a “meagre” reduction. Stop Climate Chaos said today that the figures are a “stark confirmation” that action to tackle climate change has been

“nowhere near strong enough or fast enough”,

and the Climate Change Committee called for immediate accelerated implementation.

There is political will in the Parliament to make that happen, but the action so far—the 2,500 heat pumps that were funded last year and the provision of 12,700 electric car chargers—will not deliver the change that we need. At the start of this session of Parliament, with the 2030 targets now in our sight, how will the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary accelerate that action and make sure that we meet our 2045 targets?

Gillian Martin: I welcome Claire Baker to her role, and I look forward to working with her. I very much take to heart what she has said about the will to make progress on the matter.

The answer to her substantive question about how we are going to do that has been laid out in the climate change plan. The climate change plan is, in effect, the road map for all the policies that we will take forward.

I am convening early meetings with my Cabinet colleagues, because the areas that are associated with action to deliver on transport, energy, housing and social policy lie with other cabinet secretaries. We will form a cross-Government group to make sure that we hit the ground running. I will convene a meeting with the relevant cabinet secretaries and their officials in the next couple of days.

I have also reached out to every one of my shadow cabinet secretaries, because I think that Claire Baker's fundamental point is correct. We have made progress in the 10 years that I have been in the Parliament. We are more than halfway to net zero. I do not agree with the position that those things would have happened anyway. A tremendous amount of work has been done on peatland restoration, which is sequestering carbon and stopping leakage into the atmosphere. A great deal of work has also been done on Government support for electric vehicle chargers and heat pumps and for various other measures to help businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.

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I want to work with every individual shadow of mine on our shared goals and ideas, because I do not believe that anyone has a monopoly on good ideas.

The climate change plan was set out in March. However, are there areas in which we can do more? I want to talk to my counterparts across the chamber to work out how we can do that, because it is not just the Government's challenge but Parliament's challenge. It is society's challenge, but it is also Parliament's challenge. Particularly when we have individuals in the Parliament who do not believe in climate action—we have already heard them in the past three weeks—it is ever more important that those who understand the science and realise the imperative around climate action stick together and get action done.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I ask for questions and answers to be shorter.

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): I thank the cabinet secretary for her interesting statement. I will make a couple of points to start with. I note that the emissions levels in the report—the 2024 levels—represent around 0.07 per cent of global emissions, so there is a total-rounding error. I also point out that, in the past five years, Scotland's emissions have barely declined at all. However, its share of global emissions will keep declining as emissions around the world keep increasing, notably in the large economies of China and India.

My question comes from the fact that I massively disagree that this activity is an economic opportunity; rather, it is a massive economic cost for Scotland, which is driving expensive energy and deindustrialisation. We have seen that with the closure of Grangemouth refinery and the Mossmorran plant. The figures in the report show that the largest reduction—nearly 80 per cent—came from use of fuel for combustion. That is basically industry closing down. Has the cabinet secretary reviewed how much of the reduction has been caused by deindustrialisation and how many jobs have been lost? Can she elaborate on that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Again, I ask for shorter questions.

Gillian Martin: I will try to keep my answer short. With respect, for Duncan Massey to say as a representative of North East Scotland that there is no economic benefit to his constituents or to my constituents in the area is, frankly, astounding. In Aberdeen, 12.7 per cent of local employment is supported by net zero activity. In Aberdeen city alone, net zero activity contributes £1.1 billion of gross value added. In Aberdeenshire alone, there has been a £6.8-billion pipeline of energy projects. Those are facts; I have not just plucked those points out of the air.

To say that Scotland is not emitting much compared with global emissions but then ask why we are not doing better is completely and utterly all over the place. Also, to say that climate action is accelerating job losses in other areas is completely back to front. We are making sure that we have the replacement jobs and activity for when we see an increased and accelerated decline in the industries that rely on fossil fuels and the burning of those fuels. That will make Scotland more resilient. Frankly, I would much rather be protecting and creating jobs in North East Scotland, which Mr Massey represents, than turning my back on those opportunities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): A number of members have indicated that they wish to ask a question, so I again ask for questions and answers to be briefer.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Peterhead power station is the biggest carbon emitter in Scotland, but it is also, through its dispatchable energy production, vital for energy security. Carbon capture is the obvious solution, and the cabinet secretary has touched on that. However, what can be done to make the UK Government stump up the £200 million for development that it promised and, more importantly, funding akin to the £22 billion that has been allocated for carbon capture south of the border?

Gillian Martin: Alan Brown alights on something that, when I formerly had responsibility for energy in particular, became the subject of an almost twice-monthly conversation with my UK Government counterparts. The UK Government pledged £200 million for the development of Acorn, but that money is still not flowing. Alan Brown made a really good point. I do not like the phrase “shovel ready”, but Peterhead power station is the most mature of the carbon capture, use and storage projects in the UK, yet other, less mature projects have been given billions of pounds.

The Acorn project is vital to decarbonising Scotland's emitters and delivering a just transition. It could unlock billions in private investment while driving essential progress to net zero. I agree with Alan Brown that we need to get clarity on the £200 million and ensure that we get the project off the ground, as it will create many new jobs, particularly in the place that I am from.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her role. Members on our benches look forward to working with her. However, today is not a day for celebration. Overall, our carbon footprint in Scotland is going up, not down, and it should be going down, faster. The Greens have continually

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pointed out the huge reliance in the climate change plan on technologies that do not yet exist, such as in Acorn with CCUS. I heard what Alan Brown suggested, but we could spend £200 million on carbon capture and storage and still not have a viable technology that delivers carbon reduction. When will the cabinet secretary come up with a plan B—if CCUS does not happen—that will lead to steeper reductions in emissions in transport, home heating and agriculture but also benefit jobs, the economy and the people of Scotland?

Gillian Martin: I will not turn my back on one of Scotland's major innovation opportunities, in CCUS. We have arguably the largest capacity for CCUS under the seabed in the North Sea. We also have a mature project that, frankly, should have been delivered 10 or 12 years ago but has continually had the rug pulled from under it.

I thank Mark Ruskell for his warm wishes. I absolutely want to continue working with him, and I hope that, at the end of today's ballot, he will be successful in becoming the convener of the committee that, if I have this correct, will scrutinise me.

The climate change plan is an evolving document and we will not rule anything out. We will ensure that it is not a static document that sits on a shelf unchanged. We will have to change it depending on the situation and as we find innovations. We will also ensure that we act when we see disappointing results: a 1 per cent emissions reduction for 2024, for example, is not what it should be. We should accelerate more quickly.

I extend the same words to Mark Ruskell that I did to Claire Baker: I want to work with him and his colleagues to ensure that the climate change plan is delivered and that it is enhanced as we progress, so that we get to net zero by 2045.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. I welcome her to her post, and I look forward to once again working with her on her extensive portfolio.

The agriculture budget has faced year-on-year cuts under this Scottish National Party Government. However, in the cabinet secretary's statement, there is a clear expectation that agriculture will continue to reduce emissions and that land use will come under increasing scrutiny, while, notably, there is no clarity on the future direction of livestock policy. The Scottish Government's "Rural Support Plan 2026-2031", which was published at the end of the previous parliamentary session with minimal opportunity for scrutiny, indicated that there will be a shift in funding away from active farming towards environmental schemes during this parliamentary session.

At the same time, we see worrying signals elsewhere. Last week, in England, Ed Miliband expressed support for policies to reduce herd numbers without a matching reduction in meat and dairy consumption, and that will simply lead to cheap imports with a higher carbon footprint. Therefore, given the importance of the beef and sheep sectors to rural Scotland, will the cabinet secretary now give a clear and unequivocal commitment that the Government will introduce policies that actively protect and sustain our national herd and flock, rather than continue with a position in which there are no safeguards in place and a real risk of further decline towards a critical mass cliff edge? Will she set out detailed proposals so that farmers—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): One question is enough, Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson:—finally have the certainty that they need?

Gillian Martin: I thank Finlay Carson for his warm wishes, and I look forward to working with him.

It is not true to say that there have been funding reductions. The Scottish Government will invest more than £1 billion in the rural affairs budget during 2026-27, and we continue to provide certainty to the industry.

Critically, the substance of Finlay Carson's speech, before he asked his questions, was about herd numbers. If he casts his mind back to before the election—I know that the election campaign took a long time and that we were all away from here for a number of weeks—he might remember that I did not take the Climate Change Committee's advice on active policies to reduce herd numbers in Scotland, because I recognised that that would offshore emissions and have a detrimental impact on our agriculture. With my officials and Cabinet colleagues, I have formulated a climate change plan that does not depend on anything that he has described as happening elsewhere in the UK.

I will continue with that approach. Mr Fairlie will be working with me on how we sustain active farming. We will give direct payments for active farming. We will make sure that we support farmers in decarbonising their activities and in improving their bottom lines as a result of those activities. I look forward to Finlay Carson scrutinising me on that.

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement, and I welcome her to her role.

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I very much share the cabinet secretary's ambition in relation to climate change requiring sensible and practical solutions, not ideological blockages. However, the Government repeatedly failed to meet the majority of its climate change targets in the previous parliamentary session.

The cabinet secretary talked about making homes warmer. In my Edinburgh Northern constituency, many people live in old tenements, where it is much more difficult to get consensus on insulating homes and upgrading heating. Will the Government establish a specific fund to help those who are most in need with the costs of insulation and heating upgrades? How will the Government make progress on retrofitting tenements in this parliamentary session?

Gillian Martin: I thank the member for her warm wishes, and I welcome her to her role in the Parliament.

On retrofitting and housing quality, I will be working with my Cabinet colleagues, including Shirley-Anne Somerville, who will lead that work. Stephen Gethins, who is sitting beside me, will take forward the strategy on heat in buildings.

The member pointed to the fact that reducing emissions is not a role for only one cabinet secretary, the Cabinet or the Government; there is a role for the Parliament, local authorities and private enterprise. We need a whole-society change, but there is also a whole-society opportunity.

On fuel poverty and warmer homes, I think that we can all agree that action to decrease bills and provide drier and warmer homes will have an impact on generations of families. The Government is very serious about tackling that issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): A number of members still wish to ask questions, so we will need shorter questions.

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): I congratulate the cabinet secretary on her role. She recently visited Blawhorn Moss national nature reserve in my Bathgate constituency to mark world peatlands day and celebrate Scotland exceeding its annual peatland restoration target. Will the cabinet secretary, having seen at first hand the innovative restoration work at Blawhorn Moss, outline the contribution that peatland restoration is expected to make towards reducing Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions? What further support will the Scottish Government provide to expand that work?

Gillian Martin: As Pauline Stafford said, I visited Blawhorn Moss last week, and I thoroughly enjoyed hearing from people from the peatland action project about their partnership work with the Government, with innovative solutions being deployed to rewet peatland, make it a haven for wildlife and protect neighbouring communities from flooding.

This year, the partnership between the Government and the peatland action project restored 15,448 hectares of degraded peatland, which is the equivalent of 30,000 football pitches—for those who care about football. That exceeded our programme for government target by more than 3,000 hectares. The climate change plan sets out how we will protect, manage and restore Scotland's peatlands for climate, nature and people, and it details our ambitions to restore more than 400,000 hectares by 2040.

The importance of peatland cannot be underestimated. It is an emitter when it is degraded, and it is a sink when it is rewetted. We need a double whammy of opportunity in sequestering carbon for Scotland through peatland restoration activities.

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): My entry in the register of interests will show that I run a crofting business that is in receipt of agricultural support.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to supporting farmers and crofters to reduce emissions, and I listened carefully to her response to Finlay Carson's question earlier. Does she share my concerns that the fall in emissions in agriculture that was published today is largely attributed to a drop in livestock numbers, which has worrying implications for Scottish agriculture? Does she agree with me that the Scottish Government must deliver policy that maintains a critical mass of livestock across the country to support the supply chain and our rural economy?

Gillian Martin: I welcome Donald MacKinnon to his role, and I look forward to working with him. The simple answer to his question is yes. I had discussions with the Climate Change Committee, and it gave us advice on what we should put in our climate change plan. It said that there should be policies that actively reduce livestock numbers. We said no: Scotland is an agricultural nation, and we must maintain our herd numbers.

As Donald MacKinnon will know, there are many reasons why herd numbers are coming down. We need to ensure that our direct payments are associated with active farming and that we give farmers and crofters the tools not only to decarbonise and to reduce their methane emissions in particular, through innovation and using support payments, but to ensure that their farms are working farms that produce food for our nation.

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I hope that some of our policies across the Government, particularly on local food procurement for parts of the public sector, will improve that situation for farmers in Scotland.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): I will reduce my question, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the cabinet secretary to her role, and I declare an interest as someone who believes in the science of climate change.

I welcome the Climate Change Committee's approval of our revised climate change plan, with its focus on feasible and deliverable change. However, I am slightly dismayed at the lack of progress, and I accept the Climate Change Committee's view that we must accelerate action. I would like to hear some detail from the cabinet secretary about the areas where she thinks acceleration in action can be focused, and about what she would hope to prioritise over the next 12 months.

Gillian Martin: We need to ensure that our pathway is ambitious, deliverable and central to the Government's approach. Being ambitious on its own is not good enough. Our pathway has to be fair, deliverable and achievable. We have worked closely with the Climate Change Committee, and its advice has informed our emissions trajectory and the policies that are set out in the climate change plan, with a couple of exceptions. I am meeting the committee's chair in the next couple of days. The plan is to have a road map for what Heather Anderson is asking me to consider.

One area where we are doing a great deal of work is the decarbonisation of transport, and I will be working closely with my Government colleagues on that. I will be having a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, who is sitting beside me, on what is happening in the transport area. That represents a huge opportunity for change, and indeed for making businesses more resilient to global shocks that are outwith our control when it comes to fuel prices.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): Scotland has consistently missed its woodland planting targets. The statement shows that, and the statistics show that we are still doing that. I welcome the cabinet secretary to her role. Can she tell us how she is going to improve the Government's record in this area?

Gillian Martin: I have to take slight issue with the assertion that we are missing targets. We are actually doing exceptionally well when it comes to woodland planting.

It is of great comfort to me that Graham Simpson seems to remain as he was in the previous session, in that he has an understanding of climate action as an imperative for this session. I wonder how he is going to get on with the climate change deniers in his group, and I wonder—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Cabinet secretary, could you please answer—

Gillian Martin: I wonder how he will square his—

Duncan Massey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Gillian Martin: You cannot intervene on an answer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): There is a point of order.

Gillian Martin: I am answering a question. Can I continue?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): There has been a point of order, cabinet secretary. Apologies—you perhaps did not hear.

Duncan Massey: My point of order is on standing order rule 7.3.1, which is about "courteous and respectful manner". We have been extremely clear that we support the current Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Mr Massey, this is not an opportunity for a speech. You have made your point about courtesy, and I reiterate that all members must be courteous to one another at all times. I will bring in the cabinet secretary to answer the question.

Gillian Martin: If Graham Simpson wants to meet me to go through the actions that we are taking on woodland and forestry creation, I am happy to do that.

I want to note that I was treating Graham Simpson with the utmost respect, because I worked very closely with him on these issues in the previous parliamentary session. I was merely pointing out that it is a relief that there is someone in the Reform party in this Parliament who still believes that climate change needs to be addressed through climate action.

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Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): The cabinet secretary referred to 105,000 jobs and the contribution to the economy of £10.2 billion from net zero-related industries. Does she agree that those figures are demonstrative of the renewables sector's important role in supporting economic growth and employment while working towards net zero by 2045?

Gillian Martin: I absolutely agree with Stuart McMillan. Those figures are a powerful demonstration of climate action and economic growth going hand in hand. Scotland's vast renewable energy potential is one of our greatest economic opportunities. Many people in the rest of the world do not have the geography to harness that we do, and they do not have the hinterland of working in subsea capacities that we have. There is an opportunity for us to continue to expand the sector and its wider, magnificent supply chain, along with associated industries such as clean transport and heat, which are expected to deliver thousands of well-paid sustainable jobs across Scotland, including in Stuart McMillan's constituency, as well as to secure lasting benefits for communities.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her role, which brings together climate action and rural affairs.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the important role that our farmers and crofters must play in reducing emissions by increasing tree planting and peatland restoration. Today's figures show that progress is being made, but it is only a starting point, and land managers need long-term certainty to plan their business activity. Will the cabinet secretary set out how large and small land managers across Scotland will be supported to scale up climate-friendly actions such as tree planting and peatland restoration?

Gillian Martin: I thank Ariane Burgess for her good wishes. I look forward to continuing to work with her on this most important of areas. I know how passionate she is about it, as am I.

We will make sure that we continue with direct payments. We have been able to give payments early to growers, in particular where active farming is happening. Of course, active farming must be sustainable farming, and the agricultural and land management sectors, by virtue of managing our land, have not just the biggest responsibility but the biggest opportunity to assist us in getting to net zero and improving the environment for everyone. They also create hundreds and hundreds of jobs, particularly in rural Scotland, including the area that Ariane Burgess represents.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The final question that I can call is from Colm Merrick.

Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I congratulate the cabinet secretary on her new role. As she knows, cars remain the largest contributor to emissions in Scotland, although, thanks to SNP Government investment, Scotland has led the way in the UK in the provision of public electric vehicle charging points. How is the Scottish Government continuing to encourage an uptake in the use of electric vehicles? Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns about the impact of the UK Government's new tax per mile on EVs, particularly on people living in rural areas?

Gillian Martin: I thank Colm Merrick for that question, the content of which very much exercises me, particularly the UK Government putting a motor tax on EV drivers and penalising them, when we should be encouraging the take-up of electric vehicles so that we can further decarbonise transport.

This is particularly important in rural areas, which may not have transport links that meet everyone's needs. People in rural areas need to use cars so, when they can, they should have the opportunity to purchase an EV. The Scottish Government has invested more than £70 million in public EV charging since 2011 and increasing private sector investment has crowded in as a direct result of that, so that we now have one of the most comprehensive charging networks in the UK.

However, per-mile taxation is damaging not only Scotland's decarbonisation objectives but those of the whole of the UK, because it costs the average EV driver in the UK £350 per year, with some drivers in Scotland paying more than £50 more, simply because of our geography. I am also unsure how it is going to work, so I have lots of questions. I would like to see it being scrapped and I would like to see EV take-up being incentivised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I apologise to those members I was unable to call during this item of business.

Growing Scotland's Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy. I call Stephen Flynn to speak to and move the motion.

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15:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): When I made the decision to stand for election to this Parliament, I did so because I believe that our nation's future is full of potential and that it is our job to ensure that that potential is not just spoken about in homes, parks and pubs across Scotland but is delivered by those of us fortunate enough to serve in this Parliament. That means having good jobs with good wages, having stronger businesses with the opportunity to grow, and ensuring that the generations that follow our own enjoy better living standards than we do.

Growing Scotland's economy is the key to unlocking that opportunity and delivering that potential. Many of my generation on these isles and of the generations that have followed since—it feels as if there have been a fair few—have neither seen nor felt an economy that works.

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

Stephen Flynn: They are the generations that entered the world of work during a global financial crisis and lived through the austerity years of Cameron and Clegg that followed. It is probably apt that, at that point, I give way to Rachael Hamilton.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind the member of the convention that interventions are not taken during a first speech and that this is Mr Flynn's first speech.

Rachael Hamilton: I apologise, but I am grateful to Stephen Flynn for taking the intervention. Does Mr Flynn agree with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland, which has basically said that we cannot tax our way to growth?

Stephen Flynn: There is an irony in Rachael Hamilton intervening when I was making a point about austerity when we consider the damage that was done by her party to the United Kingdom's economy, to Scotland's economy and to Scottish families, and in her choosing to blame others when she could have taken responsibility for the decisions of the Conservative Government.

We have had not only the austerity years of Cameron and Clegg; we are also the generation who watched hopelessly as Farage and Johnson dragged us from the European Union, who remained rooted to our homes during the pandemic and who grew angry as Vladimir Putin brought terror back to Europe and Liz Truss brought insanity to number 10.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Will Mr Flynn take another intervention?

Stephen Flynn: I am sure that Mr Hoy is away to apologise for Liz Truss.

Craig Hoy: I thank our newbie for giving way during his maiden speech. Will he now take the opportunity to apologise to the tens of thousands of oil and gas workers in the north-east who have lost their jobs as a direct result of this Government's failure to support our oil and gas sector?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Mr Hoy, I remind you that you must treat all members with courtesy at all times.

Stephen Flynn: I gave Mr Hoy the opportunity to apologise for Liz Truss, but I notice that he chose not to do so, which is something that I have no doubt will sit heavily on the minds of voters across Scotland in the coming weeks. How dare a member of the Conservative Party—the party responsible for the energy profits levy and for the failed environmental risk assessment that blocked the Rosebank project from being taken forward—come to this chamber and blame anyone else for that party's actions? The reality is that Scotland's oil and gas industry has contributed nearly £400 billion to his UK Treasury, and people have lost their jobs despite that. That is on him and his party, and nobody else's.

The people in the generation I have spoken of have been buffeted by events and they have been promised change from Westminster throughout their adult lives, but they have never seen it delivered. Let me be clear that, for as long as the great levers of any state that control trade, migration, energy, tax and employment law are held by others far removed from Scotland's reach, we will always be held back from being able to deliver the full potential that a growing economy can deliver and that our nation deserves.

That becomes ever more frustrating when we consider just how strong our foundations are. Let us be in no doubt that Scotland starts from a position of strength. Our nation is awash with investment and innovation, from the SaxaVord spaceport sat atop the very tip of the Shetland isles in Unst to the Center Parcs development down south by Hawick, and from the world-leading subsea oil and gas and renewables engineering of Aberdeen in the east to the glory of Scotland's malts in the Western Isles. Across Edinburgh and Glasgow lie financial institutions that are the envy of many, and that is before we spread our view out across our land in celebration of our food, farming and fishing. Indeed, all of us in the chamber—although

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perhaps not Mr Hoy—could rightly celebrate success stories from each of our constituencies time and time again. We all know them: the local businesses with the global connections and the global brands.

The task now is to use the powers that we have to build on those underlying strengths and channel them into growth that the Scottish public can feel. The next phase of this Government's delivery must be about pace, outcomes and reforms. As I have said, Scotland does not lack assets or ambitions, but we know that progress is all too often slowed by the complexity of the state and fragmented support systems that act as a barrier. Our job now is to cut through that complexity, accelerate delivery and align the Government, public bodies and partners behind the shared goal of higher sustainable growth that is felt in people's day-to-day lives.

First, we must continue to unlock investment. We all know that Scotland continues to have the highest levels of foreign direct investment outside London. We all know that Scotland is a high-confidence, stable and attractive environment for many investors. We all know that it was the Scottish Government that put those conditions in place. However, we can, and we must, go further to make Scotland the best place in the United Kingdom to do business, and to create an environment where we can make it easier to turn investor interest into real projects and real jobs. Our major projects office will help to make that vision a reality.

Secondly, we must boost productivity. If we are serious about attracting investment, about being the best place on these isles to do business and about competing internationally, we must continue to invest in making sure that the workforce of today is ready for the work of tomorrow, and skills are key to boosting productivity. That means working with our schools, colleges, universities, research institutions and businesses to ensure that our young people, those who are out of work and, indeed, those who are looking for a change know exactly what skills they need to get on in life, and where best to get them.

However, skills are only part of the story, because they are worth having only if there is somewhere to use them—

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Stephen Flynn: —and that is why, thirdly, we will back the industries of the future.

Talking about the future, I will give way to Willie Rennie.

Willie Rennie: He is a charmer, is he not?

On the point about skills and the workforce, what is the cabinet secretary's answer to the high levels of economic inactivity in the workforce aged 16 to 64? I have not heard anything yet that gives me confidence that the Government is on top of that issue.

Stephen Flynn: The point that Mr Rennie rightly makes is incredibly important, and it is no surprise that he chose to make it. I tried to reference in my remarks the importance of working across institutions and with business to bring people together to make sure that, from the youngest to the oldest, people have the skills that they require to get back into the workplace. I do not think that anyone could put their hand up and say that there is an easy answer in that regard, but we are—and we will be—willing to engage across the chamber and across civic society and business in Scotland to ensure that that happens. I am looking forward to working with Willie Rennie in that regard.

I return to the industries of the future. Our vision must go beyond simply adopting new technologies to, instead, helping to create and commercialise them. Areas such as life sciences, digital and artificial intelligence, critical technologies such as quantum and photonics, advanced manufacturing and—of course—the energy transition offer major opportunities for high-productivity and high-value jobs.

We must be able to build on our existing strengths in energy, engineering and innovation while opening up new opportunities in sectors such as hydrogen, carbon capture and storage, and offshore wind. That is how growth is felt across generations; it is not just announced from a podium. We must wrap an arm around the supply chains in those sectors, to ensure that they grow, innovate, export and stay anchored right here, in Scotland, for Scotland. Our high growth unit will help to make that scale-up possible. It will sit directly adjacent to the office of the First Minister, so there will be nowhere to hide.

Fourthly, we will continue to expand Scotland's global reach. Given that we are a small, open economy, our long-term growth depends on selling more goods and services to the world and harnessing our export potential. That outward-looking tradition runs deep, and there is a golden opportunity in the coming weeks to harness the export potential of our biggest single-nation export market, as Scotland heads to America for the world cup. We all know that success abroad will help to bring success at home, and our task is to help more Scottish firms succeed in such global markets.

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Fifthly—I am sure that there will be agreement across the parties on this—we must reform the system so that it supports growth rather than holding it back. When done well, the planning system is an effective tool in delivering economic growth, but businesses and investors need a system that is quicker and gives more certainty; regulation that is more predictable and less complicated; and support that is less fragmented. Certainty breeds confidence, but risk and delay do the opposite. Reform matters because delivery matters and because growth will be felt only if Government acts with urgency, clarity and purpose.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): The cabinet secretary has made a good point about speeding up the planning system; however, we have been talking about that for years. Does he have any specific proposals for achieving it?

Stephen Flynn: If Graham Simpson has been talking about it for years in the chamber but not been able to deliver it, that may be a reflection on his abilities. However, I am new here, and I give him the commitment that we can—and, indeed, will—do so. In short, we want the planning system to act as an enabler rather than a barrier.

I am conscious that, to anyone who lives near Mossmorran or Grangemouth, or in my home city of Aberdeen, all of this may feel a mile away from their lived reality, in which deindustrialisation is leaving them without hope for the future or the certainty that they crave for their family. They want to hear that their jobs of today can be protected so that they can have access to the jobs of tomorrow. I want them to know that we hear them and will do our part to deliver the opportunities for a future that they and their communities deserve.

None of that will be easy. We can shout about the energy profits levy that is choking investment and creating a cliff edge for jobs. We can yell that energy security matters, and that jet fuel from Grangemouth would have been better than jet fuel from outside Scotland. However, to be successful, we need Westminster to listen. Although it may well try to ignore this Parliament, we will not let it do so, because the issue matters so much to those residents and to Scotland's future.

When I was elected to this Parliament, I could barely hide my delight—so much so that I could not even get my words out when I was sworn in. The reason why I was so happy was because I believe that this Parliament can deliver on Scotland's potential. To be a part of that story should be a special thing for us all, delivering a productive, dynamic, prosperous Scotland, where growth is a real thing that changes people's lives through the jobs that they can get, the homes that they can afford, the businesses that they can build and the confidence that they can have in their future. That is not just my mission; it should be this Parliament's mission.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that higher economic growth is essential to delivering long-term prosperity, tackling child poverty, improving public services and achieving climate ambitions; agrees that supporting enterprise, investment, innovation and trade is key to maximising productivity and increasing sustainable and inclusive economic growth; supports action to remove unnecessary barriers to success; acknowledges Scotland's economic potential, including its key strengths in sectors such as energy, food and drink, financial services, and space, and endorses a continued focus on economic growth to build a more resilient, prosperous, and fairer Scotland for all.

16:05

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I am not sure whether I have had the chance before to welcome you to your place, Deputy Presiding Officer, but I do so now. I also welcome the cabinet secretary to his place. For a first speech, I thought that he did very well.

I agree with Mr Flynn on the fundamental points of his premise. I believe that economic growth is important, because it is about the potential of this country, and that potential is measured in wages and jobs. We must all be focused on that, but it is complicated. I welcome that the cabinet secretary has added transport to his portfolio, because in previous parliamentary sessions, the economy has had a name check in the brief, but it has not necessarily had connections to the parts of policy that can directly impact economic growth.

In a sense, I do not envy the cabinet secretary his task, because it is complicated. It is a big portfolio, and he has a task ahead of him. It reminds me that I was once told by a former boss that, given the complexity of his job, he was not there to be liked but to be effective. I say to the cabinet secretary that he is halfway there already.

If we are to confront this issue, we need a bit of frankness and candour as we look at the opportunities that are in front of us. First, I say to the Government that it needs to confront some of the economic context. Time after time, the Scottish Fiscal Commission has made the point that there is a £785 million fiscal performance gap, which it defines as Scotland's wages growing more slowly than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. Let us put that in context. That £785 million could fund Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise,

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South of Scotland Enterprise, the Scottish National Investment Bank and Skills Development Scotland combined. We need to address and confront that gap.

We must also acknowledge Scotland's relative economic performance. It is a fact that, between 2014 and 2024, Scotland's economy grew by 8.4 per cent, compared with 14.3 per cent across the UK. Let us be clear—we need to be candid on all fronts—that that correlates with a significant decline in oil and gas extraction from the North Sea. Ultimately, we need to recognise the scale of the oil and gas sector and the fact that it is a declining sector, whether we like it or not, because of geology, and we must focus on how we replace those jobs. They are high-paid jobs that pay well above the median wage, and we have a challenge to replace them, regardless of our views on climate change. That is the reality of the North Sea.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am listening carefully to the member's point. He will presumably acknowledge that the Labour Government's ban on new exploration and production will not help the oil and gas industry one bit.

Daniel Johnson: The member completely fails to acknowledge the bodged process that the previous UK Government put in place, which is why those licences ended up in the Supreme Court in the first place. If I am coming to the chamber with candour and honesty, I would ask that the member does the same.

We need to focus on three core things. The first is the economics of place; the second is around people and skills; and the third is partnership.

Craig Hoy: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Daniel Johnson: I apologise, Mr Hoy; I would like to make a little bit of progress.

For all three things, we have the powers here, but we fail to focus on them. On place, if we examine the figures, we see that there are parts of the United Kingdom where gross domestic product per head is growing far faster than it is in Scotland. Greater Manchester has had a GDP-per-head growth of 15.4 per cent in recent years, and in West Yorkshire it is 7.5 per cent, whereas Scotland's GDP-per-head growth in a similar period has been 4.3 per cent. We need to look at the Government's pledges to put regional economic partnerships on a statutory footing, but we must consider what they will do and how they will work. What power from this place will we push out so that they can deliver in partnership with industry?

The cabinet secretary was right to point to the importance of people and skills, but the reality is that the number of modern apprenticeship starts is falling and we have barely got going on upskilling and reskilling. Yet we have to wait for the organisational reform of SDS into the Scottish Funding Council. I worry that we will not have the scope or capacity to implement the changes that we need in terms of upskilling and reskilling, let alone deal with the increasing difficulties that young people face in getting into the workforce at all.

On partnership, we need a much greater focus on the issue of the time and uncertainty that the Government introduces into investment pipelines—I accept that the cabinet secretary referenced that. Let us take renewables: it takes seven to 10 years from start to finish to get projects through the planning and consenting regime, in comparison with Norway, where similar projects take three to four years to go through that process. We need a comprehensive mapping exercise from the Government, understanding where it has touch points and where it increases time and uncertainty. More importantly—I say this to people from all political parties—I think that there is an overwhelming tendency for politicians to assume that everyone in business is driven only by the profit motive. Actually, the profit motive is vital for business. Yes, we need to be cautious about profiteering but the fact is that we need to work in partnership and understand how businesses can generate a return, because that is what economic growth ultimately requires.

My time is up, but I will say that this is perhaps a hopeful start. We need a renewed discussion around the economy, one based around decentralisation, people and partnership.

I move amendment S7M-00290.3, to insert at end:

“; notes that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has projected Scotland's 'Tax base performance gap' for 2026-27 to be £785 million while data shows that GDP increased by 8.4% between Q2 2014 and Q2 2024 for Scotland compared to 14.3% across the UK as a whole, and believes that understanding and addressing these gaps is imperative in order to grow jobs, wages and opportunities, as well as maximising revenue for funding public services in Scotland.”

16:11

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): I extend my congratulations to Stephen Flynn on his new role as cabinet secretary. I very much welcome the debate on growing Scotland's economy, because I believe that a genuine focus on growth has been desperately missing from this Parliament, and certainly from Scottish National Party Administrations, for a long time. I hope that Mr Flynn brings a fresh approach. I was encouraged by some of his words, so I am thankful for that.

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This Parliament should be united on one fundamental truth, and that is that higher economic growth is essential. It is essential if we are serious about delivering long-term prosperity for everyone, serious about driving jobs and opportunity for everyone, and serious about improving our public services for everyone, yet the reality is that Scotland today faces stagnant growth, causing stagnant wages and resulting in far too few opportunities for people—especially young people.

Too many people feel that the economy is simply not working for them and that they do not have a future. Partly as a result, we now have unsustainable numbers of people who are out of work and relying on benefits. Scotland, with a working-age population of around 3.6 million, has only 2.6 million people in work. After allowing for students, carers, retirees and those who cannot work, we are still left with about half a million people who are effectively locked out of opportunity and prosperity.

Craig Hoy: Will the member take an intervention?

Duncan Massey: I will move on with my arguments first, thank you.

That is a national failure and one that must be addressed by growth and coupled with reform of the benefits system.

Another of the core reasons for the underperformance is that Scotland has become the highest-taxed part of the UK. Whether it is income tax, property taxes or other costs such as minimum unit pricing for alcohol, the cumulative burden is clear. Our taxes are too high and the system is too complex. It is riddled with cliff edges that discourage people from taking on extra work or progressing in their careers. It makes Scotland less competitive and less attractive, particularly when we try to recruit skilled professionals from the rest of the UK. Nowhere is that clearer than in our national health service, where doctors and consultants are increasingly reluctant to take on additional shifts or even to relocate here.

The reality is simple. The most expensive purchase that any person makes in their life is not their home, their car or their holiday—it is their Government. Unlike any other purchase, they have no choice but to pay for it. Indeed, last week, we heard, thanks to the—

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Duncan Massey: Yes, I will.

George Adam: Surely, to use the member's metaphor that the biggest purchase that an individual will make will be their Government, we could say that, every five years, we get a chance to make that choice in an election. The SNP has just won an overwhelming victory in the election, so the member is talking complete and utter nonsense, is he not?

Duncan Massey: I am not sure that it was overwhelming, and I am not sure that it was a vote on the tax system of Scotland.

Anyway, we heard last week, thanks to the Mandelson files, that the Labour Government mainly sits around asking, "Who can we tax in order to pay benefits to others?" If anything, this place seems to embrace that approach, but on steroids. Even any thoughts of controlling the benefits bill are totally forbidden—

Craig Hoy: Will the member take an intervention on that specific point?

Duncan Massey: Sure.

Craig Hoy: Independent analysts have shown that the Scottish child payment is resulting in people choosing not to take on extra shifts, giving up work entirely or turning down pay rises. Would the member, therefore, join me in imposing a two-child benefit on the Scottish child payment?

Duncan Massey: I will not be drawn on specific policies, but the whole benefit system obviously needs reviewed, and that is going to be a key point for the Government.

Another reason for the lack of growth is the high cost of our energy. Despite some of the rhetoric that we have heard about our energy system, we currently have a struggling system that delivers through an ever-more fragile grid and is dependent on huge subsidies from the UK Government. It is driving some of the highest energy costs in the world, especially industrial energy prices, which are hurting consumers and businesses across the board.

Most obviously, we are deindustrialising at a rapid rate. I was encouraged by the fact that we have heard Grangemouth refinery and Mossmorran mentioned. The Alexander Dennis bus factory in Falkirk has also closed down, because we have made most energy-intensive businesses simply unviable in Scotland. Those problems are caused not by gas price spikes but by net zero policies, in particular very expensive subsidised intermittent renewables. Renewables are a welcome part of the mix, but the more accurate Office for National

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Statistics figures show that we are simply not getting the jobs to replace the industries that are being shut down.

We have talked about North Sea oil and gas, which is one of our great industries that has driven so much engineering excellence. It is being crushed by deliberate policy choices, whether it be the Scottish National Party's presumption against oil and gas; the Scottish Government's continuing refusal to unambiguously back new projects or new drilling; or the energy price levy, which was introduced by the Tories, increased by Labour and supported by virtually every party in the chamber, apart from Reform.

Liam Kerr: Would the member confirm that, while he was a member of, and got his start in politics with, the Conservative party, he unequivocally backed Conservative party policy?

Duncan Massey: I did not, and that is, of course, one of the main reasons that I left.

Let us move on to another area: let us talk about Europe. In this place, it seems to be a matter of faith that a failing, declining European Union is somehow a great place to be. I highlight that, over the period since Brexit, Britain has had higher gross domestic product—

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Duncan Massey: Not just yet—I will expand my argument.

Alyn Smith: Oh, please do.

Duncan Massey: I highlight that, over the period since Brexit, Britain has had higher GDP growth than all the other major EU economies—admittedly, it is well behind the fast-growing economies of the world such as America and countries across Asia.

The well-known meme goes like this: the US innovates, China replicates and the EU regulates. That is now very unfair on China, which, one could say, is now innovating the entire world, but it is perfectly fair on the EU, which is now a sick man blocking innovation across the board in areas such as AI and is—with the exception of nuclear France—energy and resource poor and has an ageing population and limited military capability. The EU now makes up only 13 per cent of global GDP and, like the Titanic, it is going down towards irrelevance. The tragedy is that many people in the chamber want to get back on.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Duncan Massey: I will take the intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Mr Massey, I am afraid that you are in your closing few seconds.

Duncan Massey: I will close here. I agree that Scotland has enormous potential. We are blessed with many business sectors that are generally world class and have great potential to move on. However, we are not realising that potential. Scotland needs to once again be one of the best places in the world to do business, for people to invest and for people to come and work.

First, we must fix our tax system—we need to be competitive again. That means getting rid of the six bands and moving back to three, removing the punitive cliff edges and aligning rates to at least the level in the UK. Secondly, we need a pragmatic energy policy that is focused on delivering cheap, abundant and reliable energy. Thirdly, we need to maximise our oil and gas resources in the short and medium term while planning for a transition that includes nuclear power, with renewables playing a complementary, not dominant, role.

We must also ensure that our benefits system—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): You need to conclude.

Duncan Massey: I will conclude. We must reform our benefits system to ensure that work always pays and that opportunity is always there for everyone.

We must be a Scotland where young people have opportunities—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I am sorry, Mr Massey. You need to wind up.

Duncan Massey: This is the last sentence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I am afraid that you have already had two last sentences. I gave you extra time because you took the interventions. I am sorry, but we will move on.

Duncan Massey: I move amendment S7M-00290.2, to leave out from “, improving” to end and insert:

“and improving public services; agrees that lowering the tax burden and bureaucracy are essential to support enterprise, investment, innovation and trade, in order to kickstart the economy, which has stalled due to the high tax regime implemented

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by the SNP administration; supports action to remove unnecessary barriers to success; acknowledges Scotland's economic potential, including its key strengths in sectors such as energy, food and drink, financial services, and space, and endorses a continued focus on economic growth as the best way to create a prosperous Scotland where there is hope for a better future, people can thrive and hard work is fairly rewarded."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Members, we are now running quite a bit behind time. I call Patrick Harvie, to be followed by Rachael Hamilton. Mr Harvie, you have up to six minutes.

16:21

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I congratulate Stephen Flynn on his appointment. This will be his first opportunity to hear my traditional rant about the ideology of economic growth. Other members have been listening to that rant from me for decades, but this is his first chance to hear it—I am sure that he has been looking forward to it.

Greens are far from alone in criticising the myopic approach to measuring GDP. We recognise that some economic activity is good for our health and our environment, generates wealth that is fairly shared and rewards workers with secure jobs, rights and protections in the workplace and high levels of local ownership. There is also economic activity that undermines our health, degrades our environment and exploits the workforce while enriching remote corporate interests.

We criticise the focus on growth as a simplistic measurement. It measures everything that is good and bad for people and pretends that it is all of equal value—it is a simplistic metric. It is wrong to focus on that alone, and it is the wrong target for a Government that cares about people's wellbeing.

The Scottish Government and the SNP have certainly never fully shared the Green critique of growth, but they began to move in the right direction. The national performance framework recognises wider economic indicators, even if it keeps GDP on a pedestal. As First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon placed a strong emphasis on the concept of a wellbeing economy, working with, for example, Iceland and New Zealand to create the wellbeing economy Governments group. In her TED talk in 2019, she said that the time for GDP to be seen as the only measure of a country's success was over.

As recently as January 2024, the Scottish Government backed a motion in the Parliament that set out the aim of

"a fair, green wellbeing economy in Scotland".

The SNP's position was never an outright rejection of growth. Indeed, even the Green position is often misrepresented. As our amendment makes clear, there are certainly areas where our economic activity should increase. However, we argue that an increase for its own sake, that takes place regardless of who benefits or bears the social and environmental cost, is the wrong goal to pursue.

Therefore, although there were always differences between the Green and SNP positions, the motion that we are debating today looks like a complete reversal of the Scottish Government's previous direction of travel. It reads as a repudiation of the Government's previous work on the concept of a wellbeing economy, which would be a regressive change compared to the previous decade. Stephen Flynn's speech did not give so much as a nod to the previous progressive track record.

Daniel Johnson: I will try to seek consensus. Surely a view of growth that is grounded in jobs, wages and opportunity would be a compromise between the position that the member is articulating and those taken by members in other parts of the chamber.

Patrick Harvie: There are better ways to think about that, which I will come back to later. However, the record in Europe, across decades, is that long-term economic growth has benefited the 1 per cent vastly more than the large majority of the population.

There will be those who say that all growth is good growth and that it simply does not matter that a tiny number of people become immensely wealthy while others are hungry and homeless or if growth comes from depletion of finite resources. For example, the cabinet secretary's remarks today seem to suggest that he no longer even supports environmental impact assessments and that Rosebank should have been approved without them.

Some people might think that growth is desirable even if it continues the destruction of our ecosystem, but the world is already finding out just how self-defeating that argument is. The UK's national security assessment on global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse shows the scale of the crisis that has been brought about by the current economic model, and it illustrates that the economy is wholly dependent on a healthy environment and a fairly functioning society, with up to 12 per cent of GDP at risk as a result of ecosystem collapse by 2030—that is just a few years away.

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A reckoning is needed with the profound failure of the old economic model, which has left us with a legacy of poverty and inequality, hollowed-out public services, public infrastructure in private hands, and a climate and nature crisis. A reckoning is also needed with the political model that enabled that system and has, for decades, handed away power that should be democratically accountable to corporations and markets. Dare I say it: it is time to take back control.

New thinking is emerging. The “Global Justice Report” that the Green amendment mentions makes the case that a global transformation that reconciles planetary habitability and high standards of wellbeing for all people is possible. However, that depends on rapid decarbonisation, a shift away from overconsumption towards efficiency and a dramatic reduction in inequality. That would certainly be bad for the billionaire class, but it would be a path to shared prosperity for the majority of the world’s population that is better than they have access to today.

We need a Government with that willingness to confront the failures of the current dominant, failed economic system and with the vision and ambition to bring new thinking to the challenge. This country has huge potential to meet the needs of all our people without trashing our life support system, and to contribute to the wellbeing of others around the world without allowing a tiny number to hoard the wealth that we all generate together.

There will be things that we need to grow: clean energy, nature restoration and efficient resource use, as well as the social capacity that improves everyone’s lives, from health and care to education and culture.

Growth in the areas that improve our lives, help people to help one another and protect the world that we all depend on is healthy growth. However, growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.

I urge the Government to rediscover that understanding, which, for a few years, it was beginning to embrace. I move amendment S7M-00290.4, to leave out from “is essential” to end and insert:

“does not necessarily deliver prosperity, tackle child poverty, improve public services or achieve climate ambitions, and that only government action can ensure that economic activity helps to achieve these objectives rather than undermining them; believes that growth is needed in areas such as clean energy, housing, nature restoration, as well as social provision, including health, education and care, and that public, community and worker ownership should play an increased role; welcomes the recent publication of the Global Justice Report by the World Inequality Lab, which, it considers, is an important contribution to the debate about how high standards of living for all people can be compatible with decarbonisation and sustainability; urges the Scottish Government to ensure that its economic strategy shows similar ambition in combining these vital objectives, and rejects the failed idea that GDP growth inevitably builds a fair or sustainable economy.”

16:28

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Our amendment has a laser focus on Scotland’s economic potential. I welcome Stephen Flynn to his role and congratulate him on his first speech.

I appreciate that this may sound obvious, but after nearly two decades of SNP Government, it is worth restating the basics. Prosperity means improved services, such as building new schools and saving swimming pools—the obvious things that all of us are talking about in our constituencies. It means ensuring that we improve people’s life chances. It means job creation.

However, under the SNP, the economic landscape looks perilous. Scotland’s economic growth has lagged behind that of the rest of the UK by £12 billion since the SNP took power. Its failure to grow the economy means that, despite Scots being the highest taxed of those in all parts of the UK, only half of that tax gets to public services.

We need sound fiscal management, but how can we accept that the party of John Swinney, Peter Murrell and Colin Beattie is fiscally responsible? The SNP has left this country with a deficit—a black hole—that will reach £5 billion by the end of the decade, and spending is growing faster than revenue. As I said, that leaves less money for infrastructure projects such as dualling the A9, for essential housing and energy projects and for supporting jobs and investment. It is fantasy economics. It is a dangerous game to be playing with Scotland’s future.

Instead of fixing those problems, the SNP is obsessed with another dangerous game. The very first vote of this session of Parliament was a symbolic vote on the constitution, which clearly sends the wrong message to businesses. Sir Tom Hunter warned that that vote will have people asking themselves whether they should invest in Scotland if there is something going on that makes it politically unstable. That is the wrong message to send to businesses. There are business representatives in the gallery today, and they want Scotland to succeed. For the SNP, economic growth has always played second fiddle to breaking up the United Kingdom.

Now to Mr Flynn: at Westminster, as a backbencher, he could shout from the sidelines and show off his leadership potential, but he could of course dodge any blame for SNP policies. Now he has a responsibility

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to deliver for business, and there is no hiding; the business sector is watching. In a recent interview, he criticised the fact that Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the UK, despite it being his own Government's policy.

The business community says that there is no direction of travel for Scotland's long-term growth. The previous Finance and Public Administration Committee concluded that economic strategies have not delivered the scale of growth that was promised, and Audit Scotland has said that it is concerned about the SNP's unclear and weak delivery mechanisms.

Unlike the SNP motion, my party's amendment highlights Scotland's key sectors, such as oil and gas, energy, food and drink, financial services and space. Nowhere is security more at stake than in our oil and gas sector, and in Aberdeen—the city that built it. When I spoke to voters in Aberdeen South, I heard at first hand about the pain and turmoil caused by the SNP's presumption against oil and gas. Livelihoods are being lost—1,000 jobs are being lost per month. That is shocking.

That is not serious economic policy. It is the exporting of Scottish jobs, prosperity and growth for political posturing.

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Rachael Hamilton accept that the energy profits levy introduced by the Conservative UK Government is costing 1,000 jobs a month across the sector? What is her explanation for that?

Rachael Hamilton: That was an interesting intervention from Jack Middleton. I wonder whether he supports the introduction of licences for Jackdaw and Rosebank. We are coming on to Jack Middleton, so he can listen up on non-domestic rates. Get your intervention ready, Mr Middleton.

Now that Stephen Flynn has landed at Holyrood, he must find it pretty shameful that his own party disagrees with him and is refusing to remove its presumption against oil and gas to protect those jobs in the north-east. Any party that claims to support economic growth must support our oil and gas sector in Aberdeen.

My other concern is that 80 per cent of Scots think that income tax should be the same or lower than the rest of the UK. It is one of the top concerns of business owners in Scotland. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Fraser of Allander Institute, the Institute of Chartered Accountants and many more have argued time and again that the SNP Government has a complicated high-tax regime. It is damaging our growth and prosperity.

Moving on to non-domestic rates—I have a short time left—former SNP special adviser Jack Middleton said that there are clear flaws in his party's business rate revaluation, which led to 412 businesses having rises of more than 1,000 per cent. He is quiet now, is he not, Presiding Officer? It is a bit like an arsonist helping SNP ministers pour petrol over a burning fire and not calling the fire service.

Constituents in my constituency have been in touch about the damaging non-domestic rates. A constituent from Berwickshire contacted me to tell me that their draft rateable value could be more than double the current figure. At a time when energy and other costs are rising, that is very worrying. The Scottish Hospitality Group has said:

“the Scottish Government and local authorities must urgently fix the immediate implementation failures on rates reliefs.”

I see that time is marching on, Presiding Officer, so I will close there.

I move amendment S7M-00290.5, to leave out from “recognises” to end and insert:

“acknowledges Scotland's economic potential, including its strengths in sectors such as oil and gas, energy, food and drink, financial services and space; recognises the vital contribution of the oil and gas industry to jobs, investment and energy security; regrets the Scottish National Party administration's increases to Scottish Income Tax and failure to reform business rates, which have harmed Scotland's competitiveness; endorses a continued focus on economic growth to build a more resilient and prosperous Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to support continued investment in the North Sea, reform business rates and reduce the tax burden on hard-working people in Scotland over the next five years.”

16:35

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I join others in welcoming the cabinet secretary to his post and I commend him on his first speech. Daniel Johnson talked about a hopeful start. I am not sure whether Mr Johnson has retained that hope since he sat down, but I welcome the debate that we are having on economic growth.

Very often, such debates are framed in the context of cities and city regions. I absolve the cabinet secretary from that as, in his remarks, he recognised the role of our rural and island communities, which are often underestimated and undervalued, whether that is in terms of their contribution, ambition or innovation. If we

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look at many of the key sectors that drive our economy, such as energy, food and drink, the creative sector, tourism and space, we find that those are areas in which our rural and island communities can claim to be punching above their weight.

Very often, however, the argument can be made that, as well as those communities are doing, they cannot fulfil their potential because they are being held back, whether that is because of the slow and patchy progress in the roll-out of digital infrastructure or because of a transport network in which we see delays in the dualling of the A9, underinvestment in the ferry network—and the chaos arising from that—and cuts in air services. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for engaging with me on that issue, but it is holding back our rural and island areas.

In rural and island areas there is a specific dimension to the housing crisis that we are seeing across the country. We see the same issue with care, whether it is social care or childcare. There is the impact not just of the failure or inability to meet the needs of those who require care but of people who would otherwise be in the workforce being drawn out of it to take on caring roles because support is not available.

We see the same issue with centralised procurement. I understand and acknowledge that that can have benefits but, in areas such as the one that I represent, that approach very often adds to the cost and crowds out opportunities for businesses to grow, expand and develop jobs and value.

Support and funding will be needed but, in rural and island areas, that is often seen as some sort of subsidy, whereas in every other part of the country it is recognised as an investment. That investment is key for Scotland and the UK to achieve their ambitions, whether on the economy or the transition to net zero, which we have heard quite a bit about in this debate.

Islands are part of what makes Scotland Scotland. That is exemplified in my Orkney constituency, where, pretty consistently over the years for which I have represented those islands, colleagues across the chamber who have been fortunate enough to visit have reflected on the can-do attitude of the people who live there. We have a track record of delivering on quality, change and innovation but, too often, we are held back, very often by a one-size-fits-all approach to policy or regulation that is unnecessary to meet our wider obligations and ambitions and that I think stems from a sense of administrative simplicity rather than a sense of what is best for Orkney or the country as a whole.

Of course, small and medium-sized enterprises are the lifeblood of places such as Orkney—there are very few large companies in those areas—and SMEs have faced shocks, such as those on business rates, which have been mentioned. Although action was taken on that in the previous budget, not least due to the intervention of Liberal Democrats, I think that the Federation of Small Businesses and others are right to call for much wider reform.

The amendment in my name highlights Brexit's costs to Orkney, Scotland and the wider UK, which are estimated by Bloomberg Economics at between £100 billion and £200 billion a year. There are also costs to the European Union. I lived and worked in Brussels for around five years, and I know that there is a recognition of the mutual disadvantage that has arisen from this breakage.

However, the future relationship with the EU is not simply ours to determine. EU member states have a view on that debate, but mutual self-interest surely depends on rebuilding ties. We have already seen positive signs, which are welcome, but we must go further. As referred to in my amendment, a new customs union would help to reduce trade friction and would benefit small and medium-sized enterprises and communities, not only in rural and island areas but across the country. I urge the Parliament to support my amendment.

I move amendment S7M-00290.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that Brexit has had a deeply damaging impact on the economy, and agrees that one of the biggest changes that could be made to boost growth, fix trade and cut the cost of living would be a new bespoke customs union between the UK and the EU.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We move to the open debate.

16:40

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary to his new post. It is great to see him in the Parliament.

When we talk about the economy, it can sometimes feel like we are talking about something that is quite abstract—something that is separate from people's everyday lives. It sounds technical and distant, full of forecasts and figures and a language that does not always mean that much to the people who live with the dire consequences of disastrous economic decisions. The word “economy” has its roots in the management of resources, and that is a useful reminder. Having an economy should never be just about producing more

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wealth somewhere for someone; it should be about how we use Scotland's resources, develop our skills, support our industries and ensure that our communities benefit from it all. That is the question that I come back to: who is this growth for?

When I think about economic growth in Banffshire and Buchan Coast, I do not think first about a graph or a statistic; I think about the young folk in Buckie who wonder whether there will be a good job for them if they stay in their home town. I think about the folk across the constituency who are deciding what skills they want to build at North East Scotland College, whether that takes them into fishing, engineering, offshore renewables, construction, care, education or local business and enterprise. I think about the folk who want to raise their families in the towns that they grew up in, because they can see opportunity, stability, a decent standard of living and a future for those who come after them. That is what economic growth has to mean in real life.

In my constituency, I see that potential everywhere. Fraserburgh harbour has a master plan that looks to future proof one of Scotland's key fishing ports. Peterhead port, with links to fishing, energy and trade, is already a massive asset for Scotland. In Buckie, Macduff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead and right along the coastline, our harbours, ports and communities all have a part to play in Scotland's economic future, and we must protect it.

If we want that growth to be meaningful, we need to connect the dots. We cannot look at economic cases and business plans in silos, which is why, for example, the Campaign for North East Rail's economic case really matters. Peterhead and Fraserburgh are two of Scotland's largest towns without a rail link—that is not only a transport issue but an economic issue. It affects access to education, work, freight, business confidence and how quickly and cleanly produce from one of Europe's most important fishing ports can reach the market. Addressing that is what sustainable and inclusive growth should look like: not only growth that appears in national figures but growth that reaches the communities, workers and businesses that helped to create it.

Liam Kerr: I find myself in very strong agreement with the member on the benefits of north-east rail and the Buchan railway line being relayed, as called for by the CNER. What would she have the Government do about that? I certainly think that the Government needs to do proper case studies and get on with relaying the line.

Karen Adam: I thank the member for that intervention because it gives me the opportunity to say that I have already opened conversations and will discuss what next steps the campaign is asking for. The SNP manifesto said that there would be support for the campaign, and I look forward to working cross-party to see whether we can help to get that work delivered.

The north-east needs a stronger and more bespoke economic focus. We have Highlands and Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise working nationally.

Yi-pei Chou Turvey (North East Scotland) (LD): Will the member give way?

Karen Adam: I am sorry, but I will make headway and come back to the member.

The north-east has its own mix of industries, pressures and opportunities, which deserves focused attention. The north-east is not waiting for somebody to come and fix everything. The people, businesses, ideas and work ethic are already in place. They need the right support, connections and doors opened. If we are serious about removing barriers to success, we have to listen to the people, businesses and communities who know what those barriers are.

There are limits to what Scotland can do while key powers remain at Westminster, such as those relating to energy policy and immigration, as well as major fiscal levers and big parts of economic decision making. That matters when energy-rich communities still face fuel poverty, when local businesses struggle to recruit, when care services need staff, when schools need teachers and when rural and coastal communities need policy that reflects the reality. That is why independence matters in this debate. There is a practical question of whether Scotland has the powers to build an economy around Scotland's needs.

However, we have responsibilities now, and we should use every power that we have to support enterprise, investment, innovation and trade. Growth cannot just be about numbers on paper; it must mean better lives, fewer children in poverty, stronger public services, healthier towns, better jobs and communities where people feel proud to stay, work, raise families and build something lasting.

What Banffshire and Buchan Coast needs is support to turn its potential into prosperity that is seen and felt locally. That is the kind of economic growth that I want for Scotland—growth with purpose, growth that reaches people and growth that strengthens the places that we all call home.

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16:46

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): I welcome today's debate on economic growth, which is one of the most important topics—if not the most important one—for the Parliament to address. If the Government can concentrate on driving up economic growth for the next five years, that will be five years well spent for the sake of our fellow citizens, businesses and, of course, public services.

However, to do that, we must confront and address the fact that earnings and employment growth in Scotland are lagging behind that in the rest of the UK. As my colleague Daniel Johnson laid out, the Scottish Fiscal Commission projects that, in 2026-27 alone, the economic performance gap will be £785 million. We need to confront that reality. It cannot be wished away, and populists of various political stripes have ill served our people and our economy by pretending otherwise.

We also need the Government to recognise the convening power that it possesses. A key example relates to business rates, as the Government should be a much more constructive partner with businesses, in contrast to its track record over the past few years, with reliefs not being passed on in full and the recent damaging revaluation, as many members across the chamber have acknowledged.

Even as AI and other technologies play an ever-greater role in the economy, we simply cannot deliver economic growth without recognising that it is people who make our economy turn. As a proud trade unionist and GMB member—I happily declare that interest now—I know that that is the case. There are huge skills shortages in our economy, but there are also huge numbers of people—particularly young people, as other members have said—who are not currently in education, employment or training. There is a huge amount of untapped potential in our economy, and the Government is not doing enough to unlock it.

As other members have said, this is undoubtedly a time of economic transition, primarily in our energy sector, but there are, of course, impacts on the wider economy. Colleges should be in prime position to work with businesses and support transitions by training and retraining workers. However, instead, over the previous parliamentary session, the SNP cut college funding by 20 per cent. The Scottish Funding Council now estimates that 22 out of Scotland's 24 colleges are not sustainable. Just when our economy, businesses and workers need colleges the most, colleges the length and breadth of Scotland are having to cut costs, let staff go and scale back.

Yesterday, I met Forth Valley College's principal, Kenny MacInnes—

Rachael Hamilton: Will Jenny Young take an intervention?

Jenny Young: Yes—happily.

Rachael Hamilton: Many of the college staff I speak to in my constituency cite the increase in employer national insurance contributions by the Labour Government as one of the reasons why colleges are not investing in people and skills. What representations to the UK Government on scrapping that policy will Jenny Young make?

Jenny Young: Rachael Hamilton will be well aware that, when we inherited the financial and economic mess that the Tories left in 2024, we had to make difficult decisions to fund the NHS and other public services. I am sure that she will agree that it is the Scottish Government that has done the most damage to our colleges. There has been a 20 per cent cut to their funding over five years. How are colleges supposed to fix that?

As I was saying, I met the principal of Forth Valley College, Kenny MacInnes, at the college's campus in Falkirk yesterday. That campus has long specialised in construction and engineering, which are two vital sectors for our economy nationally, as well as locally, in my region, in proximity to Grangemouth. If the Scottish Government's talk of a just transition and economic growth meant anything, the college nearest to Grangemouth would not be forced to scale back at what is a critical moment for the region that I represent.

The injection of funding from the Scottish Government in the 2026-27 budget—

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Young: Not just now, thank you.

That funding did not repair the damage done to Scotland's colleges done by the 20 per cent cut, and a spending review promising flat cash—which, in reality, is a cut—gives Scotland's colleges no light at the end of the tunnel.

If the Scottish Government is serious about growing Scotland's economy—I sincerely hope that it is—colleges must not be left to wither on the vine.

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16:50

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Without a successful economy, we will struggle to deal with the many challenges that the country faces. Scotland currently has limited powers and, without the powers of a normal, independent nation, there will always be limitations placed on the Scottish Government.

However, with the powers that we do have, the SNP Scottish Government has delivered a great deal. Since 2007, GDP and productivity growth in Scotland has outpaced that in the rest of the UK. Scotland is the top destination in the UK for foreign direct investment outside of London for the 10th year running, according to EY's latest attractiveness study. In 2025, this city, Edinburgh, outperformed London for the first time. Thanks to the sustained focus by the SNP through policies such as Techscaler, Scotland is by far the fastest-growing start-up economy in the UK and one of the fastest growing in Europe.

Rachael Hamilton: Scotland actually ranks eighth in the UK for FDI. Can the member clarify whether he is referring to the number of projects being invested in, rather than the economic and financial value that is being delivered?

Stuart McMillan: I am not going to stand here and do the research for Rachael Hamilton; I am sure that she can go and do the research herself.

Every MSP should welcome this information and these facts. The SNP has never lacked ambition for this country, and that is why we want independence: to fully harness the opportunity and the potential.

Within the limitations of devolution, establishing and maintaining the small business bonus scheme has been vital. FSB Scotland supports it, and 98 per cent of private sector businesses in Scotland benefit from it. I absolutely welcome the commitment that the non-domestic rates system will be realigned, with businesses such as Amazon paying their fair share and contributing to communities. Daniel Johnson made a point earlier regarding businesses and profits, and I agree with him on that. Amazon used to operate in my constituency, and I know how important the jobs were for my constituents, although I also know how the community was so badly let down by the company when it left. The same can be said for EE, which left Greenock in recent years, and for the profitable Cigna Healthcare, which recently announced some job losses in Greenock and Glasgow. The galling thing about that is the fact that some of those jobs are already being advertised in other countries.

Despite the two companies leaving and the information from Cigna Healthcare, the Scottish Government has helped to safeguard and create jobs in Inverclyde. That touches on the Green amendment, to which Patrick Harvie spoke, referring to Government action. When Texas Instruments announced its intention to leave its profitable Greenock site, the Scottish Government worked with its agencies and Inverclyde Council to find a buyer. They put together a £14 million package to help safeguard highly skilled jobs, and they brought Diodes to the table—which also invested significantly. Those jobs remain local.

The Scottish Government has also helped Ferguson Marine. Notwithstanding some of the utter nonsense that has been spoken and written about the yard, the undeniable fact is that the yard remains open, the jobs are saved, more apprenticeships are being created and the yard has a future.

Those two investments alone have helped my local community and economy.

Investing in our home-grown businesses is crucial, as is inward investment. That is yet another reason why it is so important for the Scottish Government to have offices in other nations.

When considering investment, the easy option is to focus on cities.

Craig Hoy: Will Stuart McMillan take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I have already taken an intervention.

Liam McArthur quite rightly touched on a point about island and rural communities, which I absolutely agree with. There are similar aspects for places such as my constituency—post-industrial towns with some villages—where there might be an expectation that we should commute to Glasgow. However, I do not think that we should all be commuters to a city.

There is an economic opportunity, with the West College Scotland Greenock campus at the centre of it. Karen Adam touched on this in her comments. We have a college building that is long past its sell-by date, but there is cross-party willingness and local consensus to work together to find a solution to deliver college infrastructure to drive economic change. It is about assisting and not about the Government stepping in. It will ensure that Inverclyde is sustainable, assisting more people into employment and upskilling more of my constituents. A creative solution has been discussed, and those options will now go to the SFC. I fully support the college and its ambition, and I will continue my engagement with the Scottish Government on that.

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Successful local economies come in many guises. Creative Regeneration in my constituency is an example of a SCIO—Scottish charitable incorporated organisation—that is using the arts, culture, heritage and science to engage and educate, in addition to improving economic opportunities. Its biggest project by far is the purchase of the Glebe, a former sugar refinery, to turn into a multi-use creative space that will also be a great economic driver. That is a type of community regeneration that is ambitious but deliverable.

I could say much more about Inverclyde's economic challenges and opportunities, but I note that, in general, we are at a turning point. From the 1980s Tory decimation of the shipbuilding industry and people being forced to leave—to get on their bike—and find a job somewhere else, there is now a real economic opportunity for regeneration in Inverclyde, with the college at its heart.

16:56

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate and to have the chance to share some reflections on the key economic challenges and opportunities in my constituency.

Every member in the chamber will have had countless conversations with constituents who feel that the economy is just not working for them. Wages are not keeping up with inflation, energy costs in an energy-rich nation are soaring and home ownership is out of reach for far too many young people. People look around and see a UK economic model that is broken. The impact is felt by workers, public services and businesses in Moray and right across the country.

The context is important. As the cabinet secretary set out, in recent times, households and businesses have lived through an unprecedented number of unprecedented events: 15 years of Tory austerity, Brexit, a global pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Liz Truss mini-budget and, now, events in the middle east.

Liam Kerr: Businesses have also lived through the appalling SNP rates regime. The FSB says that the most recent rates revaluation has seen significant increases to bills and that it is urgent that the eligibility thresholds are revisited. Does Laura Mitchell agree? If so, will she urge the Government to do that?

Laura Mitchell: If Liam Kerr would have a little patience, I will come on to non-domestic rates later in my remarks.

As household costs have soared, so has the cost of doing business. Inflation and energy costs are key drivers, but businesses across Moray tell me that so, too, are UK Government economic choices. The hike in employer national insurance contributions is a tax on jobs, and employers large and small are feeling the pain. Hostile immigration policies are leading to skills shortages in key sectors in my rural communities. The duty increases on Scotch whisky are a policy that specifically prevents investment and growth in Speyside, which is a region that I represent. Hospitality businesses are struggling to cope with the 20 per cent VAT rate, which Faith Houlding of Scribbles in my constituency has been campaigning hard on; she deserves great credit for that. I note that my colleague Alyn Smith has lodged a motion on the issue, and I hope that members from across the chamber will support it.

Despite the challenges, businesses in Moray have shown remarkable resilience and ambition. Businesses in my community want to invest, grow and create more jobs. In a challenging environment, business owners in Moray are working together to do just that.

In that vein, I welcome the Government's commitment to rebalance the non-domestic rates system. Although the relief that is on offer in Scotland is the most generous in the UK, many businesses feel that the current system deters them from growing and can be complex to navigate. Reviewing the system would be a boost for businesses, high streets and town centres up and down the country, and I look forward to discussing that with the Government in the weeks and months ahead.

As well as facing challenges, Scotland has tremendous opportunities. The economic opportunities of the transition to cleaner energy are enormous and, as has been set out by my local chamber of commerce in its ambitious business plan for Moray, our region wants to be at the heart of that. Not only do we have an abundance of natural resources on our doorstep, we have incredible expertise in our offshore and supply chain workforce. Many of my constituents have worked offshore for decades and have the skills that are required to make a huge contribution to the businesses of the future. It is therefore deeply regrettable that the UK Government's hated energy profits levy continues to cost thousands of jobs per month in the north-east.

The First Minister's renewed focus on growing Scotland's economy and building on what the SNP has already delivered in government has been eloquently set out by Stuart McMillan and I am particularly interested in seeing how plans to empower regional economic partnerships will develop and how that will lead to strategic investment in rural communities such as mine.

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Creating the prosperous country that we all want to see would, of course, be considerably easier if this Parliament had the full economic levers of an independent country, but I know that this new Government will use the powers of this Parliament to drive forward its ambitious agenda for Scotland, to ensure that we are building an economy that can support strong public services and that, crucially, will be one that people feel works for them.

17:01

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary set out, Scotland has never lacked ideas or ambition. We have world-class universities, skilled workers, energy, science, engineering and creativity. Across the country, people are building things of real value, so the question is not whether Scotland can create but whether Scotland can turn what we create into real growth. Countries that succeed do not leave growth to chance; they choose where they can lead, then build the markets, skills and industrial muscle to make it happen. That is how ideas become industries and ambition becomes national wealth.

There is a quiet danger in our economy. Scotland could become a place where new ideas are born but not where their value is owned, a place where companies start and invention happens but where wealth moves elsewhere. Scotland's scale-up firms make up a small share of our business base but, together, employ almost a quarter of a million people and generate more than £60 billion in turnover, according to Scaleup Britain.

Craig Hoy: Will the member take an intervention?

Lloyd Melville: No, thank you.

If we are serious about growth, we cannot ask only how many firms start here; we must ask how many grow here, decide here and build wealth here. A business that begins here in Scotland should not have to leave Scotland to become world-class, and Scotland should not settle for a future of insecure gig work while the real value is owned elsewhere. Growth must mean skilled jobs, secure work and industries rooted here in Scotland.

The offshore wind industry shows what is at stake. Scotland has the resource, the skills and the industrial inheritance to lead the next energy age, but turbines in Scottish waters are not the same as wealth in Scotland's hands. If high-value work is designed, built and owned elsewhere, Scotland will have hosted the opportunity while others captured the prize.

That is why Scotland needs the discipline to capture the economic opportunities ahead. We must make Scotland impossible for investors to ignore. Private capital does not move simply because politicians ask nicely; it moves when firms have customers, revenue and a clear route to growth. Public capital should help us to share risk, give confidence and put larger funds into Scottish deals and we should ask why more of Scotland's long-term capital—such as that in pension funds—is not backing our long-term ambitions.

Government must also become a better first customer. The public sector buys billions of pounds-worth of goods and services every year, and that is not just administration but economic power. When the NHS buys technology, when councils retrofit homes or when public bodies invest in digital systems, we should all be asking how that helps a Scottish firm to prove itself. Every public pound should work twice—once to buy the service that we need and again to build the economy that we want.

We must build the places where firms can grow. A company cannot expand without the space, homes for workers and planning and infrastructure to match its ambition. Ardersier, Nigg and Kishorn show what that means in practice: ports, power, land, skills and supply chains that are ready to receive investment and generate growth.

Of course, Scotland does not yet control every lever of the economy. When a £1.5 billion investment in wind turbine manufacturing can be blocked by the UK Government, we are reminded that even Scotland's industrial opportunities depend on decisions taken elsewhere. Those limits are real, but limits must never become a habit of mind. Devolution gives us tools, but independence would give us the full toolbox. However, no one should mistake the constraints of devolution for an excuse to think small. With the powers that we have, we can put investment behind ambition, make public money work harder and turn buying power into economic strength.

The future will not belong to the countries that simply host the transition. It will belong to the countries that build it, and Scotland must be one of them. We must have not just a country of invention but a country of industry; not just firms that start here but firms that scale here; and not just wealth created in Scotland but wealth held in Scotland. That is how we will create the dynamic, growing economy that Scotland needs.

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The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The final speaker in the open debate will be Heather Anderson.

17:06

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): As one of the few people in the chamber who has run a medium-sized business, which I did for 15 years, I start by expressing my admiration and support for everybody in Scotland who has had the courage and determination to start up and run a business.

As everyone out there who knows what it takes to cover the wages every month knows, we have withstood enormous shocks since the financial crash in 2008. We have traded through the economic disaster of Brexit and we were dragged out of the world's largest free market against our will. My food business imported fresh fruit and vegetables every week, and we certainly felt the impact. The UK now has the unique distinction of being the first country in the world to impose economic sanctions on itself.

Like other food businesses, we then traded through Covid and somehow came out the other side. We sold the farm a few years ago, but my heart still stopped when I heard Rachel Reeves announce the employer national insurance hike, because I knew immediately how that would affect the bottom line of every hospitality and retail business in Scotland. Now we are going through another wave of energy price spikes, and I applaud everything that our Government is doing to continue to support small, medium-sized and large businesses across Scotland.

However, the focus of my speech is the huge opportunity that Scotland's economy has been given with the vast renewable resources that it has. In such an uncertain world, home-grown renewable energy is our path to energy security, more affordable bills, long-term economic growth and environmental resilience. Having won the energy lottery yet again, Scotland has a renewables sector that already supports 24,000 jobs, and every gigawatt of new offshore wind capacity delivers £2 billion to £3 billion to the economy. Renewable energy production has tripled in the past 10 years, and renewable energy is now one of the cheapest and fastest ways to generate energy at scale.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Heather Anderson: I am very conscious of the time, so I will continue.

That is because our natural resources are not globally traded or subject to volatile price hikes. New onshore wind is now half the cost of new gas, and new offshore wind is 40 per cent cheaper. Right now, the price of electricity is coupled to the price of gas, which makes electricity artificially costly. Of course, with the powers of independence, we could act on energy pricing for the benefit of the people in Scotland.

Duncan Massey: On the member's claim that renewables are an extremely cheap form of energy, perhaps she could explain why the current contracts for difference costs for offshore wind are sitting at £95 per megawatt hour, which is significantly higher than the market price of gas.

Heather Anderson: My statistics are taken from reports from the industry, which explain those costs. I am not working in the industry, so I cannot answer the member's question directly, but I am relying on reliable resources, which gave me those prices from the industry.

As I have said, if we had the powers of independence, we could act on energy pricing for the benefit of people in Scotland. Right now, what the sector needs is leadership and political stability to ensure that it will continue to attract long-term investment. The SNP has provided and will continue to provide that stability and leadership.

The success of our energy sector must be determined by not just how many turbines we install but evidence on the skilled workforce that the industry nurtures and the number of households that live in warmer homes and pay lower bills. In Dundee, a company called Whole Life Consultants Ltd has used smart modelling to work out that it would take 15,990 person years to deliver all the interventions that Dundee needs. It has worked out how many tilers, brickies, carpenters, joiners, scaffolders, plasterers, roofers, painters, surveyors, electricians, glaziers, architects, managers and professional staff are needed to get the job done.

In Dundee, that job is installing the insulation, replacing the windows and boilers, fitting the solar and photovoltaic panels and installing the smart decarbonised energy systems that we need. It will transform people's quality of life and, if we are able to take advantage of the opportunity, provide real work for about 1,600 people a year as we go forward. Those are jobs that Dundee could do with. To give a sense of the scale of that, if members had to do it, it would take all MSPs 120 years—or probably much longer, because we do not have any of the necessary skill sets.

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Thankfully, however, our job is to set the direction of travel and let other organisations address the skills shortage. Here in Dundee—I think that I am in Dundee all the time—Dundee and Angus College is one of those key institutions. It is doing the real job of ensuring that the future workforce is ready. It enrolls around 800 students a year in construction, engineering and building services. It has worked out that skills for mechanical engineering are equally applicable to maintaining wind turbines. Working closely with industry partners such as Vestas, the college is ensuring that its students' skills are fully compatible with and transferable to offshore wind technology. It has diversified its courses to ensure that its students achieve the mandatory qualifications that they need to work offshore. That is real work in the real world.

If Scotland is to remain a global leader in renewable energy, we must continue to support institutions such as Dundee and Angus College that are quietly doing the hard work of turning ambition into reality and developing the technicians, engineers and skilled professionals who will power our future economy. I fully support the motion and all that the SNP Government is doing to continue to grow Scotland's economy.

17:12

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): I welcome Stephen Flynn to his new position. If the chamber is good enough to elect me as convener of the Transport Committee, I will look forward to his coming before that committee. Transport will be a key part of growing the economy, so I look forward to the partnership approach that we will, I am sure, be able to endeavour to take.

One thing that frustrates me about debates on the economy is that each person trades in their own statistics. We should agree that we can all pick stats that favour our argument over another. We can show that the rest of the UK is better than Scotland, or that Scotland is better in the UK, or best in the world or best in the universe; I am not sure which way it is or how that benefits us at all.

What is most important is that we recognise that we need to do better. Karen Adam was right: it is about how people feel that really matters—the people of Buckie want to feel better. The fact that only half of the electorate turned out to vote in the recent election was a clear indication that they did not think that this place was working for them. We need to do better, no matter what the stats say, because the stats are used only to try to prove that we are right politically, not to benefit anybody's life. We should focus on making an improvement and a change in approach will be required.

First, detail matters. I am increasingly convinced that the glitzier the offer, the less convincing it will be, and the less meaningful in delivering change. The minister was right when he highlighted predictability and certainty. Daniel Johnson alighted on that as well.

Businesses want to know what is expected of them. They do not have time to look through every single press release that the Government issues to find out whether it is about real change, a repeat of a previous statement or spin of a previous announcement that does not mean anything different from what has been agreed before. Let us have a bit of boring predictability, so that businesses know what is expected of them and can get on with what they do best, which is running their businesses, rather than trying to second-guess what the Government is doing.

The second point, about which Daniel Johnson was absolutely right, is that we should not be squeamish about profit. Profit is a good thing. When my dad was in business, profit was invested right back into the business to grow it and provide a better service for the community. Let us not be squeamish about profit and let us recognise that we cannot achieve growth by ourselves. Government is not all-powerful. The private sector is playing an important role in delivering economic growth, so let us work together in partnership and have strategies that work together.

The next change of approach that we require is to accept—sometimes, this Parliament has not accepted this—that work is a good thing. People should be striving towards working. There is no shame in the fact that some people cannot work, but, if people can work, they should work. People should pay taxes, because that is good for society, and they should participate in society.

The next point—about which, again, this Parliament has had some blind spots—is that people feel a bit squeamish about certain sectors. I recently went down to see Babcock in Rosyth. There are 3,000 workers there now, and the place is absolutely buzzing. When I was the MP for Dunfermline and West Fife, at the height of the construction of the aircraft carriers, Babcock had 1,500 workers. The number is double that now, and we should celebrate that. Good young apprentices are getting good jobs that contribute to the defence of this country. That is an important factor. We need defence in this country, so we should celebrate the fact that Scotland has many great defence businesses and we should support them. We should say loudly and clearly that we are with them.

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The next point is about energy. We have flip-flopped all over the place on that, depending on what the international challenge is—whether it is on price, security or the climate. Let us have consistency, so that businesses know what is expected of them, rather than having constant change, depending on which way the political winds are blowing.

We need pragmatism and an approach that works. The Government has various levers that it can use effectively. In an excellent contribution, Lloyd Melville highlighted exactly the power of procurement. That covers housing and all the areas around education and universities. All of those are great political levers, so let us use all of them to grow the economy of this country, because, together, by hunting for agreement, we can get economic growth to help the very people in Buckie that Karen Adam talked about.

17:17

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): As other members have done, I welcome Stephen Flynn to the chamber and thank him for his maiden speech. He posed the rhetorical question as to why he had come here. Some people thought that he came here because he wanted to be a very large fish in a very small pond after his period in Westminster—the SNP's very own Andy Burnham. I think that he got off to a good start here. Although neither a sprat nor a minnow, he is perhaps not the great white shark that he hoped to be in these waters, and I think that there is still some work to do. What he could and should have done during his speech was apologise for some of the issues that arose in the previous parliamentary session and seriously impeded Scotland's ability to compete globally and grow our economy. Principally, he could and should have apologised for the ongoing presumption against oil and gas, which, month after month, is resulting in thousands of jobs being lost in the sector.

He said—and other SNP MSPs have repeated this—that we introduced the energy profits levy. Yes, we did—during a period of excess profits. However, let us bear in mind that the SNP wanted us to go further and faster, and that, when Labour came into office, it sought to extend the levy when we were ready to wind it down. Only one party in the chamber is committed to growing our economy through growing our oil and gas sector, and that is the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.

Mr Flynn could and should have apologised for the damage that was done to the hospitality sector during the previous parliamentary session, when, in budget after budget, the SNP took funds from Westminster that were intended to provide rates relief to the struggling hospitality sector and, instead, diverted them into other areas.

Mr Flynn could and should have apologised to our island communities because a corruption of the procurement process meant that many of our communities are still deprived of those lifeline ferries, and because of the economic damage that that will do as we go into high season again. He could and should have apologised to the Scottish licensing and brewing sector for the damage that was done through, for example, the botched deposit return scheme and the ongoing problems caused by the seeds of doubt that the SNP is sowing in that sector.

As the minister sits down with businesses across Scotland, what he could and should do if he wants to restore their trust in Scotland as a place in which to invest is listen seriously to their concerns, because I think that their concerns are very clear. When it comes to recruiting the best staff from the United Kingdom and around the world, the damaging tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the UK is a fundamental issue. When it comes to the skills mismatch in our economy—which, year after year, the SNP has ducked—he could sit down with businesses and horizon scan to see what Scotland's colleges should be producing. When he talks about deregulation and the planning system, rather than simply giving us an open and honest answer to, "Let's talk about it," the SNP, after 19 years in government, should have some big and bold ideas. When it comes to removing red tape, the SNP could and should do what it has said it would do in the past, which is reduce the size of the state. We will watch closely to see whether Ivan McKee can do that.

We heard some other interesting contributions today. Lloyd Melville, who is not currently in the chamber, quite rightly identified the huge pool of capital that we could have within Scottish public sector pension funds. I encourage the minister to look to Quebec and Ottawa to see how global investment is coming to Scotland through, for example, those Canadian state teachers' pension funds.

Ultimately, none of this is rocket science. As my colleague Rachael Hamilton said, a low-tax, deregulated economy, in which we take Government off businesses' backs and start to deliver true economic growth, is within our reach. However—I say this to Mr Harvie—it requires a realisation that economic growth is good in and of itself. That is something that we should continue to bang the drum for. Ultimately, if we want Scotland to prosper now and into the future, we have to tackle the burden of taxation and the burden of red tape. We have to ensure that the Government is off businesses' backs. We should support our home-grown businesses, such as our hospitality sector and Scotland's oil and gas sector.

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The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I inform the chamber that we have received apologies from Lloyd Melville, who had permission to leave the chamber.

17:22

Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I begin by declaring an interest as a member of Orkney Islands Council and welcoming the cabinet secretary to his post.

As has been covered by my colleague Patrick Harvie, all too often when we talk about growth in the economy, we are not precise enough. Not all economic growth is equal and not all investment delivers positive outcomes. Too often, economic success is simply seen as a volume of investment; Willie Rennie spoke about our obsession with statistics. Important questions need to be asked about our economy. Who owns it? Who benefits from it? Who controls where the profits are going? Karen Adam reflected very aptly on the need for inclusive growth in the right places and for the right reason. That is essential to building a fairer and more prosperous country and taking communities along with us.

Strong track records of enterprise and innovation already exist in communities across Scotland. That is not the same as unchecked foreign direct investment or multinational ownership of our economy and our assets. Does our future lie in an economy of extraction, or should it be one that is built on community wealth creation and resilience building? Community organisations across the country already own businesses, land, energy production, housing and harbours—the list goes on. Community groups are already creating jobs, providing services, enhancing resilience and stimulating economic activity, often where it is hardest for Government to do so. They do so more efficiently, with greater local benefit and at remarkable value to the public purse. They achieve that despite facing barriers to financing, ownership and decision-making power.

The challenge is not a lack of economic opportunity or potential—I agree with the cabinet secretary on that. However, one big challenge that we face is too much leakage outwith our economy. The Centre for Local Economies Scotland report entitled “Blown away: following the money in Scotland’s onshore wind sector” shows the extent of the situation. It shows the extent of profit generation in our rural and island communities versus how much they are benefiting, and that inequity is not sustainable. It shows that, all the while, hundreds of millions of pounds are flowing into offshore tax havens.

When it comes to profit that is being generated already—which, according to the Government’s own best-practice principles, communities are entitled to a share of—the figures are also stark. Government guidance suggests that community benefit payments should be around £5,000 per installed megawatt, index linked, yet the report found that, across 261 operational wind farms, actual payments averaged just £3,167 per megawatt. By contrast, community-owned wind farms delivered the equivalent of more than £260,000 per megawatt—that is nearly 83 times more value flowing back into communities and local economies, and back into projects by the community for the community, be it in housing, job creation, health and wellbeing initiatives or transport. All those things are saving the Government money in delivering services on its behalf. That is the difference that ownership of our economy makes.

I agree that there is a balance to be struck, and we have to be pragmatic about what we are able to deliver and work in partnership. However, we are nowhere near that balancing point yet, and the Government must recognise that, in laying out its vision for our economy, we have an excellent opportunity to find that balance and work in partnership on the issue of repowering.

Scotland’s first generation of wind farms are approaching the end of their operational life, yet less than 1 per cent of Scotland’s existing onshore wind capacity is community owned. We have an opportunity not simply to replace ageing turbines, but to rethink ownership and create generational economic impact and structural change in our economy. We can ensure that the next generation of energy infrastructure delivers benefits for our local and national economies. The recent report by Equitable Energy Research CIC shows in detail the scale of opportunity. The case for getting behind this as an economic opportunity is clear: the sites have roads, grid connections, planning histories and proven resource and capacity factors, and repowering those sites, and the economic gains that can be made from them, can be done more quickly and efficiently.

Likewise, the increase in generation that is possible with repowering already exists, with modern technology and turbine technology moving on. This year, we will see the first opportunities to repower inclusively and strategically on Forestry and Land Scotland sites. The Government must get behind that and ensure that those first-generation sites are delivered effectively, with long-term mass repowering options available to us.

Liam McArthur: I echo all the comments that Kristopher Leask has made so far. Would he also accept that, with regard to repowering, genuine community benefit can be derived only where communities have the skills that they need in order to drive forward those projects, and that investment in colleges in particular is therefore crucial?

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Kristopher Leask: Yes, I quite agree, and the broader point that Liam McArthur makes around community capacity and resourcing is crucial. When communities enter into such engagements with developers, they often face quite technical, legalistic and financial discussions, for which many of them are, understandably, not prepared. Historically, we have seen a postcode lottery, with communities that have the existing capacities and volunteers—often, those who are retired and have the time to take on the substantial roles involved—able to excel while others get left behind. We must do a piece of work to broaden that out, and I hope that the Government would welcome that.

There are, however, significant barriers to repowering as things stand. NPF4 as it stands is inadequate; we need additional guidance that unlocks repowering and provides clarity and certainty to developers and community groups alike. Our strategic spatial energy plan needs to reflect our repowering potential and understand the opportunity that lies ahead of us, and we must update our onshore wind policy statement with a strategic focus on repowering so that we can deliver on that potential.

As we look ahead to the next five—and the next 25—years for our economy, let us make the right choices about growth and where our priorities lie. The Parliament has the chance to create generational change and transform the relationship between energy, our economy and our communities, and I urge the cabinet secretary to work with the Scottish Greens in doing so.

17:28

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): It is good to be making my first speech of the session; members might be thinking, “I wish he’d waited a little longer.” I have asked a few questions in the chamber and I have got used to being shouted at by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, whom I warmly welcome to his new role. I hope that his somewhat robust approach to business in the Parliament does not translate into how he goes about what is a very serious and wide-ranging portfolio—[*Interruption.*]

I spoke too soon there, Presiding Officer—he is at it already. He should know that I am not really into those antics; I would rather have a constructive dialogue with Mr Flynn over the years. If, like his predecessor in the transport portfolio, he wants to listen to my ideas, he might get some credit if he introduces some of them, and that may help with any future ambitions that he may harbour; I do not know what those may be.

The cabinet secretary’s motion is surprisingly encouraging. It references growth and how that is key to delivering prosperity and improving public services—that is a good start. Unfortunately, there is no admission of the SNP’s failures, which are caused by its high-tax, high-regulation approach that is backed by their pals in the Scottish Greens.

Mr Flynn will no doubt have had a flurry of meetings with people—he is perhaps trying to squeeze them in before he abandons ship and heads to America. If he has met representatives of the tourism and hospitality sectors, he will have been left in no doubt that they want help. Parts of the sector, which is so vital to the economy of this country, are on their knees. Tourism levies will not help and sky-high business rates are more likely to lead to businesses closing, when we should be aiming for the opposite.

The hospitality sector is crying out for business rates reform, which needs to happen quickly. Action on business rates is also vital for rejuvenating our high streets. According to the Scottish Retail Consortium, shops that occupy medium-sized and larger premises in Scotland are set to face £162 million more in business rates over the next three years than their equivalent-sized counterparts down south.

Smaller stores that are liable for basic and intermediate property rates will benefit from the Scottish Government’s new rates relief for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. That is welcome, but the poundage rates will still be above those that are levied in England, while the amount that can be claimed will be capped, unlike in England.

Perhaps when Stephen Flynn is on his stateside jolly, he will check out the transport system there. In many parts of the world—and in many parts of Britain—transport systems are light years ahead of where we are in Scotland. Our transport system is not digitally connected, and we need multimodal smart ticketing. The technology exists and it is being used elsewhere in these isles—I will be happy to talk to Mr Flynn about that. I recommend that he gets out and about over the summer and that, when he returns, he meets the Government’s smart ticketing advisory board to ask it what the hold-up is. I would go a bit further, but politeness precludes me from saying what I really think about that.

Digital connectivity is an ask of the Scottish Tourism Alliance, as is a call for a Scottish tourism and hospitality growth plan—we need to have one and it needs to lead to action. The Scottish Tourism Alliance set the Government several challenges in its first 100 days, in its first year and in this parliamentary session. We already have its ask for the first 100 days, which was for a dedicated, named cabinet secretary—let us

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hope that Mr Flynn can deliver. I have already mentioned its second ask, which is to accelerate business rates reform.

Thirdly, the Scottish Tourism Alliance wants the Government to commit to no new regulatory and tax burdens on businesses or any policies that negatively impact on Scotland's competitiveness. Instead, it asks the Scottish Government and MSPs to proactively partner with the sector to identify, shape and deliver a new set of ambitious policies to support the industry to grow in a sustainable and responsible way. All that may go against the grain for the SNP, but perhaps Mr Flynn will surprise us.

In the first year, the Scottish Tourism Alliance wants to see the growth plan that I mentioned. It also wants the Scottish Government to identify a multiyear funding package for VisitScotland, EventScotland and destination management organisations. It is realistic in wanting better transport over the course of this parliamentary session. I would act quicker, but, as most of us know, Transport Scotland does not work at pace, so we will perhaps need to wait.

Duncan Massey's amendment retains much of the cabinet secretary's motion but adds the obvious line that lower taxes lead to growth and more revenue. That is something that a previous finance secretary—and all others since—have failed to grasp, and it is holding Scotland back.

I have listened with interest to other members' contributions, including that of Mr Flynn, who mentioned independence. He also mentioned having a faster planning system, but without saying how we would achieve that. Daniel Johnson made the same point. Like me, Jenny Young visited Forth Valley College this week, and she will have heard about the threat to our college sector from underfunding by the SNP over a period of years. That must stop.

Scotland's economy must grow to pay for the public services that we all need. We need a coherent, cross-sectoral plan to achieve that—one that does not hammer businesses and individuals with more regular and high tax. Scotland needs to become more competitive than England. In short, Scotland needs reform.

17:35

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a pleasure to close this debate on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party. I welcome the minister to his place and for making a fine first speech. We are certainly agreed on the ends—on the objectives for our country in the interests of its people. The debate has turned on the question of how best to achieve and effect those outcomes that we all want.

"Opportunity" and "potential" were the words most frequently repeated in speeches this afternoon. Their absence is a significant concern facing people in this country. As members have mentioned, the recent election clearly reflected a deep sense of alienation and injustice in the country today.

When the late, great Donald Dewar opened the Parliament, he said:

"I look forward to the days ahead when this Chamber will sound with debate, argument and passion. When men and women from all over Scotland will meet to work together for a future built from the first principles of social justice."

Social justice is at the heart of what we are talking about today when we consider economic growth and how best that serves the interests of the people we represent.

GDP is a simple enough equation: consumption plus investment plus Government expenditure plus exports minus imports. However, behind that lies the question of who benefits from that equation and who owns the proceeds of the growth and the activity.

The main factor in that equation that the Government deals with is expenditure. There were a number of thoughtful speeches, notably from the member for Angus South, who noted that a lot more could be done with Government expenditure and procurement, and that those aspects could work a lot harder for the people of Scotland. We would want to encourage that.

The latest statistics that I have seen show that there was £8.9 billion of public sector procurement expenditure in 2022–23. However, only around half of that is spent in Scotland itself, which affects the multiplier effect that could be generated to benefit Scotland's people.

I will translate that into a practical example from shipbuilding, the industry in which I worked. I know that the member for Inverclyde has a strong interest in that, which he reflected in his speech.

Although we have a shipbuilding industry of which we in this country are proud, we could achieve much more with the purchasing power of the Scottish Government. However, significant numbers of shipbuilding contracts are going overseas—to Turkey, China and Poland. One of the main reasons for that is that the Government has not put in place the financial mechanisms to enable Scottish shipyards to front-finance

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contracts, meaning that they are unable to compete for that business. That could be fixed relatively easily with a more joined-up approach.

I hope that the Government will look at that. I appealed to Kate Forbes, the then Deputy First Minister, to consider that when she was in Government. I hope that we can make progress on the issue in this session of Parliament.

That relates to a point that was raised in a number of speeches: the thwarted potential of our people. Half a million people in Scotland are locked out of work. They are the great unused capital of human potential.

Jimmy Reid was a great shipbuilder. At his funeral, Billy Connolly delivered a fantastic eulogy. He recalled that, as they passed a high-rise block of flats in Glasgow, Jimmy Reid said that behind every one of those windows was a Nobel prize-winning chemist or an Olympic athlete—someone who might have won gold—but who never got the chance because, from birth, they were denied opportunity.

That takes us back to the 20 per cent cut to colleges that was mentioned in a number of speeches and to the inability to connect people with educational opportunities. I see that in the shipbuilding industry, where lots of contractors are coming in from all around the world to work in Scotland's shipyards, because we simply cannot get the skilled labour into the yards to do the jobs that are needed.

That is tragic, because we are seeing lots of potential being lost, as well as lots of jobs being lost elsewhere in the Scottish economy. Getting that joined up and connected in an efficient and effective way is really important. That is a good target for the Government in the coming years. Let us make that Government expenditure work harder to unlock investment, grow the economic base and the tax base, improve consumption and even promote exports around the world, which will all contribute to positive economic growth.

It is also important to reflect what other members said in their speeches about the nature of foreign ownership in Scotland. Around 6 per cent of Scotland's wealth is taken out of the country in extractive investments, which are rent seeking. It is important to recognise that greater ownership of our economy is important.

Simply saying that foreign direct investment is up in Scotland does not mean that it is always a good thing. I will point to an example in the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport's constituency. The recent takeover of Wood Group by Dubai-based Sidara is a great shame for Scotland. Wood Group was one of the great legacies of the North Sea for this country and was one of the great industrial champions that we built in Scotland. It was really disappointing that it was lost to foreign ownership in the way that it was, because that was avoidable. In the previous parliamentary session, I made suggestions to the Government about how that could have been solved by the Government taking a transitional stake in the business, but they were not listened to.

We need to be more interventionist, more active and more agile in protecting Scottish ownership.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Will you please wind up?

Paul Sweeney: It is a great shame to see the loss of Scottish-owned businesses and Scottish industrial potential. To join up some of those themes, that is how the Government could work much harder for the interests of the Scottish people.

17:41

Stephen Flynn: A fair few members who have just entered the chamber did not have the opportunity to enjoy the lively and spirited debate that we had this afternoon. I was particularly struck by the consensus that we managed to achieve. I managed to get Daniel Johnson and Duncan Massey to agree that what we are proposing is hopeful for the future. I think that I even got Patrick Harvie and Duncan Massey to agree on the purpose of taking back control, if I was listening correctly.

Patrick Harvie: Nah.

Stephen Flynn: Mr Harvie is correcting me in that regard. That might be where the consensus ended. I know that Mr Harvie is desperate to disagree with me, but, if he had listened to my opening remarks, he would know there was a lot on which we agree, because I was clear in setting out my view that we need an economy that works for absolutely everyone. I said that that means good jobs and good wages, and it means stronger businesses with the opportunity to grow. It means ensuring that the generations that follow our own enjoy better living standards than we do.

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

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Stephen Flynn: I am sure that Mr Harvie would agree on that point, as I expect him to do now.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful for that comment. I hope that, if Stephen Flynn is right, we will hear more about the concept of the wellbeing economy, which we did not hear much about today. However, one thing that he was unclear about in his remarks was Rosebank. He blamed Tory environmental assessments for having blocked it. Will he confirm whether he still supports what I took to be the Scottish Government's position—that it supports environmental assessments—and that those projects must pass a climate compatibility test, whatever on earth that actually means? If they are not compatible with climate action, they should not go ahead.

Stephen Flynn: Mr Harvie may have misheard me when I corrected Mr Hoy earlier in the debate. He was complaining about the fact that those projects had not gone forward, so I simply highlighted the fact that his party was in charge and in government at Westminster when the matter was dragged through the courts, and that, of course, we had the Finch ruling on scope 3 emissions. That was purely a point of clarity for Mr Hoy's benefit. It is safe to say that he needed a fair bit of help in respect of clarity.

We listened as members detailed the various aspects of what people would like to happen to Scotland's economy, and one theme that cut through is the narrative from Reform and the Conservatives on tax. What they do not recognise, posit or contribute to the debate is an acknowledgement of the importance of the state's ability to contribute when it comes to skills, infrastructure and health. That is absolutely fundamental to securing an economy that is stable, that investors can have confidence in and that can secure growth. They would do well to reflect on that moving forward.

Where we did get agreement was on renewables. I, along with Daniel Johnson and many others behind me, talked positively about renewables. Why would we not talk positively about that when we recognise that billions of pounds' worth of investment is flowing into Scotland and that there are in excess of 100,000 jobs in that sector alone? That is Scotland looking to the future and trying to capitalise on the golden ticket that we have been offered for a second time in relation to energy.

I can see Mr Massey squinting. The reason why he is squinting is that, during the election campaign, I had the joy of appearing in a hustings with him, when he argued that there was not one single job in Aberdeen related to the renewables sector—not a single job.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Stephen Flynn: I am very surprised that a Conservative member is about to try to defend Duncan Massey.

Finlay Carson: I do not think that that is the case—the cabinet secretary has misjudged me.

What is his view on the thousands of rural constituents who see their rural landscapes being industrialised and being dumping grounds for some of these renewables? What does he say to those communities?

Stephen Flynn: I completely reject Finlay Carson's assertion in respect of a dumping ground. If he had been in the chamber earlier, he would have heard me speak positively and hopefully about the benefit of farming, fishing and agriculture to Scotland's economy, both now and in the future. He might not want to embrace the fact that, ultimately, when we produce energy, as Scotland will do, we need to get it from A to B and deliver it to that market. However, in using the terms that he is using, he does himself and the renewables sector a complete disservice.

I have found myself in agreement with Mr Rennie on far too many occasions since I came to the Parliament, although perhaps not in regard to the glitz that he inferred that we bring to the debate.

Duncan Massey: *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Stephen Flynn: Och, it is Nigel Farage's man—on you go.

Duncan Massey: Will the cabinet secretary highlight that, in allocation round 7, which was the most recent funding round, the furthest north project was offshore of Berwick? That is obviously not going to help the people of the north-east of Scotland. It was also set at a contracts for difference price of £95 per megawatt hour, which is much higher than market prices, and with a 20-year contract.

Stephen Flynn: I am not sure that there was a question in there, but I think that Mr Massey misunderstands the concept of a strike price and a wholesale market price, and how that operates in terms of the end user. I am very surprised that a member for the north-east does not understand that supply chains operate right across Scotland and across the energy sector, both in oil and gas and in the renewables space. I am sure that, over the months and years to come, he will learn that.

Willie Rennie made a couple of important points in respect of profit and work, which Daniel Johnson also emphasised. None of us should be wary of talking about the benefit of profit, for the very reasons that Mr

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Rennie outlined. That money is hard earned by small and medium-sized enterprises, and, more often than not, it is reinvested back into their local communities.

The point about work goes to the heart of the point that I tried to make in my opening remarks about productivity and the need to skill up our workforce—our young people, our people who are out of work and our people who want to change jobs—so that they can contribute in a fashion that delivers for all of us collectively. I look forward to working with Mr Rennie in that regard.

Boosting productivity will be crucial to what we seek to do to grow Scotland's economy. So, too, will be unlocking investment and championing the industries of the future, whether those are in AI, quantum or other areas. It is about making sure that we expand Scotland's global reach, and we will build on the work that we have done on that up to now. It is about being brave in reforming the system, whether that is the planning system or the regulatory framework that sits behind it. I like to think that we can get common cause and consensus in that regard.

We have to be—we must be—the Parliament that delivers economic growth for Scotland, because far too many of our people do not know what that feels like. They do not know what that lived experience means to them, their families and their communities.

Craig Hoy *rose*—

Stephen Flynn: Mr Hoy is tempting me to allow him in, Presiding Officer. With your good grace, I am more than happy to do so.

Craig Hoy: Before the cabinet secretary closes, I ask him to respond to Sir Tom Hunter, who said:

"The current state of our nation does not reflect our potential. I have never heard so much disquiet amongst business leaders paying yet more and more tax with poorer and poorer outcomes."

Is that the kind of Scotland that Stephen Flynn wants to build on?

Stephen Flynn: Fortunately for Mr Hoy, I was in the company of Tom Hunter recently. I heard him state that the meeting that he had with the First Minister—I think that it was the First Minister's first meeting on returning to office—was "incredibly productive". We will build on that and ensure that individuals like Sir Tom and others in our business community—the innovators, investors and entrepreneurs—know that they have a Government that is on their side and working with them to ensure that there is economic growth for Scotland in Scotland.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Earlier, I failed—

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Can you first say which standing order you are referring to?

Rachael Hamilton: Earlier, I failed to register my interest as a shareholder in a hospitality business. I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests. I am not clear whether the register of interests has been published, but I am doing this just in case.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for that. The deadline for entries is Saturday.

That concludes the debate on growing Scotland's economy.

Decision Time

17:51

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S7M-00290.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, 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.

17:52

Meeting suspended.

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17:55

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S7M-00290.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to access the voting app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My vote failed to register. I would have noted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

Yi-pei Chou Turvey (North East Scotland) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I did not manage to put the personal identification number code in properly. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the voting system. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

For

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

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Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)

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Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00290.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, is: For 35, Against 87, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00290.2, in the name of Duncan Massey, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The First Minister (John Swinney): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the digital platform. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to access the voting app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

For

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmullian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

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Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

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Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00290.2, in the name of Duncan Massey, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, is: For 28, Against 78, Abstentions 16.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00290.4, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I, too, was unable to connect to the voting app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

For

Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)

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Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)

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Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00290.4, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, is: For 15, Against 91, Abstentions 16.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00290.5, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to connect to the voting app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

For

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)

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McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)

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Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The result of the division on amendment S7M-00290.5, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, is: For 27, Against 79, Abstentions 16.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00290.1, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to vote. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)

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Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Against

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)

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Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The result of the division on amendment S7M-00290.1, in the name of Liam McArthur, is: For 78, Against 28, Abstentions 16.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to access the voting app. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to access the voting app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)

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Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)

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Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-00290, in the name of Stephen Flynn, on growing Scotland's economy, as amended, is: For 79, Against 43, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that higher economic growth is essential to delivering long-term prosperity, tackling child poverty, improving public services and achieving climate ambitions; agrees that supporting enterprise, investment, innovation and trade is key to maximising productivity and increasing sustainable and inclusive economic growth; supports action to remove unnecessary barriers to success; acknowledges Scotland's economic potential, including its key strengths in sectors such as energy, food and drink, financial services, and space; endorses a continued focus on economic growth to build a more resilient, prosperous, and fairer Scotland for all; believes that Brexit has had a deeply damaging impact on the economy, and agrees that one of the biggest changes that could be made to boost growth, fix trade and cut the cost of living would be a new bespoke customs union between the UK and the EU.

The Presiding Officer: Before we conclude decision time, I remind members who have not yet done so to please vote in the conveners election. Around 100 members have already voted, but a number of you are yet to cast your ballot, which can be done in committee room 5. Voting remains open until 7 o'clock tonight.

That concludes decision time.

18:05

Members' business will be published tomorrow, 10 June 2026, as soon as the text is available.

The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.