Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Coinneamh na Pàrlamaid

Tuesday 23 June 2026

Session 7

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website—
www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 23 June 2026

CONTENTS

Col.

TIME FOR REFLECTION **1**
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION **3**
BUSINESS MOTION **4**
GENERAL QUESTION TIME **6**
Oil and Gas Licences (Rosebank and Jackdaw Developments) 6
SPSO (Complaints Allocation) 7
M8 (Woodside Viaducts) 8
Banking Services (Rural Areas) 10
"Coming Home" Report (Hospital Placements) 12
Schools (Four-day Week) 13
Public Sector (Transparency and Accountability) 15
Baird Family Hospital and ANCHOR Centre 16
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME **17**
BACK-BENCH MEMBERS **17**
Attacks in Edinburgh (Scottish Government Response) 17
Transgender Prisoners (Court of Session Ruling) 18
Brexit (Economic Impact) 18
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service 19
Royal Regiment of Scotland (20th Anniversary) 20
Local Authority Funding (North Ayrshire) 20
Business Rates Relief (Vacant Properties) 21
NHS Scotland (Dual Roles) 21
Treatment Access (Lymphoedema) 22
Marine Environment (Protection) 22
Organised Crime (Rural Scotland) 23
Grangemouth (Sustainable Aviation Fuel) 23
Drug Policy 24
Violence in Schools 25
Green Economy 25
Fire Stations 26
Local Government Budgets (Glasgow City Council) 27
Accident and Emergency Targets 27
Delayed Discharge (Impacts) 28
NON-DOMESTIC RATES **30**
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth) 30
The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin) 44
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab) 50
Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform) 55
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green) 59
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con) 62
Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD) 65
Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP) 67
Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP) 69
David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP) 71
Katie Hagmann (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) 73
Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP) 75
Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD) 77
Finlay Carson 80
Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green) 82
Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform) 84
Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab) 87
Gillian Martin 90

STEEL INDUSTRY (NATIONALISATION) BILL 95
The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur) 95
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab) 99
Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform) 100
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) 101
Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD) 102
Tom Arthur 103
POINT OF ORDER 107
Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform) 107
DECISION TIME 108
STV NORTH NEWS 124
Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP) 124
Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab) 127
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green) 129
Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP) 131
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con) 133
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP) 134
David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD) 136
Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) 138
Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform) 140
The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan) 141
CORRECTION 144

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 23 June 2026

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is George Black CBE, chair of the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth games.

George Black CBE: Presiding Officer, First Minister, ministers and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

When I was first approached to be the chair of the Glasgow 2026 organising company, it was something of a surprise. I had been fully retired for five years and was very happy with my new life. However, as the chief executive of Glasgow City Council, I had been heavily involved in the 2014 games, from the initial bid to host the games right through to the delivery of the games themselves. The 2014 games were great for Glasgow and Scotland, and I was keen to protect and enhance the legacy of those games.

Two years ago, the future of the Commonwealth games was a genuine topic of conversation. The question being asked—in sport, in Government and in headlines around the world—was whether an event of this kind still had a place in the modern era. When Commonwealth Sport asked whether any country or territory would host the 2026 games, only Glasgow and Scotland stepped forward.

Of course, the 2026 games are quite different from the 2014 games. Glasgow 2026 is a deliberately reimagined games: 10 sports, with six fully integrated para sports, staged across four world-class venues in an eight-mile corridor in Glasgow. For the first time, it will be delivered with no public funding of the sports programme. It is a working blueprint of what is possible not only for the Commonwealth games but for mega events around the world—an opportunity to rethink what has been done before and to make a change. It is proof that world-class sport can be staged sustainably, affordably and inclusively in a way that opens the door to future hosts of every size and circumstance right across the Commonwealth. We know that the eyes of the world are watching and that it is taking note.

What our extraordinary team in Glasgow is doing is game changing: it is redefining what is possible for major events and the impact that they can make not just in our cities and communities but across our global networks. If we get this right—and we will—the impact of Glasgow 2026 will be felt not only in our communities and venues but in cities and towns across the Commonwealth, which will look at what Glasgow and Scotland have done and say, “We can do that, too.”

Sport has a unique power to bring people together across communities and across the country. I invite every member of the Scottish Parliament to go all in for Glasgow 2026: to experience the sport, take part in the festival and get behind the athletes from across these islands who will compete on the world stage in Glasgow.

Thank you for listening.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S7M-00457, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the suspension of standing orders. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of consideration of the legislative consent memorandum on the National Security (State Threats) Bill, Rule 9B.3.5 of Standing Orders is suspended.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S7M-00458, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 23 June 2026—

after

Scottish Government Debate: Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change

insert

followed by Motion on Legislative Consent: Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill – UK Legislation

delete

5.30 pm Decision Time

and insert

6.00 pm Decision Time

(b) Wednesday 24 June 2026—

after

Reform UK Debate: Scotland Needs Reform: Five Years to 2031

insert

followed by Motion on Legislative Consent: National Security (State Threats) Bill – UK Legislation

delete

5.30 pm Decision Time

and insert

6.00 pm Decision Time

(c) Thursday 25 June 2026—

after

Scottish Government Debate: Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: NHS Capital Projects

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion: Membership of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.05 pm Decision Time—[*Jamie Hepburn*].

Motion agreed to.

General Question Time

14:04

Oil and Gas Licences (Rosebank and Jackdaw Developments)

1. **David Smith (West Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the approval of licences for the Rosebank and Jackdaw developments, in light of their potential impact on North Sea jobs and oil and gas tax revenues. (S7O-00098)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): As the member knows, decisions on the consenting of individual offshore oil and gas fields are matters that are currently reserved to the United Kingdom Government.

While I am on my feet, and as this is the first time that I have spoken in the chamber since the by-elections last week, I take the opportunity to congratulate Douglas Lumsden on his success and my own successor at Westminster, Lara Bird, on her success—and, frankly, on getting a much larger majority than I had.

David Smith: This question has come up a few times and the answers are getting a bit boring now. The last time that the First Minister stood up, he made reference to the Finch judgment. The Finch judgment was thrown out on a technicality. They wanted the environmental case to take into account the downstream impacts of burning the hydrocarbons. When it is resubmitted, we know exactly what it is going to say. It is going to say that it is going to use the worst-case scenario—

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Question, please.

David Smith: Instead of hiding behind the environmental impact assessment report, will the Scottish Government show some courage and back North Sea oil and gas jobs?

Stephen Gethins: This Government always backs jobs in the north-east. I will make two points. This Government has worked with the oil and gas sector, and I was doing work on skills just yesterday. It also backs the just transition and the tens of thousands of jobs that have come online in the low-carbon area, many of them benefiting the north-east, which would be thrown under the bus by Reform.

On the question of the law, I will not pre-empt that decision. I respect the rule of law and I will have to respect the decisions that are made. That is a basic for a minister, and I am not sure that any MSP would expect me to say otherwise.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In contrast to the answer that we have just heard, according to the Robert Gordon University report that was released today, policies pursued by this Scottish National Party Government towards oil and gas could lead to

"loss of a skilled workforce, erosion of supply chain capacity and a weakening"

of the wider economy.

Removing the presumption against new oil and gas, supporting Jackdaw and Rosebank and having an energy strategy would help to change that, so will the cabinet secretary change course and adopt those measures, or will he throw 18,000 offshore energy jobs under a bus?

The Presiding Officer: You are being promoted again, minister.

Stephen Gethins: I would like to thank my fellow north-east MSP for that. He knows that this Government is investing in jobs and skills. Yesterday, I visited the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland, where we saw at first hand the way in which the skill set is complementing—[*Interruption*.] I am being barracked by Mr Kerr again, but he is much further away than he ever used to be now that his party is in fifth place. I think that that speaks to the disaster of the energy profits levy that was introduced by his Government. [*Interruption*.]

Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Despite Scotland's vast energy resources, energy policy remains reserved to the UK Government, meaning that the benefits of our energy wealth are not felt by the Scottish people. What assessment has the minister made of that lack of control and the impact on Scotland's economy, fuel security and natural environment?

Stephen Gethins: Dawn Black is right. Like me, and unlike those who have questioned me previously, she believes that those powers should be in this Parliament. We consistently get criticism about policy that was pursued by Westminster. Scotland's vast energy resources have contributed £400 billion to the Treasury, with very little back, and the energy profits levy puts the just transition at risk and accelerates the decline in oil and gas before renewables are ready. This place is much better placed to have powers over energy, and that is why this Parliament voted for that.

SPSO (Complaints Allocation)

2. **Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on service users of delays of up to 28 weeks in the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman allocating complaints to a reviewer. (S7O-00099)

The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform (Ivan McKee): We understand that the SPSO assesses complaints to identify how they should be prioritised. The SPSO prioritises cases where a complainant is vulnerable or the matter is assessed as urgent and ongoing. The SPSO keeps people who are affected by delays informed.

In 2024-25, the SPSO reduced the number of open cases by 15 per cent. The SPSO is a Scottish Parliament-supported organisation, however, and it is the Scottish Parliament, rather than the Scottish Government, that is ultimately responsible for holding the SPSO to account for its performance and resourcing.

Duncan Massey: This is a significant failing. The ombudsman is a key part of our public services and a key part of how people interact with them. There is deep dissatisfaction with the way in which investigations are carried out. How bad does the situation have to get before a full investigation is made?

Ivan McKee: That would be a matter for the Parliament, not the Government. As an organisation, the ombudsman rightly sits separate from the Government. It is supported by the Parliament and it is for the Parliament, rather than the Government, to hold the SPSO to account. The member may wish to take up the matter with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

M8 (Woodside Viaducts)

3. **Kim Schmulian (Glasgow) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government, following the recently closed public consultation into the future of the Woodside viaducts, which support a section of the M8 in Glasgow, what further consultation has taken place with key stakeholders regarding preferred options and associated costs for the delivery of this major project. (S7O-00100)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The early public consultation on strategic options for the M8 Woodside viaducts permanent works project concluded on 25 March 2026. As part of the Scottish transport appraisal guidance process for identification and appraisal of transport interventions, three strategic approaches were presented: repair, replace and remove. Since then, engagement has continued—with key stakeholders including Glasgow City Council, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, community councils, the Road Haulage Association and the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce—to inform the appraisal of potential options and associated costs. The work is ongoing and no final decisions have been taken.

Kim Schmulian: The minister will be aware that heavy goods vehicles have been directed to the

M74, to the south of Glasgow, and that local residents are concerned about traffic congestion via the on-boarding and off-boarding ramps at Rutherglen and Cambuslang. Was there any liaison with Glasgow City Council regarding a traffic impact assessment?

Tom Arthur: I do not have at hand the details to answer the member's question, but I am happy to ask officials to write to the member, to provide her with an update.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does the minister find it surprising—as I do—that, while the options remain on the table, some people seem determined to argue for the most expensive and time-consuming options rather than the quickest and cheapest option, which is removal? Does the minister agree that there needs to be an environmental assessment of the longer-term impacts and not only of the construction phase of the options—which has not so far taken place?

Tom Arthur: The member's question illustrates that there are a range of views on the issue. I want to provide assurance to Parliament that no decisions have been taken. There has been an initial public consultation, and there will be detailed consideration of that before any further consultation. The Government is committed to fully engaging throughout the process, ensuring that all voices have the opportunity to make representations—including on the points that Mr Harvie has articulated.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The Woodside viaducts are an oversized relic of a bygone era, and they were built far wider and taller than the traffic flow requires, as Glasgow Corporation rightly stepped in to cancel the planned Maryhill motorway in 1975. Rather than accepting a false binary of either spending a fortune to maintain a 1970s concrete scar or completely severing the trunk route, we need a solution suited to modern inner-city urbanism.

Will the minister ask Transport Scotland to formally evaluate a compromise approach to replace the obsolete viaducts with a surface-level urban boulevard, taking direct inspiration from international precedents such as San Francisco's Embarcadero and New York's Sheridan Boulevard?

Tom Arthur: The member's supplementary question further highlights the range of views that exist on the issue. It has been important to have a process of public engagement. I provide assurance to the Parliament that full and detailed consideration will be given to all the opinions that have been expressed to date, including the views that have been articulated by the member, before further action is taken.

Banking Services (Rural Areas)

4. **Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I apologise for my late arrival in the chamber. To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with stakeholders to support the maintenance of banking services in rural areas. (S7O-00101)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): Although regulation of financial services is reserved, Scottish Government ministers and officials regularly engage with the sector and the regulator on the issue. Officials have raised Scottish-specific concerns with the Financial Conduct Authority, including Scotland's rural and remote geography, topography and demographics, as well as the methodology used by Link to assess communities and make decisions about banking hubs. We await the upcoming reviews by the FCA on access to cash and HM Treasury on access to banking services, which we will use to represent Scotland's interests. We continue to urge all financial services providers to hear and address customer concerns.

Finlay Carson: Given the recent closure of the last remaining bank in Kirkcudbrightshire, does the minister recognise that access to in-person banking services remains essential for many of my constituents, particularly older residents and smaller businesses, who rely on banking but do not have reliable digital access? The minister rightly said that the development of banking hubs is reserved. What support can the Scottish Government provide to ensure that banking hubs deliver a full range of face-to-face banking services, not just access to cash? What specific steps can it take to help to secure a hub or equivalent provision in areas such as Kirkcudbrightshire?

Tom Arthur: I thank the member for his important question, which certainly reflects my experience as a constituency member. Over my time in elected office, there have been numerous instances of a bank branch closing in my constituency to the detriment of my constituents, so I recognise the important role that the branches play. There is broad agreement on that across Parliament. As a minister, I am committed to engaging constructively with members on such matters.

Although we recognise the reserved nature of the issue, the Scottish Government is committed to engaging constructively. That is why we have made representations as part of the ongoing review process. I am committed to ensuring that all members have the opportunity to make representations to me, so that I can articulate that case to the UK Government. Beyond that, I am keen to work with members across the Parliament,

in recognition of the fact that the issue impacts right across Scotland. With banking hubs, we have a model that has proven to be very effective, and I think that we all agree that we want it to grow and develop.

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): The recent bank closures in the Highlands have been widespread. In Sutherland, not a single bank remains open. Too many of my constituents are being asked to travel hours on end, which is impacting vulnerable customers and businesses alike.

Does the minister agree that although protecting access to cash is important, it is not enough on its own? The minister mentioned access to banking. Will he undertake to write to the United Kingdom Government in support of access to banks, with regard to a provision in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023, to ensure that rural communities are not left behind?

Tom Arthur: The member makes a series of important points, particularly in highlighting the significant impact in more rural parts of Scotland. However, it should be understood that bank closures also have a profound impact in more urban parts of Scotland, as I have seen at first hand in my constituency in the central belt. This is a pan-Scotland issue.

I would be happy to follow up with Mr Green on the points that he has raised, and, if other members wish to make representations to me on the matter, I will be more than happy to pass them on to the UK Government.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): In Fife, the Kingdom Community Bank has been a breath of fresh air for many of my constituents. It provides access to physical branches and a personalised service, often manned by volunteers, at a time when big banks are shutting up shop and cutting jobs.

Does the Scottish Government have any plans to support or encourage the creation of community banks as a possible alternative for rural communities across Scotland?

Tom Arthur: I thank the member for highlighting the positive impact of the example that she cited in her area. Although, as I said, I recognise the reserved nature of the issue, I want to work constructively on it. I am happy to engage with members to identify any opportunities where the Scottish Government can work constructively with local authorities, community organisations, the regulators and, indeed, the UK Government to ensure that we maximise access to banking services across Scotland, recognising the vital role that they play.

"Coming Home" Report (Hospital Placements)

5. **Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** My entry in the register of members' interests will show that I was employed by Scottish Autism until my election in May. To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the number of people with learning disabilities and complex needs who remain in inappropriate hospital placements, eight years on from its report, "Coming Home". (S7O-00102)

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): We established the dynamic support register in 2023 to ensure that people with learning disabilities and complex needs are visible and as a tool to support targeted local action. The most recently published quarterly statistics evidence that there has been some progress on the issue. They show that the number of people in the "Urgent" category has reduced from 488 to 383 since March 2024, which is a reduction of more than 100 people.

I remain committed to continued improvement, and we are providing a further £20 million to implement the "Coming Home Action Plan", which was published on 19 March this year. That will take our total direct investment to date in "Coming Home" to £40 million.

Joe Long: Notwithstanding the progress that has been made, the figures that were published last week by Public Health Scotland are stark. There are 29 adults with learning disabilities in inappropriate out-of-area placements, and 67 people are stuck in hospital despite being clinically ready to leave. Of those 67 people, 42 have been waiting for more than a year and nine have been stuck in hospital for more than six years. A further 196 people were recorded as being at risk of support breakdown. What measures will the minister urgently take now to ensure that all people with learning disabilities have the home environment and skilled support that they need to fulfil their human right to life in the community?

Alison Thewliss: We should be concerned about anybody being inappropriately stuck in hospital for too long, and action is ongoing on that issue. It should be remembered that people may well have had a need for assessment and treatment when they were admitted to hospital, but it is also the case that some people will have been admitted because their community placement had broken down, and people sometimes stay in hospital for too long when they should be being supported in the community.

We are currently developing a complex support needs pathway, which is an action in the action plan. That will set out key actions, timelines and guidance for each stage from admission to discharge. It will be an important tool that will

effectively provide a person-centred standard for discharge from hospital. The pathway is being finalised and will be consulted on soon.

We are also focusing on prevention and early intervention approaches to help to keep people well and to reduce the risk of placement breakdown, which can sometimes lead to people being put in hospital.

The Presiding Officer: Minister, please wind up—this is a long answer.

Alison Thewliss: That includes the introduction of learning disability annual health checks, which are being rolled out across Scotland.

Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green): What assessment has the minister made of the number of young people with learning disabilities and complex needs who remain far from home or in adult settings due to a lack of appropriate local services?

Alison Thewliss: I do not have those specific figures in front of me, but I am more than happy to discuss that issue with Cara McKee in greater detail, because it has a significant impact on young people and their families.

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): I point members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am an elected member on West Lothian Council. Will the minister provide an update on how the Scottish Government is ensuring that local government and the national health service are working together to deliver complex care packages for those who need them?

Alison Thewliss: The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have undertaken several actions to ensure that local government and the NHS are working together effectively to deliver complex care packages through the coming home programme. A key focus has been improving co-ordination between NHS boards, local authorities and integration authorities and supporting that through the better use of data, shared oversight and earlier joint planning.

That work builds on the £20 million that has already been distributed to integration authorities since 2021 through the community living change fund. It will further benefit from the new £20 million complex care investment that I mentioned earlier, which will be delivered through Independent Living Fund Scotland. That investment will support bespoke community-based packages of care.

Schools (Four-day Week)

6. **Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, as part of its approach to promoting the wellbeing of children and young people, what assessment it has made of the potential impact of a four-day school week on opportunities for activities outwith formal education. (S7O-00103)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Siobhian Brown): Under the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975, local authorities must ensure that schools are open for at least 190 days of the year. A four-day school week would require an amendment to those regulations, and I emphasise that the Government currently has no plans to do that.

However, I recognise the value of opportunities for activities outwith formal education. That is why we are investing in initiatives such as the Scottish Football Association's extra time programme and Sistema's big noise, and we are taking forward plans to deliver outdoor education following the Parliament's passing of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Act 2026 in the previous session.

Kate Campbell: Last week, I was at Sanderson's Wynd primary school to speak to the primary 5s and 6s, who are doing a module on democracy and decision making. I got the notification that I had been selected to ask a general question just as I was heading off to the school.

When I spoke to the children, I said, "What would you ask if you could ask any question of the Scottish Government?" It turned out that they had had a detailed discussion about the benefits of four-day school weeks, and they wanted me to pass on their thoughts to the Scottish Government. They had considered the issue in the round, and one reason they thought it would be beneficial was that it would allow more time for sports, extracurricular activities and family life. My personal favourite—

The Presiding Officer: This is great, but it is general question time, and we need questions.

Kate Campbell: Sorry. It is for the children, Presiding Officer.

Being less tired was another good reason. They understood that there would be drawbacks, but they were very excited at the idea that the Scottish Government might consider their proposals.

The Presiding Officer: Please ask a question.

Kate Campbell: Would the minister consider the benefits in the round, so that the children at Sanderson's Wynd will understand that they, too, can be part of democracy and ask questions of the Government?

Siobhian Brown: I thank the children at Sanderson's Wynd primary school for engaging

and for raising their views. I hope that they are watching.

We know that time outwith the school day is important to children and young people. When we engaged with primary school children in 2023 to co-design a children's charter for school-age childcare, they told us that they valued choice about how to spend that time. They want to relax and spend time with friends and family, as well as to play and take part in a range of activities.

The choice to take part in clubs and activities is really important. As pupils will know, that can help children to feel happier, to make new friends, to do better at school and to learn new skills. We want every child to have the chance to choose something that they enjoy, whether that is sport, music, drama or any other activity that they love.

Public Sector (Transparency and Accountability)

7. **Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to improve openness, transparency and accountability across the public sector. (S7O-00104)

The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform (Ivan McKee): As part of our programme of public service reform, we are embedding openness, transparency and accountability into how services are designed, delivered and improved. Our next open Government action plan will set out an anti-corruption strategy and plans for improving public participation in decision making.

Stephen Kerr: Every member of this Parliament will have examples from constituents in which officials or organisations have withheld information or covered up failure. That culture of concealment not only lets down families and individuals but fails the most vulnerable.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that we should have a definitive Scots law relating to misconduct in public office? Will he agree to meet me and other members from across the chamber to discuss how we might work together to provide legal support for the Nolan principle of integrity in public life?

Ivan McKee: I am very happy to meet the member to discuss that further. Such issues are hugely important to the Government. It is critical that we, and all public services, are transparent and are seen to be so.

I am informed that a United Kingdom Government bill is proceeding in that regard, and that we are engaging in discussions with it on that.

Baird Family Hospital and ANCHOR Centre

8. **Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its discussions with NHS Grampian regarding the status of the Baird family hospital and Aberdeen and North Centre for Haematology, Oncology and Radiotherapy. (S7O-00105)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government works closely with NHS Grampian and NHS Scotland Assure on all capital investment projects. Safety is always paramount, and NHS Grampian is implementing several changes to the new hospital as a result of clinical recommendations following a design review, which has had an impact on the completion date and the cost.

The key stage assurance review process is in place to ensure that a safe, high-quality healthcare facility is delivered. We are focused on ensuring that the ANCHOR centre and the Baird family hospital open when they can operate safely and effectively.

Jack Middleton: I appreciate that my constituents continue to receive first-class care elsewhere at Foresterhill, and that patient safety must be paramount, but the doors to the Baird and ANCHOR need to open, and need to stay open, as soon as possible. What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that there is accountability, scrutiny and proper leadership to get the project finalised to the highest standard of safety?

Angela Constance: I assure Mr Middleton that we remain absolutely focused on ensuring that the ANCHOR centre and the Baird family hospital open when they can operate safely and effectively.

A national oversight group, which is led by my officials, has been established to ensure that that happens as quickly as possible. The group has been established to take control of recovery planning and delivery of the Baird and ANCHOR. A key focus of the work is to establish a timeline for opening while ensuring that safety is not compromised. There are critical issues with building systems that may require redesign, but that work will determine cost and timeline. I will keep the member informed.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general question time.

First Minister's Question Time

Back-bench Members

14:30

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): We now move to back-bench questions to the First Minister.

Before I take the first question, which will be from Kate Campbell, I remind members that, in relation to the anti-Muslim attacks in Edinburgh, a criminal case is active for contempt of court purposes and the sub judice rule is engaged. I have exercised my discretion to allow reference to the case so that a question can be asked about the action being taken by the Scottish Government and others in the light of the attacks. However, members should avoid getting into the detail of the incident itself.

Attacks in Edinburgh (Scottish Government Response)

Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP): I know that the First Minister will share my horror and deep concern at the series of anti-Muslim attacks that took place in Edinburgh on Friday night. My thoughts are with those who have been hurt and the communities affected. People in Scotland must stand united in our condemnation of that hatred and against attempts to stoke fear and divide us.

Can the First Minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's response to the attacks and its engagement with Scotland's Muslim community, which will understandably be anxious because of what has happened?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I associate myself unreservedly with the comments that Kate Campbell has put on the record and I unequivocally condemn the horrendous attacks that took place on Friday.

Yesterday, along with Simita Kumar and Ben Macpherson, I visited the mosques in Broomhouse and Annandale Street and I met two young men who had been injured in the attacks. They have suffered physical injuries, but they are also clearly utterly traumatised by their experience on Friday night. They are a valued part of our community.

The Scottish Government will do all that we can to ensure that community cohesion is at the centre of all our work. We are doing that through a number of steps, including the "We are Scotland" campaign, which encourages cohesion in our communities; the work that is being taken forward in the education system to ensure that there is an awareness of the importance of cohesion in our communities; and making sure that our police are supported to undertake the valuable and critically important work that they undertook on Friday evening to protect members of the public who were subject to such a terrible attack.

I would say to Parliament, as I have said on a number of occasions, that there needs to be clear and emphatic leadership in this country that our politics are about bringing people together. That will always be what I say to Parliament and to the people of Scotland.

Transgender Prisoners (Court of Session Ruling)

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): There has been a very welcome and sudden U-turn from the Scottish Government in response to the court case that was decided on Friday about the presence of transgender male prisoners in the female prison estate. Although that was welcome, it was shocking that the Scottish Prison Service seemed to indicate initially that it would not be complying with the law and would continue to allow male-bodied prisoners in female prisons, putting females at risk.

I welcome the U-turn, but can the First Minister tell us how much taxpayer money has been spent on defending the indefensible with regard to this issue? Will he now finally agree to meet For Women Scotland to hear its concerns on behalf of vulnerable women?

The First Minister: Mr Fraser is a qualified solicitor. He will know that there is a necessity in the case of individual judgments for those involved to consider whether there is any basis on which an appeal should be mounted in a particular case. A swift decision has been taken by the Government not to appeal in this case and to indicate that the practical steps are now being taken by the Scottish Prison Service to ensure that the prison estate is entirely compliant with the judgment that was issued by Lady Ross on Friday.

The case involved considerations regarding ministers' legal obligations under the Scotland Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010 and the European convention on human rights. The complicated interaction of rights and responsibilities was fully aired in the case that was considered by Lady Ross, and the Government is now implementing the conclusions of that decision.

Brexit (Economic Impact)

Calum Kerr (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Scottish Parliament information centre research shows that economic growth in Europe has been a third higher than the United Kingdom's since Brexit. Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson said that the UK would be £350 million a week better off outside the European Union, but Brexit has caused real damage to our

economy. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of those findings? Does the First Minister share my concern that the Westminster parties continue to drag us down a path of managed economic decline?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Mr Kerr raises important issues around the economic impact of Brexit, which is relevant given that today marks 10 years since the Brexit referendum. Year on year, the scale of the Brexit disaster becomes more apparent. Modelling by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research estimated a 3.2 per cent hit to gross domestic product due to Brexit in 2025, increasing to an estimated 5.7 per cent by 2035. That equates to a cut in public revenues of around £3.3 billion in 2025 in Scotland. It is absolutely crystal clear that the Brexit experiment has failed. It is an unmitigated economic, political and societal disaster. We are clear that Scotland must rejoin the European Union as an independent member of it.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): The decisions taken by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board yesterday will affect more than 30 fire stations across Scotland, including those in Greenock, Helensburgh and Milngavie. The Fire Brigades Union has warned that there will be the most significant cuts to the front line in decades, with station closures and the loss of firefighter jobs and appliances. Does the First Minister agree that MSPs should have the opportunity to debate and vote on those cuts?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand the concerns that Katy Clark has put to Parliament today and the concerns that are expressed by members of the Fire Brigades Union. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board has consulted extensively on the changes. The board decided not to take forward a whole host of changes that were part of the consultation, which was because of the very point that I have explained to Parliament on previous occasions: that individual changes would have to be assessed to determine their suitability and sustainability to ensure that an effective fire and rescue service is in place.

Some of the changes involve the closure of a number of stations that have not operated and have had no staff for some time. There is the redesign of services in different parts of the community, with the creation of new stations to reflect changes in population growth. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board is empowered by law to take those decisions to ensure that we have sustainable services.

Obviously, members of Parliament can raise individual issues and questions in Parliament, but I am satisfied that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board has undertaken its scrutiny of this important issue with a very strong evidence base to enable it to come to the conclusions that it has come to.

Royal Regiment of Scotland (20th Anniversary)

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): As this is armed forces week, will the First Minister join me in congratulating all ranks of the Royal Regiment of Scotland on its 20th anniversary? Thousands of gallant young men and women from Scotland and across the Commonwealth have served in the regiment over the past two decades, with 23 paying the ultimate sacrifice for their country, including my friend Robert Hetherington. Will the Government formally recognise the regiment's 20th anniversary? With two-thirds of Scotland's councils having granted Scotland's line infantry regiment the freedom of their areas, is the First Minister willing to write to the Lord Provost of Glasgow to encourage her to grant that recognition from Scotland's largest city?

The First Minister (John Swinney): On that specific last point that Mr Sweeney raises with me, it is obviously a matter for individual local authorities to decide on their own position. However, for my part, I set out, on behalf of the Scottish Government, my appreciation of the service of all members of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, and indeed of the service of all members of the armed forces. They undertake a perilous task on our behalf to keep us safe.

I express my sympathy to Mr Sweeney on the loss of his friend, Robert Hetherington, and commend him for his service and sacrifice in ensuring the safety and security of our country. It is important on armed forces day—and every day—to remember the sacrifice of members of our armed forces, and I do so unreservedly in Parliament today.

Local Authority Funding (North Ayrshire)

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): More than £441 million that was allocated to local authorities for this year is yet to be formally allocated by the joint settlement and distribution group. Given the need to invest in further health and social care integration, and given that North Ayrshire moved to critical care-only provision in April, can the First Minister say when those resources will be distributed and how much will be allocated to North Ayrshire?

The First Minister (John Swinney): All funding to local government is subject to consideration by the joint settlement and distribution group and agreed to by Convention of Scottish Local Authorities leaders. To date, £44.9 million of previously undistributed revenue funding has been

discussed and agreed through those formal governance processes. As a result, North Ayrshire Council will receive an additional £1.2 million, which will be paid as a redetermination of the general revenue grant in the normal way.

Alongside a number of other smaller funding lines, £37.6 million for the teachers' induction scheme remains undistributed, because the data will not be available until later this year, and £19.6 million for discretionary housing payments will be distributed following a reconciliation at the end of the financial year. I assure Patricia Gibson that the mechanisms to ensure the distribution of those resources will be taken forward at the appropriate opportunity, when the data is available, to ensure that local authorities can receive the funding that has been allocated to them.

Business Rates Relief (Vacant Properties)

Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): Does the First Minister support nationally funding business rates relief for current vacant properties to encourage local growth, particularly in the rural economy of the Highlands and Islands?

The First Minister (John Swinney): A statement that relates to non-domestic rates will be made shortly by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government. Therefore, if Mr Bannerman will forgive me, I will not give a specific answer to his question. The Deputy First Minister will update Parliament on the latest developments in the Government's thinking on non-domestic rates shortly.

NHS Scotland (Dual Roles)

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): What is the Scottish Government's position on the appropriateness of a single individual holding the dual role of chief executive of NHS Scotland and director general for health and social care given that that arrangement places responsibility for operational delivery and the scrutiny of that delivery in the same office?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The arrangements to which Helen McDade has referred are about ensuring the operational delivery of the Government's priorities on health, and the statute requires ministers to be fundamentally responsible for the delivery of healthcare services in Scotland. The holding of those two posts—director general for health in the Scottish Government and chief executive of NHS Scotland—is to enable that link to be applied in the delivery of healthcare services in Scotland.

When I am holding the health service to account—for example, on reducing long waits, which has been an absolute priority of mine during my time as First Minister—I am holding the chief executive of NHS Scotland, the director general for health, and health secretaries, accountable for that very important issue. It is a part of our system's architecture that enables us to be satisfied that the priorities of ministers are being delivered in practice in the health service around the country.

Treatment Access (Lymphoedema)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I have a constituent who, for the past nine years, has desperately sought treatment for swelling on his legs and groin that has progressively worsened and is now profoundly incapacitating. Having sought treatment in Scotland, it is clear that that is not available. However, with the help of his general practitioner, a consultant at the urology and lymphoedema clinic at St George's, University of London was consulted, and they confirmed that the treatment, which he feels has a high chance of success, requires approval from the national services division. That approval has not been forthcoming, despite my constituent doing everything that has been asked of him.

Given the impact on his physical and mental health, which my constituent now believes to be a matter of life and death, will the First Minister, subject to me providing further details, look into the case and take steps to ensure that a referral can be made as soon as possible?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I would be very happy to do so. If Mr McArthur furnishes me with the details, I will ensure that the matter is attended to immediately. In principle, cross-border treatment within the health service is entirely conceivable, and our arrangements make provision for it. I will have to look at the specific details with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care to see what the issues are. I am very happy to consider the case, and I give Mr McArthur reassurance that the possibility that he has set out is, in principle, entirely plausible within the health service.

Marine Environment (Protection)

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Today, coastal communities and marine experts gathered outside the Parliament to demand urgent action to protect Scotland's precious marine environment. Last year, the Scottish Government delayed a consultation on the implementation of management measures for marine protected areas and priority marine features. That capped off a decade of delays to protecting our seas from overfishing and environmental damage and to meeting legal obligations on achieving a good environmental status for our seas. Will the First Minister heed the calls from Scottish coastal communities and urgently consult on the introduction of protections

to restore our marine environment and allow for greater local control?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The issue that Ariane Burgess has raised is covered by a petition that the Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands received this morning, which will, obviously, be the subject of engagement. Encouraging the protection and enhancement of our marine environment is a policy priority for the Government, but it must reconcile a variety of perspectives in that process. I assure Ariane Burgess that ministers will engage substantively on the issue, and we will set out our position once we have had the opportunity to consider the evidence that has been put to us.

Organised Crime (Rural Scotland)

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): Like me, the First Minister represents a large area of rural Scotland, so he will be well aware of the growing concern among farmers that organised crime groups are targeting farms across rural Scotland, particularly in conjunction with organised crime groups based in Northern Ireland. Does he share my concern about such events?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am certainly familiar with the issues that Mr Smith has raised, given my constituency workload and the visibility that they were being given when I visited the Royal Highland Show on Thursday morning.

The Government is supporting action to tackle the issue through the work of the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, which is a multi-agency partnership, led by Police Scotland, that works with a variety of justice and rural sector partners to provide the necessary action in that respect. We provide Police Scotland with financial support for its work. We are increasingly concerned by the link between machinery theft and serious organised crime, and the partnership is focused on addressing that practice in rural communities.

Grangemouth (Sustainable Aviation Fuel)

Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP): The Labour Government has announced £219 million for sustainable aviation fuel, a key transition option for the Grangemouth site, which produced jet fuel for all of Scotland before it was betrayed and shut down. Will the First Minister join me in calling on the United Kingdom Government to spend every penny of that money on Grangemouth and its workers?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I recognise the significance of the issue that Martyn Day has raised. The opportunity to develop jet fuel at Grangemouth was one of the significant economic opportunities that arose from the debate on the facility's future, and it is a matter of enormous regret that the UK Government's promised interventions to safeguard Grangemouth's future have not been taken forward as a consequence. I endorse the calls that Mr Day has made. Given that we still face significant uncertainty about the availability of jet fuel because of the uncertainty in the middle east, making progress on the issue is an urgent priority, and I assure Mr Day of the Scottish Government's willingness to participate in that work.

Drug Policy

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): In 2016, 867 people died in Scotland from a drug-related death. That figure is engraved in my mind because it included my dad. Since then, those numbers have hit record highs, with 1,017 people dying last year. Those are not just statistics—behind every one of them is a father, a mother, a son or a daughter. They represent a loved one lost and a family devastated.

However, the Government's answer has been to introduce a consumption room in the heart of Glasgow and to vote down legislation that would enshrine the right to rehabilitation in our law. How many more lives need to be lost before the Government takes urgent action? If a right to addiction recovery bill came back to the Parliament, would the First Minister's Government look favourably on it?

The First Minister (John Swinney): First, I express my condolences to Mr Kerr on the loss of his father; I appreciate enormously the agony that will be involved in considering the issue, given his personal circumstances.

The Government recognises the significant challenge of drug deaths in our society, which are disproportionately higher than in any other jurisdiction in western Europe. On Friday morning, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs and I took part in an extensive discussion with a range of partners from across local government, the police health boards and other organisations—including people with lived experience, who gave astonishing testimony—to assess the steps that the Government is currently taking.

We are investing heavily in increasing rehabilitation services in Scotland, and one of the reasons that the Government did not support the Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill is because of the expanded capacity that is being put in place. A range of other measures are being taken forward, but I am open to contributions and points about what more action can be taken to add to the steps that we are already taking, so I extend an invitation to members of the Parliament to contribute to that process.

A final point is that we are experiencing an upsurge in drug deaths as a result of the increasing level of toxicity of the drugs that are being circulated in our society, which are synthetic opioids of enormous ferocity in their impact on people who are using drugs. We already face an acute challenge, and there is a growing challenge because of the issues arising from the increase in drug use.

My reflection on the Thistle is that it has helped to avoid more than 100 drug deaths, because it has intervened in more than 100 medical emergencies where people were at risk of losing their lives.

Violence in Schools

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): A recent report to City of Edinburgh Council's education, children and families committee showed that there were more than 2,000 violent incidents in Edinburgh schools last year, which was a 43 per cent increase on figures from the previous year.

Our schools should be safe places for pupils and staff alike. I know that the Scottish Government has previously produced an action plan on behaviour in schools, but it is clear from those figures that that plan is not working. What further action will the First Minister's Government take to properly tackle violence in schools?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government has taken steps to work with local authorities on the production of guidance and expectations around the participation of young people in education, and to tackle unacceptable behaviour in our schools. We have to work jointly with local authorities in this area to ensure that schools are well supported. Many of our schools operate with clear behavioural codes in place and there are consequences for those who do not follow those codes. I assure the member that the Government is working closely with local authorities to ensure that, in every circumstance, we will act to support teachers.

We are also taking forward a ban on the use of mobile phone technology in schools, which we acknowledge contributes significantly to some of the difficulties and challenges in schools. The Government will take steps and report to Parliament on how that approach is being taken forward.

Green Economy

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): New analysis from the London Stock Exchange Group has shown that the market value of the global green economy has reached a record high of $10 trillion. Can the First Minister provide an update on the steps that the Scottish National Party Government is taking to ensure that Scotland is benefiting from the substantial growth opportunities of the green economy while taking the action that is needed to tackle climate change?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government's green industrial strategy is designed to ensure that we capture many of the opportunities to which Mr McMillan has referred. The climate change plan supports the requirements of our action on net zero to ensure that we are making the necessary investment to support our activities. The Government has, in the budget, committed more than £5 billion of capital and resource expenditure to support measures that are designed to have a positive impact on Scotland's climate change goals.

It is welcome that, in recent analysis, the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland has set out that climate action contributes £10.2 billion to Scotland's economy. That contributes significantly to our strong record on foreign direct investment, which has been recorded again today in EY's foreign direct investment analysis, showing Scotland—for the 11th year in a row—to be the strongest part of the United Kingdom for foreign direct investment other than London and the south-east of England.

Fire Stations

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Thousands of people across Scotland have signed a petition to stop the downgrading of fire stations. The First Minister is downplaying the seriousness of that decision by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service after years of underfunding by the Scottish Government. With Center Parcs coming to Hawick, that will be a key problem for residents, with an estimated 350,000 people a year visiting the area. I agree with Katy Clark—will the First Minister agree to us putting our constituents first and have a debate in this Parliament?

The First Minister (John Swinney): There are obviously opportunities for the Parliament to debate these questions, but I note that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board is empowered by statute to take decisions about the operational delivery of services based on the financial allocations that are made by the Government.

The Government has been increasing the resources that are made available to the SFRS. The budget for 2026-27 provides the SFRS with an additional £23.8 million compared with the previous year, bringing its total budget to £535 million, which is a 5.7 per cent increase. [*The First Minister has corrected this contribution. See end of report*].

I understand the concerns that Rachael Hamilton is raising about the circumstances in relation to the expansion of Center Parcs facilities, which is a development that will take place over a number of years. It is part of the obligation of the SFRS to continue to monitor these issues and to address local concerns as they are expressed.

Local Government Budgets (Glasgow City Council)

Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green): Figures from Audit Scotland that were published in the press last week indicate that Glasgow City Council is looking at a budget shortfall of £86.7 million. That has worried many of my constituents, as well as councillors, who fear that they will have to pass on cuts. What action will the Government take to make sure that budget shortfalls at Glasgow City Council do not impact vital services and that we keep our constituents safe?

The First Minister (John Swinney): That is a focal point of the Government's annual budget. The Government has put in place local government settlements that have increased the resources that are available to local government in recent years. Indeed, there is a real-terms increase in resources to local government in the current budget. As Iris Duane will know, the Government has to reconcile a variety of competing spending requirements as part of its budget, and we look forward to the engagement that will involve members of the Parliament in the course of the budget-setting process over the next few months.

Accident and Emergency Targets

Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): In April 2026, one third of patients attending accident and emergency were not seen within four hours. In the scrutiny of that, the people of Scotland are tired of the same rehearsed, scripted and dismissive answers that are given week after week in the chamber. The First Minister likes to project the image of a safe, steady manager; the truth is that he is simply managing decline. Will the First Minister put aside rigid dogma, stop dismissing patient suffering and deliver the reforms that Scotland desperately needs to meet the statutory four-hour A and E waiting-time target?

The First Minister (John Swinney): That is what the Government is working to achieve. We have put in place a variety of different interventions to try to reduce demand and pressure on A and E services. For example, the introduction of the pharmacy first Scotland service is designed to provide ready high street access to diagnostic services for particularly low-level incidents; the expansion of general practitioner walk-in clinics is designed to ensure that we support that endeavour; and the increase in GP numbers is designed to ensure that there are alternatives to people undertaking visits to A and E.

We are clearly wrestling with challenging circumstances in A and E services, but, in the health service as a whole, there has been an increase in the number of procedures that are being undertaken. We committed to 150,000 extra appointments and procedures in the past year, and, in fact, we delivered more than 168,000 additional appointments and procedures. We have seen reductions in the number of in-patient and day case admissions. The number of people waiting for more than 52 weeks is down for 15 months in a row, and the number of out-patients is down for 11 months in a row. Our interventions are all helping to reduce the pressures on our health service, which will assist in reducing pressure on A and E.

Delayed Discharge (Impacts)

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): The Scottish National Party promised to completely eradicate delayed discharges from hospital, but a consultant from Borders general hospital has confirmed to me that, on any one day, up to 30 per cent of the hospital's beds are blocked by patients who could be cared for at home. Delayed discharge is draining £440 million a year from the health service, so investing properly in social care is essential. Given that massive strain on hospitals, what exactly is the Government finally going to do to give social care the priority and investment that it deserves?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government has taken a number of steps to strengthen social care, not least of which has been to increase the payments made to social care staff, so that social care is an attractive profession.

There is a substantive point to the issue that Mr Dunlop has raised. I have spent a significant amount of time with other ministers trying to take practical steps to reduce delayed discharge, because it is undesirable for people to be in hospital for longer than is required.

The Government is considering the steps that need to be taken, and I am of the view that there is a necessity for significant reform in social care. The Government brought forward proposals for a national care service, but those did not command the support of Parliament and so we are looking at further proposals. I am open to engagement with other parties, because, as Mr Dunlop knows, the Government does not have a majority here. If we want to improve things for members of the public and if we all agree that the social care system is not working effectively, we must be prepared to contemplate reform. I know there will be resistance to that reform, but I look forward to working with

colleagues from across the political spectrum to secure the reform that is necessary to deliver better outcomes for members of the public.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes questions from back-bench members. I apologise to those members I was unable to call; there were many of you.

Non-domestic Rates

15:03

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): Delivering increased economic growth will be at the very heart of this Government's agenda in the next five years. We want to ensure that Scotland is full of vibrant communities where it is easy to start and grow a business, where the ambition and creativity of Scottish society are embraced and where the Government acts to create the right conditions to attract the inward investment that is needed.

A key part of making intensified economic growth a reality will be getting the right framework for non-domestic rates, because we know that businesses all across Scotland are struggling. As is the case with family finances, businesses are having to respond to inflation and are struggling with energy bills, increased staffing costs, food prices and VAT. In that context, it is important to remember that this Government has already taken action to help to alleviate the pressures that our businesses currently face. This year's rates relief package is worth close to £1 billion, and we know that that is helping to provide relief to tens of thousands of businesses all over Scotland. They also continue to welcome support such as the small business bonus and targeted retail, hospitality and leisure relief. We responded directly to calls from the self-catering sector for a dedicated transitional relief, which the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers has welcomed.

However, it is important that all Governments listen and that we continue to focus our efforts on alleviating the pressures that our businesses face. That is why I am pleased today to set out our plans for reform of the non-domestic rates system in Scotland.

Our current system is built on many strengths. Earlier this year, 1 April marked the first three-yearly revaluation in Scotland and the start of the second revaluation cycle based on rental values one year earlier. This year's Scottish budget reduced all three tax rates during this financial year in order to ensure a broadly revenue-neutral revaluation cycle in real terms—one that is redistributive and not tax raising. Alongside those tax rate reductions, the budget delivered the largest relief package in cash terms since devolution, excluding the temporary support that we provided during the pandemic.

We do not want to lose the positive elements of the existing system. Nonetheless, I know that there are real concerns about the accountability of assessors and the consistency and transparency

of valuations. Many ratepayers have found the rates system and property valuations to be complex and uncertain, and we are also seeing delays in accurate bills being issued. We know that businesses are already dealing with the fallout from international conflicts alongside the on-going damage of Brexit, which has been compounded by the UK Government's increase in employer national insurance contributions. That is why we committed to working with the business community to strengthen our rates system and accountability.

I turn to the ratepayer experience. To ensure clarity, we will deliver change in how the non-domestic rates billing system works. It is an unfortunate consequence of our current fiscal arrangements that our tax decisions are confirmed only in the Scottish budget, which follows the United Kingdom budget. That leaves an incredibly tight period of time in which the Scottish Government is expected to set our budget. Notwithstanding that, however, it is unacceptable that delays in software updates have prevented ratepayers from receiving accurate bills ahead of the financial year, with bills often arriving only late into the summer months. Such delays create unnecessary challenges for businesses, making it harder to plan ahead and manage cash flow.

That is why we will take two actions in that space. We will provide improved self-service information for ratepayers to assess their likely liabilities through our online rates calculator. Alongside that, we will work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Improvement Service to ensure that the non-domestic rates billing system works as it should. Specifically, I want to reach agreement, working with local government, on an NDR billing system that will deliver accurate bills on time, all the time.

In relation to accountability, I will address three matters: the short-term issues arising from the revaluation; improvements to the appeals process; and consideration of more significant structural change to our current model.

First, this Government has heard clearly the concerns about apparent anomalies in the 2026 revaluation. A number of examples have been raised with ministers. Although an appeals system to consider such cases through the Scottish tribunals exists, we want to be sure that there is not a systemic issue of inconsistent valuations. We are mindful that, due to the one-year tone date—something that England has thus far considered unworkable—assessors are producing draft valuations in less than eight months. I therefore announce today that the Government will establish an independent panel to undertake a rapid review of the outcomes of the 2026 revaluation. Specifically, it will be tasked with examining and reporting to ministers, within three months of its appointment, on allegedly anomalous valuations and their overall impact. Ministers will ask the panel to make recommendations on how those might be addressed.

Secondly, alongside that immediate review, we must ensure that business owners who consider their rates to be inaccurate have access to timely recourse. The appeals system is intended to allow ratepayers to request changes to a property valuation from the assessor in the first instance, with the possibility of appeal to the independent First-tier Tribunal for Scotland. It is important that the judiciary is independent in how it organises its work, but I commit today to examining how the Government can support increasing the capacity of the local tax chamber to support that process.

Thirdly, ministers have listened to the concerns about the valuation system, and I commit today to a general review of the assessor function. The review will ensure that assessors' independence in valuation is maintained, but it will also seek to ensure that there is confidence in the system for all. Over the summer, we will begin engaging with stakeholders to develop options for reform to the structure of assessors and establish how those options could deliver improvements in accountability and transparency. I intend to explore further the potential role for a national assessor and the option of placing the Scottish Assessors Association on a statutory footing, with reporting obligations to Parliament. Such changes would require full system redesign and legislation, but I acknowledge that assurance is needed now, which is exactly why I have committed to an independent rapid review of the 2026 revaluation.

The Government is providing a package of relief, which, I remind members, is forecast to be worth more than £870 million in 2026-27. That includes the business growth accelerator and fresh start reliefs, which are the most generous schemes of their type across the United Kingdom.

However, I am mindful of concerns that capital investments can translate directly into increased rates liabilities, which can act as a disincentive to growth. Similarly, cliff edges in relief eligibility can encourage the turnover of properties or constrain expansion. We have heard that concern in the campaign led by *The Courier* and others, which calls for an expansion in eligibility for fresh start relief. We have already committed to a comprehensive review of non-domestic rates, which will examine the impacts and configuration of our reliefs. However, recognising the benefit to businesses of having certainty on rates and reliefs for the duration of the three-year valuation period, we have provided that certainty on some of our most significant reliefs over the next three years. As a result, our comprehensive review will start

this summer, in order for any fundamental changes to be in place for the next round of revaluation.

Alongside that comprehensive review, we will identify early changes that can be made at the next Scottish budget to enhance and better target our existing package. The final decisions on such changes will be confirmed at the Scottish budget, but I can announce today that, from 1 April 2027, vape shops will be excluded from eligibility for relief.

I place on record my thanks to *The Courier*, *The Press and Journal* and the *Sunday Post* for their campaigning to support Scotland's businesses. Campaigning journalism can deliver real results, and those publications should be commended for their role in that.

The Government was returned to office with a strong mandate from the people of Scotland. We must all reflect that that includes Scottish businesses, which recognise the support that the Government has been able to put in place during extraordinarily challenging times for our businesses. In returning to office, ministers are mindful of the need for greater action and impetus, to acknowledge the ongoing economic uncertainty of our times.

The Government has committed to a comprehensive review of non-domestic rates to support our businesses across the country. In addition, I have confirmed today that we will act to deliver increased transparency, accountability and clarity. On billing, we will improve access to self-service information, and we will work with local government on a billing system that works on time, first time. We will establish an independent panel to undertake a rapid review of revaluation, and we will ensure that the appeals process has the capacity to deliver timely outcomes. The assessor function will be reviewed, with options being developed over the summer. Of course, we will continue to enhance incentives for investment.

Our comprehensive review will consider fundamental changes but, in the short term, the Government will respond positively and openly to constructive ideas. Crucially, we will work in partnership with business to drive the inclusive economic growth that our nation requires in order to meet the challenges of our time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wished to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now. Questions and answers should be brief.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I thank the Cabinet Secretary for advance sight of her statement. Although the changes will, no doubt, be welcome, I think that there will be disappointment that more fundamental reform is not being considered. On transparency, businesses want not access to their bills online but to understand how calculations are arrived at. On accountability, they want consideration of a single assessor. They also want sectoral equity. Right now, business rates can change as much as threefold between use classes. Why has the Scottish Government rejected a more fundamental review and reform of non-domestic rates?

Jenny Gilruth: What I have set out to the Parliament today amounts to significant change in relation to the way in which we currently support our businesses. I heard the word "welcome" from Daniel Johnson, so I will cling to that, because I am trying to listen to positivity. I hope that he listened to the tone of my statement, which asked for positive contributions, across parties, to engage with the Government on the reviews that will now take place.

It is important that we improve access to billing because of the challenges that businesses have set out to ministers in relation to the evidence that they are presented with. It is also important that that is worked on with local government and the Improvement Service, which is why I have engaged directly with COSLA on two occasions already. The Minister for Public Finance and I look forward to taking part in a number of engagements with business to inform the review that we will undertake across the summer months. It is hugely important that we undertake that.

Some of the challenge that Mr Johnson set out is fair. I have set out a number of actions, particularly in relation to the general review of the assessor function, which has not ruled out a potential role for a national assessor, which was the other point that Mr Johnson mentioned. It is important to place that on the record. I see Daniel Johnson nodding; I hope that we have some agreement, finally, on that point.

Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. The statement made frequent mention of the fact that the rates relief this year is worth near £1 billion. However, this would not appear to be the full picture. The intermediate and higher rates have been reduced by 2p for this year, yet they are still 2.5p higher than they were two years ago. Hundreds of businesses went bust as a direct result of those massive hikes, and this so-called cut still keeps in place the majority of that unaffordable increase. Will the cabinet secretary set out a timeline of

meaningful non-domestic rates cuts and not just tinker around the edges?

Jenny Gilruth: It is the case that, in 2026-27, the basic properties rate is the lowest that it has been since 2018-19, and reliefs are forecast to save ratepayers more than £870 million. As I set out in my statement, we also have the small business bonus scheme, which is the most generous of its kind in the United Kingdom. It is hugely important, because we estimate that more than 100,000 properties will be eligible for that support this year.

I set out a number of different actions in my statement to Parliament. I mentioned previously, in response to Mr Johnson, the general review of the assessor function. However, I think that the comprehensive review of non-domestic rates will be welcomed in general by businesses. The work of looking at the configuration of all our reliefs will start this summer, as I set out in my statement. In response to the member's point in relation to timescales, the review will deliver real change in time for the next re-evaluation.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP): I note that the Deputy First Minister has confirmed that vape shops will be excluded from eligibility for relief from 1 April 2027, and I welcome that commitment. How will that contribute to the Scottish Government's public health commitments and build on the progress that has been made on reducing the harm that vapes can cause?

Jenny Gilruth: As Clare Haughey will be aware, in recent years, we have seen an increase in vaping in Scotland, and it is highest among those aged 16 to 24 years old. We have also seen an increase in the number of vaping shops opening on our high streets all over the country, selling products that cause addiction to nicotine and other health harms. That is exactly why we are taking action to ensure that vape shops contribute to the high street, recognising the growth of the sector in recent years, and also to ensure that rates relief aligns with our public health commitments, to answer the member's point.

That will sit alongside a range of other actions to prevent a new generation from becoming addicted to vaping and other nicotine products, including the commitment to consult on the retail display of vapes and nicotine products within our first 100 days in government.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I welcome the fact that vape shops will now be paying full rates. However, that shows how poorly designed the small business bonus scheme was in the first place. The Government spends more than £200 million a year on untargeted reliefs, despite its own review finding no economic benefit to the scheme. That is part of the almost £1 billion in reliefs that goes into the system every year, but the system is still not working. Small businesses are struggling and an ever larger share of our economy is in the hands of multinationals. Profits disappear from Scotland.

The fundamental issue is that non-domestic rates bear no relation to a business's ability to pay. Will the review consider adopting a system that takes profit or turnover into account alongside property value? In the short term, will the Government introduce measures such as the Scottish Greens' proposed Amazon tax—a higher rate of NDR for large online retailers—to help even the playing field for small businesses and local high streets?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Mr Greer for his question and for his welcoming of the Government's position in relation to vape shops set out today. I do not think that he and I will agree on the small business bonus scheme in the short term. It has been hugely successful in supporting a number of businesses across the country.

I hope that Mr Greer was encouraged by the comprehensive review of NDR, which I set out in the statement. Of course, as we approach the budget ahead of 2027-28, we will engage on a cross-party basis on all those issues across the chamber. I would be more than happy to engage with him more substantively on that point.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): If kicking the can down the road was a competitive sport, this Government would win gold every single time. Many Scottish businesses now continue to face some of the highest rates liabilities in the UK, and many have seen eye-watering increases as a result of the most recent revaluation. Businesses were told that the Barclay review would fix the system. Hospitality businesses are awaiting the Gill review.

Today, the cabinet secretary announced a further review and an independent and urgent panel to assess the revaluation. Does she not understand that businesses that are going to the wall at a rate of knots in Scotland today do not want more reviews? They want urgent action to reduce their bills and to have a greater understanding of how the system operates.

Jenny Gilruth: Perhaps it was a bit too much to expect some positivity about these announcements from Mr Hoy. However, I hope that he recognises that the Government has significantly adapted our position on support for businesses in relation to some of the outputs that I have set out today. For example, the independent panel is going to provide a rapid review of the 2026 revaluation, in relation to which I understand—and very much recognise—that there have been

issues. The Government has heard that challenge from businesses and we have already engaged with them directly. The Minister for Public Finance will engage with them again tomorrow. Throughout the summer recess period, we will engage with businesses on how we can improve that approach. Of course, the independent panel will report directly to ministers.

I extend to Mr Hoy the same invitation that I extended to Mr Greer. If Mr Hoy wants to come forward with some more ambitious proposals ahead of the budget, my door is open—

Craig Hoy: I am seeing you tomorrow.

Jenny Gilruth: We will be meeting tomorrow—I look forward to that engagement.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement, which obviously comes on the back of eye-watering rises in business rates earlier this year. Those rises have posed an existential threat to many businesses, including many in my Orkney constituency, which also face additional challenges from being based in the islands. The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Liberal Democrats worked with the Government on transitional reliefs, but there was a recognition that a wider review was necessary. Can she confirm that any review will look at how the rental-only value methodology can be revised for self-catering properties to enable a more proportionate approach in future?

Jenny Gilruth: The Liberal Democrats engaged with us throughout the budget process last year and they were able to extract a number of things from the Government. I hope that other Opposition parties will learn from their good behaviour.

We have put in place additional support in relation to the transitional relief, which we know is benefiting approximately 60,000 properties. Those properties are paying lower amounts than they would otherwise have done in 2026-27. That funding is having a huge impact in that regard. We know that 96 per cent of businesses in retail, hospitality and leisure will benefit from some kind of relief in 2026-27.

There are strengths in the current system but I accept that there are inherent challenges in relation to the issues presented by revaluation, for example, and the wider challenges that businesses are facing. It is imperative that the Government does all that it can to help alleviate those challenges and I am more than happy to engage with Mr McArthur on the substantive options that we will consider as part of the review.

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary provide an assurance that the review will not include the small business bonus scheme, which is so vital for our local communities and has been touched on already in the questions?

Jenny Gilruth: In the budget, we committed to maintaining the small business bonus scheme rates and thresholds for three years, to 2028-29. We estimate that more than 100,000 properties will remain eligible for the small business bonus scheme in 2026-27—which, as I set out in my statement, remains the most generous scheme of its kind in the United Kingdom.

We are very much committed to considering seriously how we can improve reliefs at the next budget, but we have to protect the small business bonus scheme to support those businesses that we know are really in need at the current time, so I give the commitment that that scheme will continue. However, we need to look more broadly at support for our businesses, which is exactly why I have set out a number of changes in that space today.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Since the rates revaluation, one hospitality business in Glasgow has had a rateable value increase of 250 per cent, from £0.5 million to over £1.3 million. That is obviously ludicrous, and the business is now shelving a plan for a £25 million expansion, with more than 100 job opportunities lost.

This particular case shows that the sharp rates increase has led to the stalling of capital investment and the pausing of new hires—all things that Glasgow needs if it is to remain competitive with other major UK cities. Despite backing Labour's amendment in the taxation debate just a few weeks ago, the Government has, at best, kicked fresh start relief for new businesses into touch. That is not the fundamental reform that we were promised and which we need.

In her statement, the Deputy First Minister also promised an improvement to the appeals process. What reassurance and support will she give businesses affected by these extreme rate rises that their appeals will be held in a timely manner before they go under?

Jenny Gilruth: One of the points that Paul Sweeney set out in his question is that there are anomalies in the current system. Ministers recognise and understand that, which is exactly why we have committed to the review that I set out today. I am sorry if he does not feel that that goes far enough, but I set out in my statement to Parliament that we are going to look at options to enhance fresh start relief, which is a direct ask of the campaign. That is exactly why we worked to support the Labour amendment three weeks ago.

As for the delays in relation to the appeals system, I set out a number of actions that we will

take in that space. We need to work with businesses and listen to them about their experiences, and the engagement led by the Minister for Public Finance, which will continue tomorrow, has been instructive.

We need to be mindful not to create a cliff edge—and that relates to some of the challenge that Paul Sweeney has set out in his question today. I am more than happy to give that commitment today. If Paul Sweeney has the specifics of the business in question, I would be more than happy to consider the matter and to pass it to my officials for a more detailed response.

Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP): Students rightly do not pay council tax, and purpose-built student accommodation is therefore exempt. However, we can argue that PBSA is a business, as people are making profit from commercial activity—for example, there are staff working there. Councils are effectively collecting waste and providing other services for free, so there is currently a subsidy for that business model. Taking that subsidy away could result in incentivising developers to build mainstream residential housing, so would the Scottish Government consider making purpose-built student accommodation liable for non-domestic rates?

Jenny Gilruth: I very much recognise the point that Kate Campbell is making. There is a level of complexity here, because most universities receive charity relief, and we currently have no plans to change that. However, many charities undertake some sort of commercial activity, and it can be challenging to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial use. I very much welcome views on the topic as part of our stakeholder engagement for the review of rates, and I will be happy to discuss Ms Campbell's proposal with her in more detail in the coming weeks.

Kim Schmulian (Glasgow) (Reform): I recently met the chief executive of the Scottish Hospitality Group, who raised concerns about the ongoing impact of the way in which rates are currently assessed on hospitality businesses and will be in the foreseeable future. Although the announcement of 40 per cent relief on businesses with a value of up to £100,000 was welcome, many hospitality venues receive no meaningful support at all. A rateable value above £100,000 does not necessarily imply a large venue. The Scottish Hospitality Group represents many smaller venues rated at around £135,000. Given that Scotland is losing around three licensed premises per week, will the Scottish Government consider increasing the relief threshold to £200,000, which many in hospitality feel would be more cost-effective than the selective tapering system that is already in place?

Further, as the minister has indicated that she may be receptive to engaging with the hospitality community, would she be prepared to visit some of the sector venues in Glasgow?

As far as a rapid review is concerned—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Please conclude.

Kim Schmulian: This is my final question, Presiding Officer.

As far as a rapid review is concerned, exactly what stage did the Gill review reach before counsel's recent appointment?

Jenny Gilruth: There were a number of points in Kim Schmulian's question, which I want to come to. First, I am more than happy to accept her invitation to visit properties in Glasgow. The Minister for Public Finance and I have planned a summer of engagements with businesses, to hear from them directly about their experiences. It is hugely important that their experiences form part of the review and ultimately lead to improvement in how businesses experience the support that they should be entitled to.

More specifically, on retail, hospitality and leisure, the Government's shift in the budget was welcomed in relation to the additional funding and relief that we were able to provide in that space. As I have set out previously, around half the properties in retail, hospitality and leisure continue to be eligible for the small business bonus, which is hugely important and is making a real difference.

We will continue to engage with business throughout the summer recess, and I would be more than happy to give Parliament an update on that following our return.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I have to commend our ministers on the statement. There will be businesses across Stirling and Scotland breathing a sigh of relief that the matter is finally being dealt with seriously. I particularly welcome the rapid review of the 2026 revaluation. Some valuations have been wild, and there has been a lot of unease, particularly in the hospitality sector.

Noting everything that the minister has said today, does the Gill review, which will report at the end of this year, still guarantee that hospitality businesses will be getting a special consideration in NDR, as all of those very welcome changes are made?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Alyn Smith for his welcoming of this work, in particular his mention of the rapid review and the revaluations, which I know have caused concern to a number of businesses—

not all businesses, but a number of businesses. It is important that we learn from those instances and that those anomalous valuations are considered. We will receive further advice from the independent panel to that end.

The Gill review is continuing to give confirmation to that end, but the member will be aware that BJ Gill, the chair of the review, was appointed Solicitor General. I congratulate him on that appointment, but he has tendered his resignation as chair of the review, and arrangements will be made as soon as possible to appoint his successor. It is really important that the new chair of the review has the expertise and grasp of the legal framework that applies to valuation for rating and objectivity. We expect the review to complete as previously intimated to Parliament.

Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as a member of Orkney Islands Council.

Scottish Greens do not oppose the review, but it is hard to have confidence when many recommendations of the decade-old Barclay review were never acted on. I welcome the Deputy First Minister's commitment to working with COSLA and local boards to improve the billing system and ensure greater consistency for businesses. That is particularly important for smaller valuation offices, such as that of Orkney and Shetland, which is one of Scotland's smallest, but deals with a complex and large workload in proportion to its staffing capacity and funding.

Looking more broadly, does the Deputy First Minister accept that the non-domestic rates system is intended to be a local tax? The review should therefore look at how councils can be given real discretion over the operation of the system in their area, in line with the Government's community wealth-building agenda.

Jenny Gilruth: I welcome Kristopher Leask's points about engagement with COSLA. We know that there is inconsistency across the country at the current time, with different systems being used. Some of that has informed software challenges that businesses have experienced. We need greater consistency for business across the country, so that we can resolve some of the matters that businesses have flagged directly to ministers.

In April 2023, the Government devolved empty property relief. That power has gone to councils, along with additional funding in the region of £105 million, to reflect the devolution of that power. That also empowers local authorities to take decisions about how they put in place that relief for local needs, reflecting the needs of businesses in their local areas. There is a level of devolution that already exists in the current system, and it is important to recognise that.

Katie Hagmann (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a councillor in Dumfries and Galloway Council.

This point has been touched on several times this afternoon, but I note the importance of non-domestic rates to local councils. I am aware that local government was keen to ensure that it would be a key partner in work on reform, and there was a previous ambition to ensure that NDR would sit within the local government fiscal framework.

I welcome the statement and the confirmation that the Scottish Government will work with local government, COSLA and the Improvement Service, but can the cabinet secretary say what dialogue there has been with local government so far, and how the Scottish Government will ensure that a collaborative approach is taken in recognising the importance of that funding?

Jenny Gilruth: Local government is inherently important to how we drive the improvements that we need in non-domestic rates, and local government was the first stakeholder that I met in my new role. Mr McKee and I met representatives last week to talk about public service reform, in which local government will play a really important role in the coming months. Kristopher Leask asked previously about local government's role, and I gave an answer that talked about some of the software challenges that we have seen across the country.

There has been recent progress from local government to establish the strategic case for change around the collection of non-domestic rates, which is important. I am very supportive of progress in that area more broadly. We need an NDR billing system that delivers accurate bills on time, all the time, and I am very clear that we cannot do that without local government.

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): In its manifesto, the Scottish National Party promised reforms to non-domestic rates that would ensure that

"online giants … pay their fair share".

Today's statement does not point towards the fundamental changes that would be necessary to do that. How will the Government ensure that that promise will be delivered?

Jenny Gilruth: We have not yet set out detail in relation to that manifesto commitment. I would be more than happy to write to the member in due course once I have received advice on that commitment.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Time is running out, and some of Scotland's businesses are being worn to the bone by rising rates. High streets are also being hollowed out.

Will the Scottish Government consider a pause on the collection of non-domestic rates while it sorts out the glitch in the software system? What is the definition of "rapid"?

Jenny Gilruth: I did not hear Rachael Hamilton draw members' attention to her entry in the register of members' interests; although I am given to understand that she is a business owner. Nevertheless, it is important that the Government sets out a rapid review—that is exactly the timescale that I have associated with this issue—to report to ministers as soon as possible following the summer recess. We will then look to give a further update to the Parliament on all those issues. It is imperative that we outline that, and it is also imperative that members appropriately record interests where they have them.

Climate Change

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change. I will give members on the front benches the opportunity to change seats. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button.

15:36

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): I am pleased to open this afternoon's debate on meeting the challenges of climate change. Despite the majority of people in Scotland recognising that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem, we are witnessing a concerning rise in anti-climate rhetoric from those who seek to sow division.

I am proud that Scotland continues to stand firm in our commitment to tackle the twin crises of climate change and nature loss, the impacts of which are already evident across Scotland and, indeed, the world. We know that those crises will intensify and be the cause of potential incidents that will directly affect our citizens, so we must increase our climate resilience. We also know that action must accelerate to deliver our statutory emissions reductions targets and because we have such a moral obligation to decarbonise as fast as possible.

I therefore confirm that I will support Claire Baker's amendment from the Labour benches. However, I must clarify that that is on the basis that the "interim targets" that are referenced in the Labour amendment refer to the now statutory carbon budget approach to reach net zero by 2045, given that there are no longer interim targets in legislation.

I stress that accelerating the pace of change will not be easy—

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: Yes.

Claire Baker: I am happy to confirm that the amendment refers to carbon budgeting and the changes that we have made to the five-year targets.

Gillian Martin: I thank Claire Baker for that confirmation—it is very helpful, because I wanted to support the content of the amendment, but there was just an issue with wording. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we will vote for the Labour amendment.

The pace of change will not be easy, and it will be achievable only if those of us who believe in

climate change work together instead of offering opposition for opposition's sake, which has regrettably been all too common in previous parliamentary sessions. The people we represent expect better. Yes, they expect disagreement and debate, but, above all, they expect and want collaboration, action and progress.

I am prepared to deliver that with willing colleagues, and we are making progress. For example, this year, we have significantly exceeded our programme for government target on peatland restoration, with 15,448 hectares having been restored. We have also committed £110 million to peatland restoration over the next four years, which will give the sector certainty and realise the potential of jobs growth.

Alongside the necessary accelerated action, we will also continue to set out more detail on delivery planning. I intend to convene a cross-Government delivery group on climate action to support that and strengthen delivery monitoring across the whole of Government.

Delivering climate action means investing in our economic future and improving the lives of our citizens. Scotland is blessed with vast natural resources, creative communities and businesses and exceptional people. That gives us a huge competitive advantage to seize the opportunities of the industries of the future. The transition that is already under way is not only our path to decarbonisation; it is central to our industrial resilience and our long-term competitiveness as a country. However, we will succeed in achieving that only if we deliver a fair and just transition.

A recent Confederation of British Industry report shows the lead that Scotland has over the rest of the United Kingdom, with net zero-related activity contributing a total of £10.2 billion to Scotland's economy and supporting more than 105,000 jobs. For every £1 of direct economic value that is generated in the sector, a further £1.75 is supported across the wider Scottish economy.

Households and businesses will also see direct financial benefits from the switch to, for example, electric vehicles, including the electrification of heavy goods vehicles. That will mean lower operating and maintenance costs across the economy, as well as reduced vulnerability to fluctuations in fossil fuel prices—shocks can be caused by geopolitical events, as we have seen particularly this year.

This Government's significant investments in concessionary public transport are also making it easier and more affordable to switch. In addition, our £2 bus fare cap is now active across the Highlands and Islands, supporting rural connectivity and tourism. The Scottish National Party Government will go even further, putting in place the £2 bus fare cap across the whole of Scotland by the end of this session of Parliament.

Climate action is improving the quality of our lives. Active travel not only reduces emissions but increases physical activity and the health benefits that come from that. The switch to EVs means clearer air, which reduces our risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, meaning long-term and significant health budget savings.

The Edinburgh Climate Change Institute estimates that those co-benefits are worth £1,450 per person over the 15-year period of the new climate change plan, not least by reducing pressure on our national health service. That figure does not even include the £42 billion of financial benefits that are directly attributable to the plan up to 2040.

Climate action is now at the heart of Scotland's economy, our public health and our wider society. Let us drill down into particular areas of Scotland. The CBI report demonstrates that climate action is driving the economy of Aberdeen—my home city and Europe's energy capital—as well as that of Perth and Kinross, where the sector supports 12 per cent of gross value added.

In fact, 19 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas have more than three times more net zero businesses than the UK average, compared with the overall number of businesses in their area. That includes North Lanarkshire, where there are 8.8 times more than the UK average. Net zero activity in Glasgow and Edinburgh together support £3.8 billion in GVA, when the wider supply chain and spillover effects are included.

The net zero economy is the economy. The bedrock of this trend is our small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up about 90 per cent of the companies in the green sector.

Let us now look at the impacts of climate change in Scotland as we are feeling them. From wildfires to flooding to coastal erosion, we know that climate change is causing more serious and more unpredictable impacts across the whole of Scotland. These trends are getting worse and they threaten our livelihoods and the safety of our communities. They risk damage to our homes, our landscapes, our businesses and our infrastructure. Insurance becomes more difficult to obtain and afford for families and businesses. Once an event has happened, the premiums go up—if people ever had insurance in the first place. I will not be the only MSP who, in the event of a flood, has had to visit people in households who did not have insurance at all and are devastated.

The Climate Change Committee is clear that the effects of climate change are costing Scotland billions of pounds a year. That is only likely to

increase if we do not take the necessary action to reduce our emissions and adapt to the impacts that are already with us.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Unfortunately, this sounds like the usual broken record, with the Scottish Government cherry-picking statistics. If everything is so good, why has the Climate Change Committee suggested that we should plant 18,000 hectares of trees, whereas the Scottish Government has reduced its goal to 10,000 hectares? Perhaps the cabinet secretary could update the chamber on how many hectares of trees were planted in 2024-25.

Gillian Martin: I would be happy to give Finlay Carson that molecular detail after this debate. I am not cherry-picking particular aspects but instead going through some of the areas in which there has been a great deal of progress. I am also outlining where we need to go further. I do not think that characterising what I have been saying as "a broken record" is conducive to the collaborative relationship that I want to have with the Conservative members, particularly given that there are so many new members who perhaps are not with the agenda on this issue and do not see the benefits of it.

I was talking about adaptation. Professor Graeme Roy of the Scottish Fiscal Commission has said that

"not responding to the challenge of climate change ... will be far more expensive and damaging to the public finances than investing in net zero ... it is simply not an option."

That is the Scottish Fiscal Commission's position.

Our third Scottish national adaptation plan is our blueprint to build resilience to climate change in a way that is fair and equitable but which can also potentially save millions of pounds by preventing damage. Collaboration is at its heart, including collaboration with local government.

As I have said, our climate change plan is accelerating the rollout of EV chargers. We have delivered nearly £4 million of grant funding to 120 organisations specifically to support the installation of 250 charge points in rural and island locations. We have introduced the rural and island infrastructure fund and have more than doubled it to £10 million to enable the expansion of that infrastructure.

The bridge between climate mitigation and adaptation is also built by the restoration of our natural environment. We know that climate regulates nature, and nature regulates climate—they are inseparable and symbiotic. Today, I announced new funding of nearly £1 million for the Forth, Clyde, Fife and Lothians climate forests. That will not only contribute to our woodland creation targets—which Mr Carson was exercised about—but provide green spaces, flood resilience and opportunities for our people, particularly in urban environments, where we need to improve neighbourhoods and give children, in particular, access to nature. The funding will also help us to reach our plans to increase woodland cover to 23 per cent by 2040.

Yesterday, I visited Duloch Park and Calais Muir Woods, which are part of the Fife climate forests, where I met local partners and community groups. I saw at first hand how they are working together to boost the number of trees in Fife and improve access to high-quality, vibrant green spaces that produce thriving, resilient places for people as well as nature, mitigate flooding and give families places to carry out leisure activities. Those groups also plant community gardens to provide food and often turn derelict wasteland into beautiful, safe spaces that make areas more pleasant to live in and bring people together. We are also committed to working with the Scottish outdoor recreation alliance and others to develop a Scottish paths fund and produce new guidance for access authorities on how to fulfil their responsibilities.

We have invested more than £75 million in the nature restoration fund for a huge amount of diverse projects, supporting the planting of 300,000 trees and protecting 216km of habitat. The nature restoration fund is not just restoring Scotland's nature; it is also strengthening the economy. It is supporting projects that create jobs, develop skills and attract additional private investment. More than £7 million has so far been leveraged in match funding from the private sector.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the minister take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I will in a second.

Those projects also help to reduce future spending on issues such as flooding and wildfires, and to build long-term resilience to climate change and its impacts. I will say that again: more than £7 million has been leveraged as a result of the funding of the nature restoration fund.

Mark Ruskell: I am enjoying much of what the cabinet secretary is laying out in her speech. However, she has not mentioned the industrial decline in Scotland and the need to get a just transition for workers in Mossmorran and at other sites, such as Dunbar and Grangemouth, where we need to see an industrial future but also to take investors and workers with us. Can she say more about what the Government is doing to lead on the just transition, rather than leaving it to markets and corporates to determine the future, which often means that they just leave Scotland?

Gillian Martin: I do not believe that we are leaving it to corporates. We are using our funding to leverage an investment from companies to make that money work harder. The just transition fund in the north-east is one example; Stephen Gethins now has responsibility for that fund. I will not mention specific incidents in that space, but I have mentioned the just transition in making the broader point that we have to seize the opportunities that are there with climate action, which will create jobs. We need to accelerate that action, because as we do so, we will build market certainty and create new markets that will provide new jobs and boost businesses. I think that I have made quite a lot of mention of the amount of GVA that it is bringing to Scotland.

We have also committed £350 million to more than 3,400 businesses through the agri-environment climate scheme, which will help farmers and crofters to embed climate adaptation and resilience into their land management, helping to maintain the long-term capacity of our land to produce the food that we need and to sustain the businesses that produce it.

I have more to say, but I believe that I am running out of time, so I will end on this note. We will not allow continued deindustrialisation to create new scars in our community. Mark Ruskell was right to point out that we need a just transition, as we do not want to replicate the mistakes of the 1980s. However, we need action on electricity prices. There is not much of a silver bullet available to people in policy, but if there is one thing that I would ask for that would unlock so much more, particularly in the just transition space and in relation to some emissions reduction measures so that more people could adopt them in their own homes, it would be for action on the cost of electricity. We must see that cost come down and decoupled from gas. Interventions such as that would see us not just meet our targets but potentially exceed them.

Although I will accept the Labour amendment, it is deeply disappointing that the amendment from Reform reiterates its denial of climate change as a real and pressing issue. I hope to be able to talk some sense into Reform members over the next few years, because, as I hope that I have laid out, there are economic benefits associated with climate action. This is not a cost; it is a cost benefit.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that climate change constitutes an emergency; supports the goal to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius; notes the consequences of climate change that are currently impacting populations and places around the world; condemns any spread of misinformation about and denial of the impacts of climate change that undermine the evidence base; reaffirms Scotland's commitment to delivering ambitious climate action and achieving net zero by 2045, in line with its statutory carbon budget targets; agrees on the need to enhance Scotland's climate resilience and adaptation efforts to safeguard people, communities, public services and ecosystems from the impacts of climate change; welcomes the transformative opportunities presented by climate action, including significant economic, social, environmental and public health benefits, and acknowledges that delivery of the transition must be fair and inclusive for all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Claire Baker to speak to and move amendment S7M-00434.2.

15:51

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): We need to be clear that climate change is an emergency that affects communities across the world and increasingly here in Scotland. We are seeing more extreme weather events, increased flooding, risks to biodiversity, pressures on food production, and growing risks to public health and infrastructure. Climate change does not stop just because some people do not believe in it. The scientific evidence is clear, the need for action is urgent and the responsibility of Government to deliver is undeniable.

Members in successive sessions of the Scottish Parliament have recognised that reality and, although delivery has sometimes fallen short, the need to act has largely been accepted. In returning to the environment brief after around 10 years, I am struck by the extent to which the political consensus on climate action appears to be weakening. That should concern us all. The challenge cannot be whether we agree on the destination; it must be whether we are making enough progress to get there. If Governments repeatedly set ambitious targets but fail to demonstrate progress, people inevitably begin to question whether change is really happening. We cannot allow frustration with delivery to become an argument against action.

Gillian Martin: Does the member agree, however, that the issue is not just for Government, and that there has to be a determination, in a coalition of the willing in Parliament and in wider society, to reach the targets?

Claire Baker: I agree with that to an extent, but Government has the levers and is there to provide leadership and the drive to make things happen. As I have made clear, collectively across the Parliament, we have agreed that we need to make progress on the targets, which are also legally binding by an agreement made here, and the committees have an important role to play. However, ultimately, the Government has to show leadership on the issue.

Scotland does not have a shortage of climate targets; we have a shortage of evidence that we

are moving quickly enough to meet them. There remains a persistent gap between the commitments that have been made and the progress that has been delivered. Devolved policy areas are where many of the emissions reductions that we need must come from, whether they be in transport, low-carbon heat in our homes, or nature restoration. Those are all areas in which we need faster progress.

The recent emissions statement demonstrated the reality. Emissions reductions have slowed, our carbon footprint is moving in the wrong direction and, unless we increase the pace of change, we will struggle to meet future targets. The figures matter because, every year that progress slows, the scale of the challenge becomes even greater. Delaying action today simply means steeper and more difficult changes tomorrow.

The publication of the draft climate action plan at the end of last year was a missed opportunity for the Scottish Government, as it failed to provide the necessary focus on delivery. Stakeholders were looking for confidence that Scotland has a credible pathway to meeting its carbon budgets. The concern was not about ambition; it was about whether the measures that were identified were sufficient, detailed enough and, above all, capable of being implemented.

The cabinet secretary has described the plan as a road map, but a road map must show not only the destination but how we intend to get there. Scotland needs a clearer pathway towards meeting its carbon budgets, and the Parliament needs better tools to monitor progress along the way.

We have seen positive changes, including having greater scrutiny and a greater focus on carbon budgets, but there remain significant gaps in how progress will be measured and monitored. I am keen to hear more from the cabinet secretary about the priority actions that have been taken forward, how progress will be reported to the Parliament and how the cross-Government group referenced in the emissions statement will help to deliver change. She referred to some of that in her opening remarks, but I look forward to hearing more detail. Scrutiny is not an obstacle to climate action; it is essential to it.

We recognise that responsibility for taking action on climate change is shared across individuals, communities, private companies, the public sector and others, as well as the Government. However, as I said earlier, the Government holds the levers of power. For local authorities, households and communities to help drive the transition, they need proper support to do so. For many families, climate policy is not about having an abstract discussion about emissions; it concerns whether they can afford to heat their homes, whether their home is energy efficient and whether they can reduce their energy bills. People want warmer homes, lower bills and cleaner energy, but too many households still face barriers when it comes to improving energy efficiency or installing low-carbon technologies. Improving energy efficiency should be one of the most effective ways to reduce emissions, tackle fuel poverty and lower household bills, yet progress on retrofitting Scotland's housing stock remains too slow and too many households are still waiting for practical support. We also need to explore how technologies such as solar power, battery storage and heat pumps can work together to decarbonise homes while helping families to manage energy costs.

Domestic transport, which remains our largest source of emissions, is a clear example of the gap between ambition and delivery. Last year, the Scottish Government scrapped its own target to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030, because it had failed to put in place the policies necessary to achieve that. Although there has been expansion and investment in electric vehicle infrastructure, it seems that we increasingly rely on the switch from petrol and diesel to EVs, instead of delivering a wider transformation of our transport system.

Gillian Martin: I make this intervention in the spirit of wanting to work together. One of the issues has been the UK Government's decision to tax EV drivers per mile. Does the member not see that as a retrograde step when we want more people to access EVs?

Claire Baker: My understanding is that a consultation on that decision has just closed. Some of the pressure comes from the costs that we have put on rural transport and on people who live in rural areas, but we recognise that rural car ownership is always more expensive. If people do not have alternatives to using their cars, we need to invest more in public transport and ensure that they have such alternatives so that we can deliver modal shifts. Although EVs are part of the solution, they have to sit alongside public transport, and too many people in Scotland do not have access to a network that meets their needs.

People understand the need to reduce transport emissions, but they also know that if a bus does not turn up, if the train is still too expensive or if there is no public transport option at all, they will continue to rely on their cars. That is why we need genuine alternatives: reliable public transport, better bus services, improved rail connectivity and safer active travel routes. The reintroduction of off-peak fares was welcome in helping to tackle the cost of rail travel, but the Government's own analysis suggested that it did not deliver the

significant modal shift that had been hoped for. Achieving that shift remains one of the biggest transport challenges that we face.

Climate action must also work for rural Scotland. Our farmers and crofters already experience the impacts of climate change, including increasing uncertainty around production, and are essential partners in this transition. Although we have seen emissions from agriculture reduce over recent decades, much of that reduction has coincided with declining livestock numbers. We agree that meeting agricultural emissions targets cannot rely on simply reducing livestock numbers. Farmers need support to adopt new technologies and lower-carbon practices while being able to maintain a thriving food-producing sector.

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): Does Claire Baker accept that the Scottish Government and this Parliament have made the necessary injections of cash into agriculture by ensuring that we continue with direct payments, continue voluntary coupled support—

Finlay Carson: You cut the budget.

Jim Fairlie: —and continue to have a ring fenced fund for cattle production in this country while, in England, the policies introduced by the Tories and continued by the Labour Party have decimated agriculture there?

Claire Baker: I do not agree with that analysis, which does not recognise the reality that farmers are dealing with. When I met NFU Scotland this week, it called for clarity on the money that the Scottish Government will provide.

Jim Fairlie: It has clarity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Members must not interrupt.

Claire Baker: We agree with maintaining livestock numbers—although the numbers have come down because of market forces—but the funding framework must support the transformation that we need in farming. If we look at how things have been set up in England and Wales, we see that the money that is distributed to farmers is more clearly linked to the transformation that we need in farming practices.

Jim Fairlie: I assume that Claire Baker is comfortable with the fact that, down in England, a payment under the basic payment scheme used to be worth £40,000 but its replacement is now worth £600. Is that the right way to give farmers certainty?

Claire Baker: I have made it clear that farming and agriculture are important sectors, as the highest emissions in Scotland come from agriculture, transport, housing and buildings, but the Government does not seem to be setting out how it could support the agriculture sector to make the shift. The minister talked about supporting the sector, but he did not talk about the subject of the debate, which is how we should deal with such emissions.

As I said, we would not reduce livestock numbers—although numbers are already coming down because of market forces—but what should we do? We need to consider the funding network and ensure that we work with farmers. We should use the potential that we have to encourage and incentivise low-carbon farming and greening practices through the payments system. The minister seems to be quite excited by the fact that I am saying that, as though it is not something that the Government supports, but my understanding is that the Government does support reducing emissions in the agriculture sector, and I would like a clearer idea of how it plans to do that.

Scotland's natural environment is one of its greatest assets, but biodiversity continues to decline and many species and habitats remain under pressure. Nature restoration is a key part of our response to climate change. Healthy ecosystems help to store carbon, improve resilience to extreme weather and support sustainable economic activity. However, there are questions about whether our ambition is translating into projects on the ground. Communities, land managers and environmental organisations need certainty on support and investment, alongside clear targets for nature restoration.

The same applies to the marine environment. Our seas support biodiversity, sustain coastal communities and have an important role in carbon storage. However, protecting marine ecosystems requires effective management, robust monitoring and meaningful engagement with those whose livelihoods depend on our seas.

Deputy Presiding Officer, given that I have accepted a number of interventions, am I able to continue?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): You should be winding up, so I recommend that you do not take any more interventions and that you move to your closing remarks.

Claire Baker: I was going to say something about tree planting. The cabinet secretary's announcement on climate forests is welcome, but we could do more in that area.

We know that the transition to net zero presents huge opportunities for Scotland, and we have the natural resources and ability to deliver that transformation. Alongside opportunity, we need leadership and delivery, with the Government providing clear and credible plans for

implementation. Ambition alone will not reduce emissions. Targets alone will not restore nature. We need faster progress on decarbonising transport, improving the energy efficiency of our homes, supporting communities and businesses through the transition and restoring our natural environment.

I move amendment S7M-00434.2, to insert at end:

"; recognises that, in order to meet the 2030 targets and beyond, the pace of change has to accelerate, acknowledging that, if pace continues at the current rate, targets will be missed; calls on the Scottish Government to publish detailed plans on how it will meet interim targets, and further calls on the Scottish Government to move at pace to bring forward retrofitting and other measures to tackle fuel poverty and help Scotland reach its climate targets."

16:03

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): Let me begin with a simple but important distinction. Global warming is real and a problem, but it is not an emergency. That distinction matters, because it shapes how we respond. Make no mistake: our current policies are failing. They are disproportionate and unilateral, are causing the closure of industries and are driving huge energy bills while having zero effect on global emissions. In Scotland, most obviously, such policies have driven the closures of the Grangemouth refinery and the Mossmorran plant, and they are causing huge damage to our North Sea oil and gas industry.

The distinction also matters because emotive terms such as "emergency" and "crisis" are simply not supported by the science.

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): Will Duncan Massey take an intervention on that point?

Duncan Massey: No, because I am about to make my argument.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Members do not need to take interventions.

Duncan Massey: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has quietly removed its RCP—representative concentration pathway—8.5 scenario, which once again highlights that the scientific consensus is that there is slow and mild warming, with the mid-term estimate being another 1°C to 1.5°C increase by the end of the century.

What are the real impacts of that warming? Again, the IPCC sees the likely emergence of more heatwaves, but it does not see a climate change signal for river floods, heavy rainfall, drought of all types, severe wind storms or tropical storms.

Lloyd Melville: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Duncan Massey: Yes.

Lloyd Melville: I gently point out to the member that, in my constituency, I watched people being evacuated from their homes by boat because of severe rainstorms and severe river flooding. Does he accept that that is the reality of climate change that we are facing right now?

Duncan Massey: I reiterate the science—the IPCC does not see that as a trend.

Lloyd Melville: It is happening now.

Duncan Massey: The IPCC does not see it as a trend—that is the science. Quite often, when we look at individual events, we see that there has been a failure to dredge rivers, or building on flood plains, and all those factors contribute strongly.

The IPCC also does not currently attribute wildfire occurrence to climate change. It sees an increase in dry and simultaneously windy weather that can influence wildfire, but it highlights that wildfires are more dependent on land use and nearby human activity to provide ignition and fuel. The Dava moor fire is a case in point. The fire was started by a flare during a coastguard exercise. Although there was extremely dry weather, it was exacerbated by an increase in fuel as a result of fewer controlled burns, and of land use changes that resulted in fewer firebreaks and fewer gamekeepers being available to fight the incident.

Jim Fairlie: The facts are that the Dava wildfire went through every landscape—it did not matter whether it was forestry, wetland, peatland or managed land—so it is simply not correct to say that the only reason for the scale of the Dava fire was that the land had not been managed.

Duncan Massey: It was certainly contributory.

Again, let us be science based and fact based about the problem, and let us acknowledge that climate change sits alongside other problems such as lack of growth, lack of jobs and the cost of living crisis. Unfortunately, our policies have made those problems interconnected. We need to ensure that our responses are pragmatic and long term and that our policies are focused on the needs of people rather than on arbitrary emissions targets.

Let us be clear: our current net zero policies are not working, and they are not proportionate. First, they are not having any actual impact. Scotland's annual emissions are 0.08 per cent of global emissions, or about one day of Chinese emissions. As the Scottish Government's own data has shown, our emissions have been flat since 2020, with no decline despite huge amounts of taxpayers' money having been thrown at the problem.

Secondly, those net zero policies are driving huge costs that are deindustrialising the whole country and driving up our energy bills.

Gillian Martin: It is important to point out that the facts and the data show that Scotland's emissions have halved since 1990 as a result of climate action. I also refer to the GVA that I mentioned in my speech—while emissions have dropped, productivity has gone up.

Duncan Massey: Emissions fell after 1990 as a result of our moving to gas, away from coal. The cabinet secretary can look up her own chart in her own report—our emissions over the past five years have been flat.

To come to the point about GVA, I think that the analysis in the CBI Scotland report is mistaken, because the costs of current policies are driving a fragile energy system with some of the most expensive energy in the world. Industrial energy costs here are double those of the US and four times those of China; we have nearly lost our primary steel industry; our chemical, pharmaceuticals and ceramics industries are all being hammered; our oil and gas industry is being closed down; we no longer produce our own fertiliser; and, across the board, manufacturing is uncompetitive as a result of those high costs.

It is all the more futile when we recognise that those materials are still produced, just not in Scotland. They are produced abroad and then imported with far higher emissions.

Of course, there are jobs in renewables, which I welcome. However, I think that the CBI report overstates the number of jobs, because it includes jobs in many industries such as waste, water, utilities and forestry, and people in advocacy groups. The number of actual jobs associated with renewables in Scotland is around 16,000—that figure is from the Office for National Statistics.

Gillian Martin: It is not—

Duncan Massey: It is.

Gillian Martin: It is not just renewables—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The cabinet secretary should not interrupt from a sedentary position.

Duncan Massey: Those jobs are not necessarily in the areas that are affected by industrial closures, and they are certainly not in the same numbers. Renewables all depend on massive subsidies, which end up on people's bills.

There is another uncomfortable truth: some of the policies that we are pursuing do massive environmental harm.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): There is no industry more subsidised than the nuclear industry, despite what Duncan Massey seems to be suggesting. Historically, subsidy for nuclear far outstretches what has gone into renewables.

Duncan Massey: I do not recognise that. The contracts for difference scheme that is driving renewables is extremely high in cost.

The supply chain for basic metals and rare earths is hugely polluting.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Will Duncan Massey take an intervention?

Duncan Massey: No, thank you—I would like to move on with my speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member has already moved into additional time, so he will not be able to take interventions.

Duncan Massey: The Berwick Bank wind farm is expected to kill tens of thousands of birds, but, apparently, that is not a problem, and it was rushed through in the name of stopping climate change.

All this is happening in a world that is changing rapidly. We are in a new geopolitical era for the major powers—the United States, China and an emerging India. It is an era in which conflict might well re-emerge and in which artificial intelligence is emerging as the key technology. What do all those things need? They need energy. Reliable, cheap and abundant energy is what success in this new world will require. That means balancing choices and making sensible decisions. It means that we must maximise our domestic oil and gas resources in the short to medium term. It means planning for the long term by investing in reliable, large-scale solutions such as nuclear, with renewables playing an important but complementary role. That is how we will secure cheap energy for everyone; protect and add to our industrial base; protect our world-leading oil and gas industry and downstream petrochemicals industry; and keep the lights on for Scotland's future while we reduce carbon emissions over the long term in a pragmatic, sensible and proportionate way.

I move amendment S7M-00434.4, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"believes that there are significant risks to the economy from over-reacting and declaring an imminent emergency which is not underpinned by scientific data; notes that Scotland is facing an economic growth challenge and that current net zero policies are contributing to unsustainable cost increases and expensive energy, which are in turn contributing to deindustrialisation, the loss of jobs and an increase to the cost of living; agrees that Scotland needs pragmatic, sensible and proportionate policies that balance the economy and achieve cheap and abundant energy with long-term reduction of emissions, and resolves that Scotland must maximise its North Sea oil and gas resources in the short to medium term, whilst planning for the long term by investing in reliable, large-scale solutions such as nuclear power, with renewables continuing to play

an important but complementary role."

16:12

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Climate change is the biggest crisis—and the biggest opportunity—that we have now and in the future. To be honest, having listened to the previous speech, I do not want to get drawn into a scientifically illiterate debate about whether climate change is real. We had that debate 25 years ago. The question now is about how we move forward and how we act to protect the economy, people and the environment.

Duncan Massey: Will Mark Ruskell take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: No.

The first half of our journey to net zero in Scotland has brought big benefits, with a revolution in renewable energy that has stripped fossil fuels out of our electricity supply and brought a strong degree of energy security. However, there have also been challenges. Transition has often been unplanned, and economic and community benefits have not reached their full potential. The next half of the journey must be better and fairer: workers and communities must be taken on the journey, and we must protect people from cost of living shocks while delivering benefits for our health and our environment that make sense in their own right.

There has certainly been a right-wing media tirade against climate action, with 70 per cent of recent articles on climate framed negatively, but it would be wrong to assume that public opinion has turned against climate action. A study that was commissioned by the Institute for Public Policy Research a couple of months ago showed that 62 per cent of the UK public back strong climate action, and individual policies such as traffic reduction measures, frequent flyer taxes and low-carbon home heating remain popular. The same study showed that 54 per cent of people believe that the best way to secure energy security is to expand renewable energy, not to double down on oil and gas production.

Despite what some politicians might dream of, we cannot wind the clock back to the 1970s. The trajectory, with or without new fields such as Rosebank, is decline. Transition must accelerate to protect jobs from a cliff edge and to protect our energy security.

There is clearly a gulf between what politicians believe is public opinion and what it really is. I was slightly taken aback by Claire Baker's comment at the beginning of her speech, when she seemed to make the point that the consensus among the public for climate action has gone away. I do not think that it has. It is political caution that will leave us more vulnerable to climate change.

Claire Baker: I do not want to be misrepresented. I have evidence that the public strongly support climate action, but the general discourse around climate has become far more divisive since I last had this portfolio. Certain voices are amplified through social media channels in particular, which may overstate their views and make them seem more than they are, but I accept that the public are largely in favour of action in the area.

Mark Ruskell: That is good to hear, because we must begin this session of the Scottish Parliament with a degree of consensus. The point that I am making is that the fact that the media are effectively driving climate change denial is a real concern, because there is really strong public support for the solutions that work.

There is a real risk that political caution will leave us more vulnerable to climate change while failing to secure the benefits of action for people and for the economy. The Holyrood Government really needs to listen to what the electorate told it during the elections, when those who are aged under 30 voted overwhelmingly for the Scottish Green Party—a party that puts climate action first. That is why there is a record number of Green MSPs, why the former First Minister's constituency is now a Green seat and why, for the first time, there is Green representation in every region of Scotland.

That generation is the future of Scotland and of our politics, and it is a generation that cares about what is coming in 2050. If political parties also want to have a future, they need to listen, because the members of that generation see the worsening extremes of weather, the displacement of people around the world and the wars that are coming due to shortages of water, food and oil, and they are anxious about what kind of world they will raise their own children in. They are also hungry for the opportunities and new jobs that can come from engineering a better future and from having a wellbeing economy that reinvests wealth in community, caring and nature. That generation of young people is also the first whose prospects look worse than those of the generation that came before, so it is no wonder that they are angry and disheartened. They have heard so many promises, but they have been let down time and time again. They deserve so much better.

I have stood here countless times and reminded the Government of the challenges that we face. I have said that we are behind on delivering climate action and will face a desperate race to catch up in the decades ahead. I have said that hitching our hopes to unproven technology such as carbon capture and storage is a huge gamble because, if

those technologies do not materialise, sectors such as land use and transport will face more pressure to reduce emissions even faster. I have also said that ignoring simple programmes to make homes cosier and cheaper or to radically improve our public transport represents a real missed opportunity. We have made some progress, but the Government must show that it is ready for the challenges of 2050, rather than for those of 2007.

If that does not happen, failure will come at a high cost. We cannot cut ourselves off from the impacts of global climate change, as Reform would want us to do, just as we cannot opt out of global action by pretending that Scotland does not have huge advantages over other countries when it comes to reducing emissions. In a world where every country will face challenges, it is no advantage at all for Scotland to be in the slow lane, but there is every advantage in being among the first movers.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's focus on delivery in this session, because we have spent too long debating targets without taking action. The climate change plan sets out a pathway, but it does not commit to detailed programmes that can be felt positively by everybody. Success or failure will come down to the political will of the whole Government to lead and to support sectors to deliver. It will need every cabinet secretary not just to mention climate change from time to time in speeches but to climate proof every budget and programme, to prioritise long-term thinking and to take risks.

If the Government does that, it will have a majority for climate action here in the Parliament, along with the Scottish Greens. If it does not, it will be letting down future generations and they will suffer the consequences.

I move amendment S7M-00434.3, to insert at end:

"; recognises that, despite a media backlash, a majority of the public continues to back strong climate action, especially young people; further recognises that local communities and workers must have a meaningful participatory role in developing and implementing local climate action, with the costs spread fairly across society; recognises that the latest Scottish Greenhouse Gas statistics indicate that progress to reduce emissions has flatlined in key sectors including agriculture, buildings and transport; believes that there must be no drilling of new fossil fuels reserves, in line with advice from the International Energy Agency; considers the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan to be undermined by a significant reliance on as-yet unproven technological solutions, including carbon capture and storage, and that the Scottish Government must develop an alternative pathway to meeting its net zero targets."

16:19

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): We all recognise the reality and impacts of climate change. Emissions must fall, Scotland must improve climate resilience and we must protect our natural environment, so we support an affordable transition to net zero. However, if this Parliament is serious about climate change, this Government must be serious about delivery, because a target never planted a tree, a press release never restored a peatland and a slogan never protected a rural job.

Rural communities need certainty and not more delay, and that is the problem. Ambitious targets are set, then missed and revised, and confidence is lost. Our amendment recognises Scotland's commitment to achieving net zero by 2045, but it also recognises what ministers too often avoid: that meeting that target will require major changes across the economy. Public confidence depends on credible targets, achievable plans and honesty about trade-offs, yet that is missing.

Gillian Martin: I have said a few times now, both in the chamber and in the meetings that I have been having with colleagues, that I want to work with members as much as possible. What policy in the Conservative manifesto would have brought emissions down? What policy in it can we work together on?

Finlay Carson: If the cabinet secretary listens when I get to the end of my speech, she will hear some of the suggestions that we included in our manifesto.

Such criticism is coming not just from the Conservative benches. The previous session's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee heard it clearly from stakeholders, who spoke of a gap between ambition and the reality and warned that delivery has been too slow and that confidence across the sector has been eroded. Regarding the target, Professor Dave Reay told the committee:

"Without a rural support plan, actual policies or a budget in place, it is really hard to see how that will be delivered."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Islands Committee*, 14 January 2026; c 38.]

That sums up the problem perfectly.

We have ambition without delivery, and we see that gap in sector after sector. We see it in forestry, where woodland creation is now falling short of even the reduced targets, following significant cuts in the support scheme. Forestry does not operate to a political timescale but works over decades, yet as a consequence of uncertainty about funding and direction, fewer trees are being planted and there is less confidence across the sector. The decision to cut the forestry grant scheme by 40 per cent has had consequences. Scottish Forestry figures show that fewer than 8,500 hectares of new

woodland were created in 2024-25, which was short of the reduced 10,000 hectare goal and far short of the 18,000 hectares in the climate change plan.

We see the same thing in peatland restoration. The ambition is welcome, but questions remain about whether delivery matches the scale that is required. The committee heard concerns about the narrow, carbon-driven approach in which there is a laser focus on the most degraded sites while wider peatland conditions are overlooked. In responding to the climate change plan, witnesses warned that the right balance has not yet been struck between short-term emissions and long-term sustainable restoration.

Jim Fairlie: Given the points that the member has made about peatland restoration, does he welcome the fact that we have exceeded the peatland restoration targets for this year?

Finlay Carson: Yes, but the minister maybe missed my point. Beyond a laser focus on restoration we must consider the wider implications, where the gains can be made and whether we are doing enough. That view came from the peatland restoration experts.

Within agriculture, farmers and crofters need clarity and certainty so that they can plan for the future. Let me be clear that farmers and crofters are not obstacles to climate action but are essential to it. They manage the land, support biodiversity and produce the food that underpins our national resilience, but they cannot deliver change if policy is unclear and support is uncertain. There is a growing perception that active farming is being sidelined.

Jim Fairlie: Will the member give way?

Finlay Carson: I need to make progress.

The rural support plan was meant to provide that clarity. Instead, it has raised further questions. Funding pressures, reduced capital support and a lack of long-term certainty have left many in the sector unsure about what comes next, and that matters not just for climate policy but for food security. We must be honest—we cannot rely on declining domestic production and increasing imports to make our emissions figures look better on paper. That is not climate leadership; it is climate displacement, which involves exporting our emissions while importing food from elsewhere, often with higher carbon costs.

Jim Fairlie: I am not quite sure what the member is talking about with regard to declining production in this country. We are still producing plenty of food in this country. He also said that there has not been certainty, but there is a guarantee of certainty between now and 2030, and work is ongoing to ensure that we continue with direct payments. Where does the member think that there is not certainty? The industry, which we have just heard from for two days at the Royal Highland Show, is telling us that it is very comfortable with the Scottish Government's direction of travel.

Finlay Carson: The minister must have been speaking to different farmers. The problem is, we know that action needs to be taken but the Government keeps kicking the hard decisions into the long grass. There is no certainty, and there is a reducing budget.

The same credibility gap that we have just heard from the minister's response exists when it comes to technology and implementation. The climate change plan talked about new machinery, alternative fuels and rapid technological change, but we heard clear evidence about the cost barriers involved, whether those are in respect of low-emission equipment or emerging technologies that are simply not viable or available at scale. The Government cannot mandate its way past affordability, or build a credible plan on the assumptions that technology will arrive on time, on budget and at scale, without proper support.

We must take a more honest and balanced approach to our natural environment. Land management matters. Prevention matters. Those who work in our countryside, such as farmers, gamekeepers, land managers and rural businesses, play a vital role, but, too often, they feel ignored in decision making or—worse—treated with suspicion. Policies that are imposed without proper engagement risk undermining the very outcomes that they seek to achieve. A just transition takes people with it rather than leaving them behind.

Nowhere is the need for honesty clearer than in energy policy. A managed transition to net zero must recognise the continuing role of oil and gas. That is not just a political point but an economic and practical reality. North Sea oil and gas supports tens of thousands of skilled jobs, underpins our energy security and provides a domestic supply with a higher environmental standard than any imports. Turning our backs on that resource prematurely will not reduce global demand but will simply mean importing more energy—often, with a higher carbon footprint—while exporting jobs and weakening our economy. That is not a just transition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The member must conclude.

Finlay Carson: A credible approach must be combined with investment in renewables and a realistic understanding of current energy needs. This debate is about credibility, because people will support the transition to net zero only if they

believe that it is fair, achievable and grounded in reality.

I move amendment S7M-00434.5, to leave out from "that climate change" to end and insert:

"the reality and impacts of climate change and supports an affordable transition to net zero; understands that Scotland is committed to reaching net zero by 2045; raises significant concern over the findings of the Climate Change Committee that meeting this target will require significant and far-reaching changes across the economy, including major reductions in domestic oil and gas production, substantial changes in agriculture and livestock numbers, rapid acceleration in the uptake of electric vehicles and the expensive mass installation of heat pumps in homes across the country; recognises that public confidence in climate policy depends on targets being credible, achievable and supported by clear delivery plans; calls on the Scottish Government to set out clearly, honestly and in full, how it plans to meet its 2045 targets, including the practical steps required, the trade-offs involved, and the real impact on jobs, households, businesses and communities; emphasises that Scotland's transition to net zero must be grounded in economic reality, protecting jobs, strengthening energy and food security and supporting sustainable economic growth; recognises the vital contribution of Scotland's farmers, crofters, land managers, gamekeepers, fishing industry and rural and island communities in protecting the natural environment; supports the continued responsible extraction of oil and gas from the North Sea as part of a managed transition, recognising its importance to Scotland's economy, energy security and skilled workforce, and rejects virtue signalling in favour of a practical, transparent and accountable approach to climate policy."

16:26

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): In 2021, I spent a week at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow. I sat in on hours of negotiations, and it was in one of those large, tented rooms, filled with people from all across the world, that I met Martina, who was a delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She and her colleagues were exhausted from trying to keep up with rich countries and influential lobbies.

Martina was there not because she was a trained negotiator; she was a teacher, and she spoke English. English was the second language of us both, but we shared something that was far more important than a common tongue: a deep concern that the planet is warming and extreme weather is driving migration, poverty, famine and flooding on a scale that the world has not seen before.

That was five years ago, when it felt like the world was finally waking up to those threats. It feels like a long time ago, now. Meanwhile, climate change continues to wreak havoc on communities across the globe and right here at home. Whether we live in Kinshasa or Craigleith, climate change is already affecting us all. To small businesses that are flooded after torrential downpours, which are happening more often, farmers struggling with long periods of drought or coastal communities across Scotland seeing increased erosion and watching sea levels rise, climate change is not a future threat but a present reality.

There is nothing to disagree with in the Government's motion. Climate change is an emergency. The science is unambiguous; I know, because I worked alongside climate scientists for more than a decade. The Parliament will be right to reaffirm Scotland's commitment to net zero by 2045 and to call out the dangerous and ridiculous stance of climate change deniers—people who spread misinformation, undermine the evidence base and prioritise ideology over science. Regrettably, some of that thinking is represented in this very chamber. We will not stand for it, and neither should the Parliament.

However, we also owe it to the people of Scotland to be honest about where we are. Scotland set ambitious targets. For more than a decade, we missed them—not once, not twice, but eight times in 12 years. The 2030 target, which was once held up as a world-leading example of climate ambition, was quietly abandoned last year because the Scottish Government's independent advisers said that it was no longer credible. That is not a record to be proud of. It demands accountability.

The climate change plan that was published earlier this year is a step forward, and we acknowledge that. However, significant gaps remain on decarbonising homes, transport, agriculture and industry. We need action, not aspirations.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats also believe that Scotland cannot afford to take any low-carbon technology off the table. An evidence-led approach means exactly that: following the evidence, not ideology. That is why we call on the Scottish Government to engage constructively with the UK Government on Scotland's energy future, including the potential role of new and emerging technologies in our energy mix. Scotland's clean energy ambitions must be built on pragmatism as much as principle, and must leave no community behind. That includes Scotland's north-east, an area close to the cabinet secretary's heart. The Liberal Democrats believe that the so-called just transition must be exactly that: it must be just, and it must be a transition, not a cliff edge.

The Scottish Government is rightly ambitious on climate and, where it makes genuine progress, we of course support that. That is not in question. However, to date, progress has been too slow, the targets have too often been missed, and the excuses have too readily been offered. It is all of our role, as an Opposition and as a Parliament, to

hold their feet to the fire. Bold rhetoric is easy. I know that. Bold action is what the Parliament and the planet actually need.

16:31

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): As the recently elected convener of the Climate Action Committee, I look forward to working with colleagues from across the chamber both in scrutinising the Scottish Government but also, I hope, through the committee, in making suggestions to help Scotland deal with the climate emergency that we all face. For clarity, I am not speaking today as convener of that committee.

As some leaders trade the hope and health of future generations for short-term gains, they push back against the very idea of a climate crisis and undermine the need for urgent action. We have already heard that in the debate, and I urge the SNP Scottish Government not to yield to the climate culture wars.

Millions of people globally are impacted by climate change today, and that will also be the case for future generations, as has already been touched upon by Sanne Dijkstra-Downie. I have also heard that on numerous occasions when I have represented the Parliament at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conferences, both the regional and international ones, which I will come back to in a moment.

Global warming is one of the biggest issues facing our planet, and strong leadership on the climate crisis has never been more important. Reaching net zero is a national challenge for Scotland, and it is one that we must win for a healthier climate, warmer homes, cleaner air and happier, more equitable and prosperous communities. The motion in the name of the cabinet secretary highlights those key criteria. I look forward to the contributions from MSPs in the open debate, which I am sure will help the committee's discussions on Thursday, when we meet for the first time, and during the rest of the parliamentary session.

I will touch briefly on three items, for wider consideration.

First, there is the issue of AI data centres and their impact on the environment. A great deal has already been written about them. We all use AI—some former MSPs more than others, of course. It is not going to go back into the box. Its use is only going to increase and become more important for the economy and society. Members will be aware of the reports of plans for 24 AI data centres across the country, so we all appreciate how important the issue has become. I touched on the CPA a minute ago, and the issue of AI data centres has been raised time and again at both international and regional conferences. We are not the only people who are talking about the issue. Helpfully, it is on the agenda for this year's festival of politics. I know that I am not allowed to use props, Presiding Officer, but I thought that I might get away with holding up this programme, as I am plugging a parliamentary event. There will, in fact, be two discussions about AI on 27 August, but one is about data centres. Dealing with climate emissions is already a massive challenge. We need to find a way to incorporate newer technologies into the economic, social and environmental policies that we manage.

Secondly, there is the issue of heat networks. It is important that they are successful in delivering the heat that we all need, but the issue of their environmental impact is also vital. District heating systems play an important role in communities up and down the country, but they come in a range of scales. Are they operating effectively? How do we create more, using efficient input, to ensure that communities can benefit from them while providing improvements for the customer and the provider?

Thirdly, there is something that is a small issue in a business context, and it might be a bit niche for some—I did not know about it until yesterday when I met up with a local business. It is an issue not just for that business, but for that particular sector across the UK. The technology that cinemas utilise is actually highly power intensive. There is technology out there that can help to improve that, but cinemas are struggling. They have not yet recovered fully from Covid, particularly when it comes to small-scale operators. That business in my constituency has one cinema in Greenock and one in Dunoon. There is a separate cinema in Falkirk that has one screen, and there are similar cinemas across the UK. Not all cinemas are part of big multinational conglomerations. That is a small example of where Government could help to move the dial somewhat.

A range of issues have already been discussed and, obviously, many more will be discussed, including the marine environment, energy generation, oil and gas extraction, agriculture, transport and construction, among others. There will be more to discuss and I am certainly looking forward to the discussions that we will have in the Climate Action Committee. However, fundamentally, we have made progress. It is difficult to get to where we need to get to, but we need to do it. The impact on us is one thing, but there is also the impact on some countries in Africa in particular. Sanne Dijkstra-Downie spoke about the Democratic Republic of Congo, but there are many others that I have heard about through the CPA. We have got a job to do.

16:36

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): I declare an interest, in that I am an elected councillor on Dundee City Council.

I will start my speech by stating an inconvenient truth. Climate change is real. It has been an emergency for some time and it is already affecting communities across Scotland, as we well know. If I could stop it by clicking my heels and denying it three times, I would, but that would not make it go away. It is already happening. Winters are already wetter. Summers are already drier. Storms are increasing in frequency and intensity and, unbelievably, droughts are being predicted in Scotland.

Duncan Massey: Will the member take an intervention?

Heather Anderson: No, I am not taking an intervention. The member got to put out a lot of misinformation earlier. I am carrying on.

The 10 warmest years on record here in Scotland have been in the past 27 years, with 2022 recorded as Scotland's hottest year ever. 2024 was the UK's warmest year on record and that record is likely to be broken in this session of Parliament, if not this year. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C is not a woke mantra. 1.5°C is not a target, it is a limit. If our planet warms up by more than 1.5°C, a number of tipping points are breached. Oceans are already warming faster than predicted, glaciers are melting faster than we had hoped, and the permafrost is thawing at an alarming rate.

Once those tipping points are breached, we run out of road. If we breach those tipping points, we cannot control any of it. However, we can control it now. That is why every decision that we make in this Parliament must take account of the impact that we will have on this place that we call home, on our children and on our grandchildren. Continuing to wreck the joint and saying that it is someone else's problem is not forgivable or excusable.

Members of this chamber may know that I was a farmer, and farmers do not need to look at the data charts. Farmers live in the weather every day. Harvests were impacted by record-breaking rainfall in 2024. Every farmer knows that the loss of hard frost over winter increases disease burden in the soil. Every grower knows that the increasing unpredictability of seasons disrupts cultivation plans. I want everyone in this chamber to take a minute to understand that everything that we eat was planted or reared by a farmer somewhere. No farmers, no party. For food producers, reaching net zero is not a target, it is a necessity.

Finlay Carson: Could the member set out what she believes is a show-stopping policy that this Government has introduced in the past 10 years that has allowed farmers to move quickly towards becoming net zero?

Heather Anderson: I will be guided by the cabinet secretary, who was here in previous sessions, but the main thing is that we are trying to involve farmers in the move to net zero. We are trying to support farmers to survive and to diversify the way they rear their animals and the way they farm. We are trying to support active farming and more organic farming.

We need organisations such as the James Hutton Institute, just outside Dundee, to develop more climate-resilient plant breeds to contend with increasing unpredictability. We need to work with nature to enable us to withstand the impact of climate change that is already baked into the 1.5°C target.

This is where local authorities come in. I always say that local authorities are the fourth emergency service. Whenever there is an adverse weather event, it is the local authority that steps in to support households that have been experiencing flooding, fires or severe heat. Local authorities are also key to ensuring that communities are supported to identify risks and improve climate resilience. In Dundee, we recently updated our climate risk and vulnerability assessment, assessing the impact of a 2°C or 4°C increase in temperature on nature, infrastructure, buildings and people. It made pretty uncomfortable reading.

We have formed Climate Ready Tayside with Perth and Kinross and Angus Councils, because we understand that adverse weather events do not respect council boundaries. The group is focusing on nature-based solutions and is developing community resilience to future events. It knows that once-in-a-generation storms are now occurring on an annual basis. Storm Babet caused devastating flooding across the region, most noticeably in Brechin, but also in Dundee, where the Dighty burst its banks. Working with nature to re-meander the Dighty is now a regular topic of debate and a work in progress.

Also in Dundee, thanks to 80 per cent funding support from the Scottish Government, we have invested in the Broughty Ferry flood protection scheme. We have combined it with an amazing active travel route, sand dune restoration and wildflower meadows. Just imagine two football pitches full of wildflowers, such as viper's bugloss, with the bees buzzing so intensely that people walking there stop still in amazement just to listen to the racket. We are protecting all those homes and businesses and getting people out walking, and the bees, bugs and beasties are loving it. That is good work. That is how we tackle climate change.

Scotland has made great progress towards meeting our net zero targets, and I trust that, with the renewed focus and the updated climate change plan, we can finish the job. The Climate Change Committee has said that we can do it, so let us get on and do it.

16:52

David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I refer to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am a councillor in Fife and a principal hydrologist for Kiloh Associates.

I recently attended a screening of the "People's Emergency Briefing" from a campaign that brings together leading scientists, economists, security experts and communicators to explain the risks posed by climate change and nature loss and to encourage a more honest public conversation about the scale of the challenge before us. The campaign calls on the UK Government to stage a prime-time, multichannel televised national emergency briefing to communicate the scale and immediacy of the risks that we face. The film perfectly captures the key risks around climate change, and I would encourage all members to look up the community screenings that are happening all over Scotland.

To take an example of the topics covered by the screening, the price of energy is a major driver of inflation and the cost of living. Renewable energy is not just better for the planet; it is more economically secure. Our dependency on fossil fuels has been responsible for huge economic shocks in recent years. Russia's invasion of Ukraine did not make wind power more expensive, and Trump's war with Iran did not make solar more costly. Almost 90 per cent of homes in Scotland rely on fossil fuels. It seems fairly obvious that, if we are less reliant on fossil fuels, we will be less exposed to the shocks created by global events.

Before entering Parliament, I spent about 15 years working as a hydrologist. During that time, I undertook hundreds of flood risk assessments across the UK for housing and commercial developments and for energy infrastructure. Over those 15 years, I watched climate change move from something that was discussed largely as a future risk to something that is increasingly reflected in day-to-day engineering practice.

When I started my career, it was common for us to apply a 20 per cent uplift for climate change to our calculations, to account for increased river flow or peak rainfall intensities in order to assess future impacts of flooding. Today, depending on the catchment, that figure can be as high as 59 per cent. Those changes are happening now. Those numbers are produced not by politicians or campaign groups but by scientists, engineers and regulators who are analysing the best available evidence we have today.

That evidence points to a clear direction: weather extremes are becoming more extreme. We are seeing more intense rainfall events, increasing flood risk, longer periods of drought and greater pressure on infrastructure that was never designed for the climate conditions that are now emerging. That is why I find concerning some of the language that has entered our political discourse in recent weeks and that has been repeated today. Once again, we have heard Reform members dismiss terms such as climate emergency and climate crisis as faith-based language rather than descriptions that are grounded in evidence.

Finlay Carson: I welcome David Barratt to the Parliament—he is one of the three Gallovidians that are now in the Parliament. Does he think that it is right that constituents in his home constituency of Galloway are subject to huge pylons and are not able to oppose the massive wind farms and solar and battery power plants that now cover our landscape when local communities should have more say?

David Barratt: To an extent, I agree with something that Finlay Carson referred to earlier, which is that a just transition takes people with it. As a former convener of the planning committee in Fife, I know that there is a process for commenting and taking part in the democratic processes that go along with that planning work. We do need infrastructure—that is part of it and it is a reality of the world that we are in—but I understand the point that he is making.

We have also heard Reform members call for Scotland to abandon net zero policies. I fully accept that there is room for legitimate debate about how we respond to climate change. We should debate which technologies we invest in, how we support workers through the transition, how we protect consumers and how we ensure that policies are fair and effective. However, there is a fundamental difference between debating solutions and dismissing the evidence that makes those solutions necessary.

As someone who has worked professionally in this field, I do not regard the language of climate emergency as a slogan. It reflects the reality that the risks identified by the science are becoming more serious and more urgent with every passing decade.

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The member is in his last few seconds.

David Barratt: I believe that climate change should not be viewed solely through the lens of risk. Challenge also means opportunity, and Scotland possesses some of the greatest renewable energy resources in Europe. We have world-class engineering expertise and a highly skilled workforce with enormous potential for offshore energy storage and emerging low-carbon technologies.

Investment in renewable energy is not simply about reducing emissions. It is about strengthening our energy security, improving our resilience and creating jobs in future industries. The national emergency briefing asks a simple question: if the evidence points to growing risk, do we respond with urgency or do we bury our heads in the sand? For me, the answer is clear: we should meet the challenges of climate change with honesty about the risks, confidence in the science and optimism about the opportunities that are before us. If we do that, Scotland will not simply adapt to a changing world—we can help to lead it.

16:49

Katie Hagmann (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I put on the record how disappointed and, frankly, staggered I have been by some of the language that has been used in this debate. To refer to climate change as a faith-based belief is not only baffling and disrespectful but dangerous.

Duncan Massey: Will the member take an intervention?

Katie Hagmann: I will not take the intervention.

That said, although I recognise and condemn the spread of misinformation, as other speakers in this debate have outlined, I am not seeking to justify or determine the legitimacy of the climate emergency. The evidence is abundantly clear: from the work of countless scientific professionals, following evidence, scientific professional advice and research, to the experiences of those who are living with life-changing and life-threatening effects in Scotland and across the globe, we know that climate change constitutes a global emergency, and I am glad that we are recognising that today in our Scottish Parliament.

Although the challenges that we collectively face are immense, Scotland has the opportunity to show leadership. I am proud that the SNP will not shy away from that but will take action. Combining our ambitious net zero targets with our commitment to a just transition, we will ensure that delivering jobs, investment and fairness for communities remains at the forefront of all our climate action.

I am drawn to the final clauses of the motion, which state:

"the transformative opportunities presented by climate action, including significant economic, social, environmental and public health benefits, and acknowledges that delivery of the transition must be fair and inclusive for all."

I whole-heartedly agree with that statement and can give a wonderful example of such opportunities in action in relation to investment in renewables. In my constituency of Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, many communities were built on the back of industry and coal mining. Those communities powered Scotland for generations but were abandoned under successive Conservative Governments, and industry was torn out with little or no regard for the people who depended on it. Devastation, lost opportunity and a deep sense of betrayal are very much still felt, as I heard directly from people on the doorsteps during my campaign.

Finlay Carson: To turn that comment on its head, what about the total disregard for communities, including the one that Katie Hagmann used to live in, round about Newton Stewart, where people feel completely and utterly ignored when it comes to having massive renewables infrastructure right on their doorstep?

Katie Hagmann: I am not in this Parliament to speak for Dumfries and Galloway Council, but I put on the record that I am a councillor in Dumfries and Galloway. There is a planning procedure in place, which is debated, and Dumfries and Galloway Council will certainly make representations. However, I do not recognise the situation that Mr Carson refers to.

When I consider the opportunities that have been brought forward by investments in the renewables sector, I am delighted to see that communities are being reimagined and revitalised. Locally, in CCDV, we have a group of nine community councils that have agreed to work together. They use the line

"Uniting our Communities – Investing in our Future".

It is wonderful to see former coalfield communities speaking with a strong, collective voice.

The 9CC Group is widely considered to be an exemplar of best practice in using community benefit. Having met the team on the ground, I can see why. It is strategic in nature, ensuring that, instead of working in isolation, communities invest funding in long-term regeneration across the whole area. That includes working with the local council and supporting apprenticeships across businesses. The group is fair and transparent, and it uses an agreed framework with a clear distribution of funds, which leads to equity and

avoids competition, meaning that everyone benefits.

There is local control and democratic leadership, because decisions are controlled by the community councils. There is also collaboration across communities, strengthening those communities and creating a shared voice with greater influence. Put simply, that turns community benefit into long-term, fair—

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Katie Hagmann: I will not, because I am just finishing up.

It ensures that the wealth from renewables delivers change for and in the communities that host them. This is the promise of a just transition: real change, delivered fairly by and for our communities. Now is the time to act, lead and deliver for Scotland's future.

16:54

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): We are at a moment that will define the future that we leave to our children and grandchildren. The science is clear, the evidence is all around us and the window for action is narrowing. Today, red weather warnings for extreme heat have been issued in the south-east of England. This is the second heatwave of the summer and it is still June. More extreme weather is battering our farms and communities. Members should speak to farmers—they will tell them that things are getting harder and harder every year.

It would be easy to stand here in despair, but I stand here with determination, because Scotland needs to rise to the challenge and our communities need to be at the centre of what we do.

I am proud of what Scotland is already achieving. Scotland has decarbonised its electricity supply faster than almost any other country in Europe has done. More than 90 per cent of our electricity now comes from renewable sources—a transformation that is powered by the wind, waves and tides that shape our East Lothian shores every day.

In East Lothian, we see both the risks and the opportunities more clearly than most. Our beautiful coastline is being impacted by climate change—communities in Cockenzie, Prestonpans and North Berwick know the reality of coastal erosion and flooding. Our farmers are already having to adapt to changing weather patterns that affect crops and livestock.

However, East Lothian is also perfectly placed to be a green energy powerhouse. The Firth of Forth offers world-class conditions for offshore wind.

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): What does the member think about the impact of Berwick Bank wind farm, which would be just off our beautiful coast and would affect up to, I think, 80,000 birds, which are expected to be slaughtered by the turbines?

Paul McLennan: I would not use that terminology. I have engaged with the Scottish Seabird Centre, RSPB Scotland and local communities on that. That discussion is ongoing.

According to the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit's report, "The Scottish Net Zero Economy in 2025", East Lothian has one of the areas of highest relative exposure to the net zero economy in Scotland. I note key statistics for East Lothian. The net zero economy accounts for 6.8 per cent of local GVA and supports 1,380 jobs, which makes it a significant contributor to and employer in East Lothian. East Lothian is placed among the top areas in Scotland for the importance of green and net zero activity. That makes a real difference to our communities and to people's livelihoods right now.

As I said, that includes transmission infrastructure, specialist manufacturing and fabrication. Local examples of companies are Sunamp, Lemac Power and Had-Fab. The net zero economy makes a stronger relative contribution in East Lothian than it does in many other parts of Scotland, and that highlights East Lothian's specialisation in the green energy transition.

The role of heat networks will be key as we move forward, although we have not heard about that today. I commend the work of Lothian Heat.

Another key point is that one in three Scottish households cannot afford to keep warm. Energy bills keep rising. Families and households are struggling while energy companies are profiting. However, proposals could lead to more than £900 million in regional benefit, combatting fuel poverty in the region.

For me, a fundamental aspect is how we talk about climate change. It offers economic opportunities. Hundreds of local jobs are under development. Energy security is important. We can lower emissions and reduce impact on the climate.

Green jobs are already making a measurable, high-value impact in East Lothian. We have heard today from a few members about the importance of a just transition. We have a net zero target for 2045.

We need to support community energy projects, which are incredibly important. We also need to expand active travel networks so that people can cycle and walk across our towns and countryside, and we need to back innovation in green hydrogen and carbon capture.

We need to push for accelerated deployment of floating offshore wind, retrofitting of our homes to slash fuel poverty and new woodland creation that enhances biodiversity while locking away carbon.

None of this is easy. There will be difficult choices. We must be honest with people: meeting our climate targets requires change—in how we travel, heat our homes and use our land. However, change does not have to mean sacrifice. It can mean warmer homes, cheaper energy bills, better health from cleaner air and thousands of well-paid local jobs. A just transition means that no community is left behind.

We know that Scotland's hands are still tied by decisions that are made in London. Failure to invest in grid infrastructure by successive UK Governments has held Scotland back. Successive UK Governments have cut support for renewables, delayed vital projects and prioritised short-term politics over long-term survival. That is why independence remains essential. An independent Scotland should have full control over our vast natural resources, the ability to strike our own international green energy deals and the power to align our immigration skills and investment policies with the urgent needs of the climate emergency.

The challenge is great, but so is our capacity to meet it. East Lothian has always punched above its weight, from the agricultural revolution to the industrial age. Now we can lead the green revolution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We move to closing speeches.

16:59

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): I thank everyone for their contributions today. I will start by stating that there is a climate emergency. On that point I will say to my namesake across the chamber, Mr Duncan Massey, that I am glad that Reform is now recognising that climate change exists, but it is an emergency. This is the hottest day we have ever seen in June in the United Kingdom, and year upon year and month upon month, climate targets are being changed.

Duncan Massey: I challenge the member, and indeed everyone in the entire chamber, to point to the scientific information, especially from IPCC, that corroborates the claim that there is a climate emergency. It does not exist. [*Interruption*.] I would ask you to corroborate every claim that is made in this chamber with scientific evidence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Speak through the chair, please, during interventions and contributions.

Duncan Dunlop: As I just said, today is the hottest day ever recorded in June in London. That record will be beaten tomorrow and probably again the following day. That is the evidence before our eyes, and we had the same in May. We can see numerous events. We can see the increasing need to build flood defences in Dumfries and we have had to do the same in Hawick.

Duncan Massey *rose—*

Duncan Dunlop: I will not continue on that point, so I will not take any more interventions on it. [*Interruption*.]

Moving on, the Government must realise that we are in danger of moving goalposts. As has been said in this debate by my colleague Sanne Dijkstra-Downie, it is tragic that we are missing our 2030 interim climate change targets and that eight out of 12 emissions milestones have been abandoned. We cannot keep moving the goalposts on this.

Indeed, the Liberal Democrats were the original green party, which is in part why I joined them. We always had ambitious targets on this issue. It was a Liberal Democrat minister in the first parliamentary session who set the first targets for renewable electricity use in Scotland. However, as Finlay Carson reminded us, targets are meaningless unless there is an action plan related to them. I will no doubt say this numerous times in this session: a target has to be related to a plan that says what is going to be done, by when, who will do it, how much it will cost and the change that it will deliver. Too frequently, we do not deliver on that.

However, the main issue that I want to sum up with is that we need to take people with us.

Gillian Martin: I would just like to say that the climate change plan is, effectively, that route map. The main part of the plan might be slim in bulk, but it has many annexes that set out plans for every sector.

Duncan Dunlop: I look forward to seeing how we follow through and deliver on those plans as they reach those who are responsible for carrying them out.

The main issue for me is how we take people with us. I slightly differ from Mark Ruskell, who said that there is still significant public interest in this issue—I do not think that there is the interest that there used to be. I am worried that climate change is being seen as a trend that we can move on from.

It should not be seen as that. It is a crucial issue that will be pervasive through all our lifetimes and those in the future. One point that I do agree with is that young people recognise that, and that is their main fear. I agree with David Barratt that we need to see "The People's Emergency Briefing" screened right across our country so that that understanding is pervasive—that is a tool to help us to do that.

I ask that, as political parties, we make sure that we reinforce this issue as a key message. I look to the Green Party in particular to do that and say this to it. Do not get distracted by other issues. When you came on to the scene, the environment and the driving forward of the message of the climate emergency were always seen to be part of your mandate. It would be good to see more of that.

Another area that I am worried about came up as a top priority when I knocked on thousands of doors, and it has been one of the main issues discussed by several members in this debate: what is happening with renewable energy infrastructure, particularly in our rural communities in the Highlands and right across the south of Scotland. People feel as though it is happening to them and not with them. People who are naturally inclined to support the movement towards our net zero ambitions and the industry that we require around it are feeling as though it is being imposed on them.

We need to be much more ambitious in that regard. In Scotland—I will pick this up with Katie Hagmann— only about £30 million was given to community benefit projects in 2025. That is tragic when you look at the fact that the industry is worth £100 billion. Investment of 0.03 per cent is paltry. We have to do better than that and be ambitious in our thinking about how we are going to take people with us. We urgently need a national plan on what renewable energy infrastructure we need, where we need it and how much we need per region, and it is in the Scottish Government's powers to produce that. That would give people security and continuity.

Within that, people also want to know what they can get from renewable energy. Community benefit should in part be community ownership. Where is the ambition for that? We talk about the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund, but what about community sovereign wealth funds, so that communities can really invest, we can overcome rural poverty and we can help sustainability to thrive in those areas again, never mind giving them access to free electricity?

I urge ministers to please lead. I like the tone on where we are going, but I ask ministers to hear and engage our communities going forward, as this is a national emergency for all of us.

17:05

Finlay Carson: This has been an important and wide-ranging debate, and I thank members from across the chamber for their contributions. There is common ground. We recognise the reality and impacts of climate change, we support climate action and we support Scotland's ambition to reach net zero by 2045—well, most of us do. However, the issue, which has been highlighted throughout the debate, is not about ambition; it about whether the ambition is backed by credible and deliverable policy. Too often, what we hear from the Scottish Government is overly optimistic and is about progress that is not reflected in reality.

Scotland has missed emissions targets in eight of the past 12 years and the 2030 interim target has been abandoned. Progress has stalled in key sectors, including transport, buildings and agriculture. When ministers highlight isolated successes, they risk obscuring the central problem, which is the gap between ambition and delivery. That matters, because public confidence depends on targets being credible, achievable and backed by real plans.

Katie Hagmann: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: I am sorry, but I do not have time. Apologies.

In the previous session, we saw that clearly in the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, where witnesses pointed to a gap between ambition and implementation and a lack of the detailed policies that are needed to deliver. Reaching net zero will require significant changes across our economy, with real costs and trade-offs. That change must happen over timescales that are practical and achievable. If we move too slowly, we fail to act but, if we move too quickly without a plan, we risk damaging rural communities and businesses and our wider economy.

Gillian Martin: I asked Finlay Carson during his opening speech to outline Conservative policies that we could discuss and which could result in emissions reduction. Specifically on land use, what policies do the Conservatives want to bring forward that would see emissions reduction in rural spaces and in relation to land use?

Finlay Carson: I took three interventions in my opening speech, so I ran out of time to talk about that. One point is that we want an increase in the budget by £50 million, which would address some of the issues, rather than the year-on-year cut that we have seen from the SNP Government.

Getting the balance right is essential, as we have heard clearly today. Claire Baker raised concerns about the continued reduction in livestock numbers and what that means for rural

Scotland. Heather Anderson, in a thoughtful contribution, reflected the experience of many in the sector. However, she found it difficult to point to a clear and practical policy that genuinely supports farmers in making the transition. That is the issue. Although change is happening, there is no clear road map to support it, and that risks becoming an unmanaged decline.

I welcome David Barratt's recognition of the challenges facing communities in areas such as Galloway, where large-scale wind, solar and battery developments and the infrastructure that comes with them are having a growing impact. However, I was particularly disappointed that Katie Hagmann failed to recognise those concerns, especially given that she represents a community that, for many years has had campaigns such as Hands Off Our Hills and has felt increasingly ignored by her Government.

Katie Hagmann: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: Yes—if I can get the time back.

Katie Hagmann: What I would add to the debate and highlight to Finlay Carson is that, although some campaign groups are very loud, the hundreds of young people who come to me and who want to support green policies are often not heard. Although it is great to listen to one side of the argument, I invite the member to listen to both sides.

Finlay Carson: I think that we do. There is no denying that everyone sees renewables as part of our future, but having areas of Galloway industrialised by massive turbines against the will of the vast majority of people in the community is just not acceptable.

On Duncan Massey's contribution, I do not believe that the task before us is simply to challenge the science; it is to respond to the science with realistic timescales, practical policies and credible plans, because climate policy cannot exist in isolation from economic realities. We must recognise the role of domestic oil and gas as part of a transition and support those who are already delivering for our environment across rural Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives support action on climate change, but it must be credible, affordable and deliverable. That is the approach that is set out in our amendment, because we currently have a Government that is failing to meet its targets, deliver a truly just transition and provide the clear plan that people and businesses need. Ambition without delivery is failure, and Scotland cannot afford any more failure.

17:10

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I started working on climate change and nature restoration in New York City in the 1990s. When I came back to live in Scotland, I was heartened, because I had arrived in a country where the people, through the Parliament and the Government of that time, had recognised the science-based evidence on climate change. It is good to hear the cabinet secretary recognise that in the chamber today, and I have heard it from colleagues across the chamber.

In 2019, the Parliament unanimously declared that there was a climate emergency. Doing so was supposed to lead to an increase in the roll-out of net zero policies, such as better buses, safer active travel and retrofitting our homes to make them warmer and cheaper to heat. Why, six years on and less than four years until 2030, am I hearing from countless people who know what is at stake that the urgent change that we need to see is not happening fast enough? I admit that we have done an incredible amount of work on energy, but there are other areas in which we need to move at a much more rapid pace.

We have heard from MSPs across the chamber—Sanne Dijkstra-Downie, Heather Anderson, David Barratt and Duncan Dunlop all talked about the wildfires and floods that demonstrate that we need to take critical action. I heard the cabinet secretary talk about this being the parliamentary session of action and the fact that we have a climate change plan. I sat on two committees in the previous session—the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee and the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee—that scrutinised the climate change plan, and we heard evidence from countless stakeholders that they did not feel confident that there was an adequate delivery plan in place.

This five-year parliamentary session is our last chance to get it right. We need bold climate change action. I welcome the cabinet secretary's focus on that, but we have to bring about a secure transition that is just and fair, that delivers for the people of Scotland and that delivers greener, more affordable futures. Well-paid jobs in renewable energy have been talked about over the past five years—we need to see more work on that. We need accessible public transport—where is that happening on the ground? In my rural and island communities, it is sometimes really hard for people to even find a bus. We need the clean heating systems that our EU neighbours have enjoyed for decades. We also need a thriving natural environment, which will be the key in supporting us to adapt to climate change. Every sector of the economy and society will have to play its part. Critically, as has been stated by numerous

colleagues this afternoon, we need to see rapid action in transport, in heat and buildings and in agriculture.

I will focus some more comments on agriculture, having just had a fantastic two days at the Royal Highland Show. We have the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 and the rural support plan, and we know that agriculture and land use play a vital role in the work that we need to do to bring down our emissions. The Scottish Greens campaigned on the idea of an agricultural transition insurance fund—we want to see £500 million of the agricultural budget put into it, because farmers need certainty. We are now in unknown territory when it comes to what we are doing in respect of our land use. We need to give farmers the certainty that if they take action, and it fails, they will still have support to take forward work on land use.

One thing that I noticed in the rural support plan, which I need to look at in more depth, is that it seems to indicate that food production is one thing and nature restoration is something else—two separate streams of activity.

However, I have met pioneering farmers who give me hope, because they recognise that there is a stacked function—the methods that they use to grow food will allow nature to regenerate. We must support farmers to move to nature-friendly, regenerative farming. Those pioneers have moved away from nitrogen use, they understand soil biology and they are choosing smaller herds and mob grazing.

We have legislated for regenerative agriculture, but we do not have the underpinning training. As I said to the minister in the previous parliamentary session, and as I will continue to say to him, we need a skills pipeline in regenerative agriculture so that we can bring new entrants into the system and support existing farmers to transition with confidence. The training must be farmer led and based on farm clusters. We cannot footer around with sporadic funding from the knowledge transfer and innovation fund; we need that pipeline.

I want to briefly mention an issue that is connected to what David Barratt said about a national emergency briefing. In January, the UK Government published its national security assessment on global biodiversity loss, which states:

> "Collapse impairs an ecosystem's ability to provide vital services including clean water, food production, and climate regulation."

That is another blue light flashing quickly and brightly that shows that the Government should move even more swiftly.

When the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee considered the climate change plan in the previous parliamentary session, one thing gave me hope when I thought, "How the heck are we going to do this?" As well as the pioneering farmers, the other people who give me hope are the people in local government who have already rolled up their sleeves. They know what they need to do, but they need Government funding to bring about action at a local level. People throughout the public sector are ready to take action. They just need the Government to give them the funding to support them to take it.

17:17

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): There is a failure at the heart of modern politics: the belief that a policy wrapped in virtue should be spared from scrutiny. The people of Scotland expect those who govern to prove their case, to show their evidence and to demonstrate that every decision will strengthen our people and will not weaken them. The present political push—

David Barratt: Will Angela Ross take an intervention?

Angela Ross: I have not got far, but go on then.

David Barratt: On the point about evidence, robust evidence from the National River Flow Archive, which is the UK's official river flow archive, shows that there has been an upward trend in peak river flow data sets. Does she accept that her colleague is wrong?

Angela Ross: I am not here to talk for my colleague right now. When David Barratt talks about peak river flow data, is he saying that there has been an increase in the rise of rivers?

David Barratt: Yes.

Angela Ross: Okay. I live locally to Musselburgh, where, in 1948, there was the worst flood involving the River Esk. The height is marked on a wall, so members can go and look at it for themselves. We have had flooding for an awful long time.

The present political push for net zero targets and rush to implement renewables without proper infrastructure, and at higher costs due to, for example, curtailment costs, while we drop oil and gas licences overnight and block nuclear development, is ruining our economy. That is at the heart of our concern. We want people to get a fair and just energy transition. I think that most people would agree that we do not want the public or businesses to suffer or struggle. We must find ways forward and not get caught up in circular debates.

Alan Brown: In relation to nuclear energy, can Angela Ross explain the current costs of Hinkley Point C and the projected costs of Sizewell C? Will she tell us how not spending that amount of money is somehow ruining our economy?

Angela Ross: I thank Alan Brown for his point. Torness nuclear power station, which is near where I live, contributes £45 million to the local economy, but that money will be gone when the power station is switched off in 2030.

I think that most of us would agree that we do not want the public to suffer—we have talked about that—and we owe it to them to find solutions. As I said, we cannot keep on having these circular debates and arguments around doing one thing or the other; we need to move forward. As someone who has been in the public eye only for a short time and has only very recently moved into politics, I am already tired of hearing circular debates.

The question is less about whether we trust the science and more about whether we trust what the Government is doing with the science. In the light of that, it is important to consider how the science is presented to us; who interprets it for policy; which assumptions and benchmarks are chosen; and whether the resulting decisions are proportionate, transparent and practical for Scotland's economy and infrastructure and for our communities.

The Climate Change Committee, for example, is an independent statutory group of mainly scientists that advises the Scottish Government. However, it is funded in part by the Scottish Government, and the person who oversees that committee is the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero at Westminster. Can we trust the CCC, therefore, to be truly impartial? I am thinking about some of the optics here.

It may surprise members to learn that I actually studied environmental archaeology and paleoecology at the University of Edinburgh; I know about science, and I know about data and interpreting it. I studied core samples extracted from the ground—

Katie Hagmann: Will the member take an intervention?

Angela Ross: I am going to make some progress, just so that I do not keep us here too late—sorry.

I studied core samples extracted from the ground in Scotland, not far from here, and used dendrochronology, entomology and pollen samples to determine climate patterns. I learned for myself that the climate is dynamic—it does change, and we have seen dramatic changes over expansive phases of time.

There are two key points that I want to raise from the recent "Scotland's Carbon Budgets" report by the Climate Change Committee. First, the temperature graph on page 21, to which members can refer later, shows a gradual rise in the mid-1800s, around the start of the main phase of industrialisation, with an increase of roughly 1°C. An uptick then occurred over the past 50 years. We note that that is an increase—we agree that there has been some correlation—but we should keep it in proportion. A 1°C change in the global average is significant, but it is not, in and of itself, an argument for policy at any price. It should not prompt anything other than careful, practical, transparent decision making.

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): Does the member accept that there is a cost to inaction if we do not tackle climate change? The UK Climate Change Committee reported last month that inaction to adapt is predicted to cost us between 1 per cent and 5 per cent of UK gross domestic product—that is, between £60 billion and £260 billion per year if we do not act. We are seeing that today with disruption to travel, damage to property and infrastructure and, in extreme cases, risk to life. There is a cost to that.

Angela Ross: We are more concerned about the rate and speed at which we have been dropped off a cliff edge, if you like, financially. We have switched so fast from what we had before to what we are looking at in the future that we did not even have in place the right infrastructure to store and transmit energy from the new renewables. That is our concern, but I thank the member for her point.

We need to prompt careful, practical and transparent decision making and not panic with slogans or policies that weaken the very people we are meant to protect. We can recognise the data and still do better in how we respond to it.

The benchmark that is used in the CCC's framework is the international goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels; that is mentioned in the Government motion. My concern is how that benchmark is applied in policy and whether the assumptions behind it are presented with enough context, transparency and realism.

We must keep in mind that the preindustrial phase sits at the end of what is known as the little ice age, which is not as cute as it sounds. It was a period from 1300 to 1840 when Scotland endured colder winters, shorter growing seasons, frozen rivers and real hardship that we have not seen in modern times. We know that from the archaeological and written records.

The little ice age was driven by lower solar energy, increased volcanic eruptions, changes in

ocean circulation and natural climatic variability, yet today we are told that we must hold global temperatures to within 1.5°C of that period, as if nature were a thermostat. That benchmark represents an extremely cold phase that would not align with modern society. It feels like a profound oversimplification of a complex dynamic system. The bottom line is that it is impossible to hold a constant in a dynamic system.

Secondly, I draw members' attention to page 39 of the carbon budget report, which shows a steep fall in Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions between 2000 and 2019, as the cabinet secretary mentioned earlier. As we have heard, some of that reduction came from a move away from coal, but some of it reflects a wider and deliberate economic shift—deindustrialisation and the movement of production, with emissions therefore going overseas. In other words, we have not always cut emissions so much as moved them out of sight.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The member must come to a conclusion.

Angela Ross: Of course—I will just skip a few bits.

Is it really an emergency when, over the past two decades, we have seen such a significant drop? The emission target has dropped.

Let us be clear: the real crisis that people feel today is financial. When energy bills are high and 23 per cent of the costs are for subsidies and green levies, businesses and families are really feeling the strain. The catastrophic deindustrialisation that we have seen has removed jobs and the opportunity for self-sufficiency and growth.

I want to move to something slightly more positive, which, actually, comes from the words of Tony Blair.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The member must come to a conclusion.

Angela Ross: I am wrapping up.

He said that the debate on climate change is "irrational". I could not agree more. We must step past the head-butting arguments about whether climate change exists and take a sensible approach to policy that does not bankrupt us in the pursuit of targets.

17:26

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): My entry in the register of members' interests will show that I run a crofting business that is in receipt of agricultural support, and that I am a shareholder in a common grazing with an interest in peatland restoration.

We welcome the Government motion and the cabinet secretary's indication that the Government will support the Labour amendment.

We are in a climate emergency, and it is right that the Parliament recognises that, as well as the scale of the challenge that is in front of us. In our islands, the impacts of climate change are not a far-off abstract concept; they are day-to-day life. In Uist, stormier weather and rising sea levels are eating away at the coastline and we are losing bits of our islands, while the same changes threaten the future viability of the causeways that link our communities. Other members from across the chamber have talked about the impacts of flooding and fires in their constituencies. We cannot sit this one out. We must play an active role.

The Government motion is correct to highlight the opportunities of taking climate change seriously. We have an abundance of renewables potential in Scotland, but we must question who will benefit. The Government talks of Scotland's energy, as we have already heard in debates in this parliamentary session, but, in reality, it is multinational corporations' energy—the same as our oil and gas sector. Of course I welcome the jobs and supply chain growth that comes with that, but we have failed to learn the lessons of the past, and we have allowed our renewable energy potential to be handed over to private businesses and even foreign-state-owned companies, while hoping that we have something of what is left over.

The expansion of renewables cannot be at any cost, and we need a more strategic approach to how projects are developed and delivered. Appropriate community benefit must be a part of that, as we heard from Katie Hagmann. Ownership matters, and there is a different way to do things. Communities in my constituency have led the way with wholly community-owned schemes from Barra to Galson. Their projects are helping us to meet our climate targets and deliver meaningful change for our communities. It does not stop there. The Point and Sandwick Trust on Lewis is using profits from its 9MW wind farm to invest in three planting and energy efficiency projects, which is the kind of transformational change that we heard about from Duncan Dunlop.

Unlocking the next generation of community energy opportunities is proving challenging. Support from the Scottish Government's community and renewable energy scheme—CARES—fund, which includes increased funding from GB Energy that is, rightly, being delivered through the existing mechanism, is crucial to developing projects. However, access for community projects to the grid remains a

challenge. These are complex problems and getting the projects realised will take collaborative working. The cabinet secretary engaged constructively with UK counterparts in the previous session, and I hope that she will encourage her successor in the energy brief to do the same.

Land is critical to meeting our climate ambitions. Emissions from land and land-based industries present enormous opportunities, with peatland restoration, forestry and agriculture presenting the biggest chance for delivery. Work by the Scottish Land Commission has shown that land suitable for planting and natural capital schemes, particularly in our upland areas, saw a dramatic rise in value before falling again, so we must be cautious about how policy on land use change impacts the land market. The nature finance initiative has not unlocked private investment to deliver peatland restoration, and uncertainty about carbon markets has held back restoration in some areas, so understanding how best to make public investment in restoration will be key to unlocking more hectares of restoration and avoiding unintended impacts on the land market in the future.

Land use change does not have to be an either/or. My own sheep at home spend time grazing on restored peatland and some of the best examples that we see are of shared land use, whether of sheep on restored peatland or cattle grazing alongside forestry. If we get that right, we can build landscapes that are more resilient to climate change, reduce land-based emissions and, importantly, take rural communities with us.

Regarding agriculture, I am pleased that the Scottish Government has reiterated its commitment not to adopt the Climate Change Committee's recommendation about livestock numbers. However, despite that, numbers continue to fall, which is a threat to the critical mass that is required to support the agricultural supply chain across the country, to the biodiversity that grazing livestock supports and to our rural communities. That trend must be taken seriously and cannot be viewed as inevitable in helping us meet targets. Meeting our climate targets will require difficult decisions, but we must be wary of the unintended consequences, as I have outlined.

If targets are to be met, the pace of change must increase and areas such as the retrofitting of houses and the decarbonisation of heat and transport will be crucial to making that happen. Meeting those targets is not something that would be nice to have; it is an essential and, as we have heard today, it brings opportunity. Unlocking the potential of community energy is one such opportunity. It can contribute to meeting our climate targets while, at the same time, having significantly more local economic impact than would come from commercial projects. Community groups in my constituency have shown how that can be done, but they need our support to build on that early success and to deliver for the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call the cabinet secretary, who has up to 9 minutes.

17:32

Gillian Martin: I have, on the whole, very much enjoyed the debate and particularly enjoyed the contribution from Donald MacKinnon, who showed, even in just the five or six minutes for which he spoke, that he is willing to work across Parliament on a shared purpose. I warmly welcome that because, as I have already said many times in this session, delivery will be key and that delivery must come from those who share a common purpose. If we do not do that, we will repeat the mistakes of the past 10 years, since I came into Parliament, by being obsessed with, and agreeing on, targets but then seeing people fall away when it comes to even the most minute intervention through policy, legislation, or support for measures in the budget.

We are long past that point and, frankly, we are also long past the, "Is climate change real?" debate. I totally agree with Mark Ruskell that it is exhausting to revisit that argument, because it has been won and the science is there. We have heard some quite shameful misquoting from various highly respected scientific and advisory bodies that have advised Governments all over the world. I imagine that the ears of those on the IPPC must be burning because of some of the ways in which they have been mischaracterised. There has been talk about taking away the RCP 8.5 scenario, but that did not happen because there was no climate emergency; it happened because pathways towards decarbonisation were improving and the cost of renewable energy, in particular, was coming down, which meant that the scenario could be taken away as a result.

Duncan Massey: Will the minister take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I will not, for fear that Mr Massey will get himself into trouble with the IPPC, because he has misquoted and mischaracterised it enough today.

Duncan Massey: Read the report!

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): There should be no shouting across the chamber.

Gillian Martin: Mark Ruskell made a point about future generations, but it is not just future generations who will have the opportunities associated with climate action, because we are seeing those for current generations and the

current workforce. On every visit that I did when I was energy secretary, and on many visits done as part of my new portfolio, I have met people who have come from traditional, high-carbon industries and have moved into new ones.

The sectors that are associated with climate action are some of the fastest growing, not just in Scotland but around the world. If we do not get involved in climate action activities, the march will be stolen by other countries, who absolutely will.

I asked Finlay Carson for suggestions on what the Conservatives want to see that would reduce emissions, but I am afraid that spending more money was not what I had in mind. It was policy actions that I was looking for. I am serious when I say that I want to work with people. I also say to him gently that the forestry grant has increased on previous years. There is a £57 million forestry grant this year.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: No. I want to get some responses on the record. With the agri-environment climate scheme, £350 million is going out the door to our farmers to help them to decarbonise. I think that that relates to one of the interventions that Mr Carson tried to make on my colleague Heather Anderson.

I welcome Sanne Dijkstra-Downie's speech. This is the first time that we have been in a debate together, but we will be meeting, I think tomorrow, to go over our shared objectives. She mentioned community resilience, particularly in the various areas that she represents. I highly recommend that she goes to Inverleith park and has a discussion about the facility for investment ready nature in Scotland—FIRNS—payments. The community was able to leverage in private finance as well and have a nature-based solution for some of the flooding issues there.

Speaking of flooding, I note that a number of members mentioned how important nature-based solutions are. Heather Anderson talked about resilience in communities and about the Broughty Ferry flood protection scheme, which uses nature to do the job of a drainage system and soak up excess water. Those are real ways of tackling devastating things that affect people. Increased flooding is not something that we can ignore, because bizarre weather patterns as a result of climate change mean that we are having more flash floods. We are not just having expected floods in winter; we are having flash floods in summer as well. We are also having wildfires in places in Scotland and around the world that have never had them before, and we need to improve our resilience to them.

I very much enjoyed David Barratt's speech on resilience building and the opportunities, although I gently say to members in the chamber that jobs associated with climate action are not just jobs in renewables, which are just a very small part. Duncan Massey underestimated the number of jobs that are associated with renewables—I think that it is twice what he mentioned. However, it is important to note that jobs associated with climate action include jobs in land management, forestry, academia and research, biofuels, wildlife management, peatland restoration, waste management, circular economy businesses, the manufacturing of low-carbon products and structural engineering. They include reams of jobs that have nothing to do with renewables.

Renewables are a very big part of our decarbonisation journey, but most of the decarbonisation associated with our energy has already been done. The heavy lifting has to come from the decarbonisation of transport, buildings and land use. As we set out in the climate change plan in March, we absolutely prioritise action in those areas, and particularly in transport. I look forward to working with colleagues on how we do that.

Paul McLennan was the only member to mention heat networks, I think. I am sorry if I have—

Stuart McMillan: I mentioned them, too.

Gillian Martin: Stuart McMillan mentioned them as well. Heat networks are going to be critical, and they represent a major opportunity to rid Scotland of the scourge of fuel poverty. By bringing people together on such things, which affect individuals, we will see off those who would want to deny that climate action is necessary.

Duncan Dunlop: I hear what the cabinet secretary says about heat networks and I very much agree with her, having lived in two post-communist cities that were served very well by them. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we could get major heat from the data centres that are proposed, but that they would need to be relatively near industrial zones or accommodation that could use that heat?

Gillian Martin: Heat networks will be the solution for a lot of urban areas and towns in Scotland, but they will not be the solution for everyone. If we can install more heat networks in the highly populated areas, we will be able to use some of the Government money to put in heat systems such as heat pumps in the more rural areas. Many of those areas are the most fuel poor because they are not connected to the gas grid, so they have not been able to take advantage of the lower gas price.

In addition, the situation in the middle east has shown us—again—that we cannot afford to be exposed to international energy shocks. We have had one wake-up call after another on this issue. This year, we had a price at the pump that was astronomical. Businesses were finding it very difficult to keep their heads above water—farming businesses in particular, because of the cost of red diesel. We are talking about the wrong thing. Energy production is one thing, but we need to reduce our reliance on the burning of fossil fuels. That is how we will reduce our exposure to global shocks, but it is also how we will have economic growth and action on the cost of living. I mentioned that, since 1990, there has been a 50 per cent reduction in emissions; however, there has been massive growth at the same time. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Finlay Carson: I will take us back somewhat. Does the cabinet secretary not accept that, without honesty and realism, there is a risk of losing public confidence in the entirety of the move to net zero? For example, why does the cabinet secretary have her head in the sand when it comes to the impact of slashing the woodland grant scheme in 2024-25? What impact did that have on confidence in the sector, given that the target is 18,000 hectares but the most recent figures suggest that only 8,000 have been planted?

Gillian Martin: Thank you, Mr Carson—

Finlay Carson: That budget was for one year, but it had a multiyear impact.

Gillian Martin: I have worked well with Finlay Carson, on the whole. We had a very constructive meeting last week, I thought. However, I will not be called dishonest in the chamber. I have already set out that there is £57 million in forestry grant for 2026-27. If Finlay Carson wants to talk about a year in the past in which the funding was lower, and obsess over that, that is fine, but I am moving forward. We have secured that money. I will not be called dishonest by Finlay Carson or anyone else.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

Gillian Martin: I believe that I am in my last minute.

A few people mentioned CARES funding. There is £15 million annually to keep up with rising demand, but we are also taking action in getting communities to be available to bid for repowering schemes. Forestry and Land Scotland has repowering opportunities, and we are making sure that communities are first in the queue to take advantage of those, supported by CARES.

There is so much more to say and so many actions that we need to take in order to meet our climate change targets. However, the targets are one thing; the implications for economic growth, public health resilience and opportunities for Scotland are vast. That is what I want to concentrate on, with people who want to come with me with solutions.

The Government is reducing emissions through a fair and just transition, increasing our climate resilience and capturing the economic, social and other benefits in which Scotland remains unwavering. I look forward to continuing to deliver on that for people and planet—with fellow travellers.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on meeting the challenge of climate change.

Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00454, in the name of Tom Arthur, on a motion of legislative consent for the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I will leave a minute to allow the minister and others to get themselves into position. Meanwhile, I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

17:43

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the legislative consent motion for the UK Government's Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 14 May 2026.

The bill empowers the UK Government to bring steel companies across the UK into public ownership if a public interest test is met, safeguarding long-term production capacity and securing steel's role in critical sectors, including national infrastructure, defence and clean energy. Domestic production capability is essential not only for economic growth and jobs but for our national security and resilience. The Scottish Government therefore supports the overall intention of the bill.

The Scottish Government had initially, on 15 June, lodged a legislative consent memorandum with the Parliament stating that we would not consent to the bill, due to the UK Government having not agreed to our proposals that it have appropriate regard to devolution. However, we have now changed our position on that, following a period of productive engagement with the UK Government.

I will use my time in the debate to update members on how we have got to this point. The bill, as introduced, included no formal role for Scottish ministers. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport therefore wrote to the UK Government, requesting that the bill be amended to include a statutory consent requirement for the proposed exercise of the powers in respect of steel undertakings in Scotland, where the exercise was for a devolved purpose. The UK Government would not agree to that request, due to practicalities around the operation of the bill.

However, since then, extensive productive engagement has taken place at both ministerial and official level. The UK Government has now given a political commitment that, should the bill's transfer power be exercised in Scotland, it would "ordinarily consult" Scottish ministers. I met the minister Chris McDonald, from the Department for Business and Trade, and we had a very constructive discussion about the bill and our shared vision for a successful steel sector in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

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

Tom Arthur: I will give way to the member if he gives me a few more moments to progress.

That positive engagement and the position that we have settled at demonstrate positive intergovernmental relations and highlight the Scottish Government's desire and willingness to work constructively and collaboratively with the UK Government where doing so will secure the best outcome for the people of Scotland. The Scottish Government will now continue to monitor the passage of the bill and engage with the UK Government on the matter.

Patrick Harvie: If there is constructive engagement, we should all welcome that. However, the minister described the commitment that has been given as a political commitment from a Government that is about to change leadership and, presumably, its whole cast of characters. Is this situation not a reminder of the deficiencies of the current process for agreeing legislative consent, which depends on good will—which sometimes is there and sometimes is not?

Tom Arthur: Patrick Harvie makes some very important points. The situation is, of course, sub-optimal and would not be our first choice. We have sought to engage constructively on an area of mutual interest, but the points that Patrick Harvie makes nonetheless stand.

As I set out in my letter to the convener of the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee, it is regrettable that, due to the expedited process for the UK Government's bill, which does not align with the timetable of our Parliament finishing for summer recess and the post-election period, we have found ourselves in a position whereby the bill could not have gone through the usual scrutiny process of this Parliament. I am, however, grateful to members who are joining this debate today to discuss the bill, and I look forward to hearing members' views on the matter.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am very concerned about this bill. First, the UK Parliament expedited the bill—it was fast-tracked—yet it confers huge powers on UK Government ministers not only to intervene in a business and take operational control, but to make a business's failure to comply a criminal offence. This is a serious piece of

legislation. In fact, the UK Parliament was recalled on a Saturday for it, and the last time that that happened was in 1982 for the Falklands war.

The Presiding Officer: This is an intervention, not a speech within a speech.

Rachael Hamilton: I am not making a speech.

What reassurances can the minister give around ensuring that such a serious bill, which has not been scrutinised in the UK Parliament and has not been scrutinised here, is sufficient in terms of the Scottish Government's devolved responsibilities?

Tom Arthur: I know that points around the process were discussed last week in Parliament. I fully recognise—and I repeat what I stated in responding to the intervention from Mr Harvie—that the situation is clearly sub-optimal. It is a reflection of the period of time in which we are operating; the UK Government's decision to progress the bill through an expedited process; and the election cycle, the formation of a Government and our reconvening after the election in this place. I fully recognise that this is not a model way in which to go about the process of seeking legislative consent.

I hope that the member understands that we have sought to act in good faith by keeping the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee informed and by ensuring that Parliament has the opportunity to consider, at the very least, the matter of legislative consent through the debate that we are having this afternoon. However, she is absolutely right to highlight the significant powers that are conferred on UK ministers through this legislation. As I sought to indicate in my letter to the committee's convener, assuming that the legislation receives royal assent, the Scottish Government and ministers are happy to continue to engage with the committee and, of course, with the Parliament in relation to any utilisation of the legislation that may have effect in Scotland. These matters are contingent on the progress of the legislation at Westminster, but I would be happy to keep Parliament up to date, particularly when we return from recess.

The steel sector remains a foundational industry within the UK economy, underpinning key supply chains in construction, manufacturing, energy and defence while sustaining tens of thousands of skilled jobs across industrial communities, including in Scotland. The sector continues to play a critical role in enabling economic growth and is central to the transition to net zero, given its importance to low-carbon infrastructure, clean energy technologies and the wider industrial base.

Of course, the Scottish Government wants to see a sustainable future for the steel sector, building on the long and proud heritage of steelwork in Scotland, and that is reflected in our green industrial strategy. We welcome the UK Government's action and we recognise that this needs to happen at a scale and with an intensity that reflects the uncertainty that is being felt by businesses, workers, and families across the UK. Potential interventions demand a co-ordinated response from Governments and our economic development agencies, which do so much to attract investment, develop talent and secure jobs.

Last year, we were supportive of the UK Government's decision to introduce the Steel Industry (Special Measures) Act 2025, which protected the British Steel operation in Scunthorpe, providing some hope that the UK Government is prepared to act when vital national interests are at stake. We said at the time that we hoped that it would form part of a comprehensive future strategy, and that is, indeed, the case.

Members will have seen in UK minister Chris McDonald's recent written statement that the UK Government

"is strongly minded to use the powers in the Bill to bring British Steel into public ownership in the future, subject to the public interest being satisfied and taking into account all the relevant facts at that time."

I suggest that this is an important point for members to reflect on, given the clearly implied policy intent of the legislation and where it could be applied.

Scottish ministers remain committed to constructive engagement with the UK Government and to supporting measures that could lead to increased economic activity in Scotland. We will continue to work with the UK Government on this bill, as well as on the future of the steel industry in Scotland. Our commitment to the industry is clear through ministers' ongoing involvement in the UK steel council, as well as our role in and input to the development and publication of the recent UK steel strategy.

This has always been—and will continue to be—a Government that takes action. We have shown, over many years, that we are prepared to step in to support vital national assets to survive and prosper, that we will take action to protect jobs and communities and that we are prepared to take a strategic view of the importance of critical skills to long-term economic success. This is the right approach when the international economic outlook continues to be an uncertain one. I therefore ask Parliament to agree to the motion for legislative consent in relation to this bill.

I move,

That the Parliament, noting that the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 14 May 2026, makes provision that falls within the legislative competence of the Parliament, agrees to give

consent to such provision as is made by clauses 1-7, 9-23, 25-43, 45-59 and 61-64.

17:53

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I welcome both the Government's motion and the minister's comments this afternoon. This is an incredibly important issue and steel is an incredibly important product. Let me make some overarching comments, because I understand the Scottish Government's reservation regarding the legislative consent motion that is before us today. In a broad sense, the economy is an area of overlapping responsibilities. Although it is reserved within the Scotland Act 1998, many of the key component parts of policy around the economy lie within devolved areas, and therefore it is an area of overlap.

The more fundamental point in relation to this situation is that national security and the economy have become more intertwined in recent months and years than they perhaps were when the 1998 act was being drafted. That is one of the issues at hand here. There are clear matters of national security, but they also have clear economic consequences.

We need to note, as the minister did, that steel is the most important primary product in manufacturing processes. National security requires it. We need to acknowledge the current situation of war in Europe with a belligerent Russia. Taking that seriously means acknowledging that our defence industry is built in steel. Civil contingency also requires steel to build infrastructure.

Beyond that, wider strategic national economic interests require steel. We are very focused on renewables, renewables infrastructure and the electrification of the economy. Those things are built in steel. The reality is that the Scunthorpe site is the last site in the entire UK that is capable of producing virgin steel. Once those furnaces close, they cannot simply be turned back on again—and there is a very real risk of that.

I note Rachael Hamilton's concerns, but this is not just AN Other sector or AN Other business. If the site closes, that will have very serious and dramatic consequences not just for the whole of UK industry but for UK national security.

Nor is this an isolated action. The UK steel strategy was announced in March, with £2.5 billion allocated by the UK Government through the National Wealth Fund, targets set to boost UK steel production to 50 per cent from the current level of 30 per cent and support confirmed for the development of electric arc furnaces to secure the future of UK steel production.

Rachael Hamilton: Even the legislation for the pandemic had a sunset clause. That bill went through two houses to get to the stage of being passed, and it was expedited. It had amendments that were not even passed or considered. The bill before us is deficient, and the UK Government is making de facto law.

Daniel Johnson: There is a clear, overarching national interest in securing the steel industry, which I think goes far beyond other considerations. The bill is vital, and it is important that it is expedited so that we have the powers to ensure that the furnaces do not close.

I acknowledge many of the points that the minister made about the circumstances. Unfortunately, the timing of the bill's introduction coincided with the election of this Parliament, the setting up of its committees and the recess. We should think about how committees can respond flexibly in the future. Although we seek to anticipate the requirement for legislative consent motions, situations such as this sometimes arise and it is important that committees can—as they do—scrutinise consent for such bills. That goes beyond the two Governments agreeing. It is important that Parliament has the opportunity to scrutinise the consent that it is giving and the powers that are being conveyed to the UK Government by the Parliament.

In closing, I direct members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a member of Community, the steelworkers' union.

17:57

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): I welcome the comments from the minister and Daniel Johnson. I acknowledge Rachael Hamilton's concerns and also what Daniel Johnson said. It is a pity about the timing, which meant that the bill could not be considered by the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee. A statement about the reasoning for that was made at its meeting today.

We need to support the legislation that is before us. The manufacture of steel remains an economically and strategically important industry, especially as we enter this new geopolitical era. We need to reindustrialise, and we may need to revitalise our military.

Make no mistake: we need to recognise how we have got here—to the point where we need to save our steelworks across the country through nationalisation. There has been a failure of industrial policy, which does not seem to care about maintaining national capability or about domestic ability to produce key industrial items. As we discussed just 15 minutes ago in the climate change debate, net zero policies have driven the

highest industrial energy costs in the world. They are double those of the US and four times more than those in China, and that is driving deindustrialisation. The steel industry, which is of course very energy intensive, is on the front line of enduring the pain, and that is why we have had to enact such legislation.

As I said, I welcome this legislation, but I fear that, until we change our energy policies and get serious about developing domestic capability in manufacturing and producing things, such as steel, that are critical to our infrastructure and to just about every manufacturing step, we will have a sector that—whether it is nationalised or not—will struggle.

I will keep my comments brief. I support the motion, but I think that some key challenges for the steel industry remain.

18:00

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): In raising concerns about this LCM, I want to make it clear from the outset that I do not have any disagreement with the intention behind the bill or, indeed, any desire to question the importance of the steel industry. The steel industry is critical, both in decarbonising the industry itself and in its contribution to decarbonising Scotland.

If anything, I welcome the fact that the UK Government is now willing, at least in some circumstances, to recognise that private ownership of critically important industry is not always in the public interest and that there should be a more assertive role for the state. To be frank, I would like to see more rather than less of that, so I welcome the intention behind the bill and I recognise its importance.

My concern is about the process. We are just one week on from the Government lodging a legislative consent memorandum that said that it recommended against giving consent to the passing of the bill. Now, at the very last minute, just before we vote in Parliament, we see a letter that changes that position.

I was a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee in the previous parliamentary session and I am a member of its successor committee in this session. I am not speaking on behalf of the present committee, because we have not discussed the issue, but its predecessor committee held an inquiry into the transparency of intergovernmental activity and its implications for parliamentary scrutiny. We published a report in March this year. The Scottish Government's submission for that report said that restoring confidence in the Sewel convention—the convention by which we are asked for and either give or withhold legislative consent in these circumstances—

"is key to resetting the relationship between the UK and devolved governments and ensuring that the position of the Scottish Parliament is protected, with sufficient opportunity for scrutiny."

Yet here we are again, just a few months later—by no means for the first time—seeing a legislative consent motion for which we have not had time for proper scrutiny and a bill that is being fast tracked through Westminster. I know the problems that I am identifying are outwith the minister's control, but that in itself is a problem as well.

We have not seen progress between the two Governments on renewing the Sewel convention or adopting a new memorandum of understanding about how it is supposed to work. As I said in my intervention, the agreements that are reached—and I am pleased if there has been progress between the two Governments—are on the basis of a handshake and a degree of trust that has been expressed with a minister at the UK level who might well not be in post when the new Prime Minister reshuffles the Cabinet and creates a new Administration. This is a deeply inadequate process.

I have no wish to block the granting of legislative consent, but I do not feel that, as an Opposition party, the Greens have had the opportunity to scrutinise the details sufficiently, so we will abstain on the motion.

I hope that the minister and his colleagues will impress on the UK Government the need to fast track, if anything, the renewal of the Sewel convention and the restoration of respect for devolution in what is currently a deeply inadequate process.

18:04

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): For the same reasons as Daniel Johnson, I will support the legislative consent motion.

However, if Ivan McKee will tolerate it, I will return to one of my favourite obsessions: the Dalzell steel plant in Lanarkshire, about which I have deep concerns because of recent developments that I hope the minister will address when he is summing up. As the minister says, it is an important part of the UK steel industry.

The minister knows that the plant has been dormant since 2024, which is now almost two years ago. We were promised that Navantia would be rolling steel plate for the Royal Navy's fleet support vessels, but because of problems in purchasing raw materials—the slab—production has been intermittent. I understand that a German company will now use the Dalzell plant as a

jobbing mill, importing 4,000 tonnes of slab from a foreign supplier outside the UK instead of purchasing that slab from Scunthorpe.

All that raises serious questions about an important part of the steel industry in Scotland. Therefore, while we are discussing this LCM, I want the minister to address the following questions in his conclusion. Why has the plant been dormant for two years? Given that a £7 million loan has been made to the company—to GFG Alliance, Liberty Steel and Mr Gupta—why has the Government allowed it to be dormant for two years? Why will the plant be used as a jobbing plant for slab that is purchased from outside the United Kingdom, rather than Scunthorpe? What will now happen to the £7 million loan from the Scottish Government? Will that be repaid, and at what point? When will we have a proper functioning mill—the only wide-plate mill in the United Kingdom—at Dalzell? When will it have a constructive relationship with the Scunthorpe plant?

All those issues should be at the front of the Government's mind, but, as usual, it is not paying attention.

18:06

Tom Arthur: I am grateful to members for their speeches. I will be brief, because most of the substantive points have been covered.

Daniel Johnson was absolutely correct to highlight the overlap of powers in relation to devolved and reserved functions, which contributed to some of the procedural complexity in this matter and led to, as Mr Harvie described it, a deeply inadequate approach, particularly with the compressed timescales. However, it is a process in which we have sought to be pragmatic and get a constructive outcome.

Mr Johnson was also correct to highlight the growing importance of national security and economic concerns. Today, we are marking 10 years since the Brexit referendum. When this Parliament first reconvened, it had been fewer than 10 years since the fall of the Berlin wall, but we recognise that we now occupy a very different world. National security and the economy are important concerns that occupy the attention of ministers and form an important part of our considerations when it comes to engaging with UK ministers.

I will touch on the point that Rachael Hamilton made in an intervention. There is a sunset clause in the legislation, and UK ministers have the power to extend the legislation through the affirmative procedure, but that would obviously require a parliamentary vote. That is just a point of information in relation to the legislation—it will initially last for two years.

I welcome the support expressed by Mr Massey, but I want to emphasise that the transition to net zero will be dependent on the steel industry, which will be crucial. There will also be an opportunity: whether it comes from electric arc furnace transition projects or grid reinforcement and improvement, there will be significant demand for steel because of the move to net zero. Therefore, net zero is not just about our obligation to hand a better planet to the next generation; it presents a tremendous economic opportunity, which future generations would not forgive us for failing to seize.

I recognise the points that Mr Harvie made regarding the process. As I said previously, it is not the process that we would have liked to see—the UK Government knows my views on that through the engagement that I have had with it. However, I have sought to engage in a pragmatic and constructive way, given the compressed timescales in which we are operating. It is important for the UK Government that there is learning from the process and that the circumstances of our Parliament—for example, when we re-form following an election—are not an afterthought in relation to the UK Government's formulation of its approach to legislation and when it decides to introduce it.

Rachael Hamilton: The papers for this morning's committee meeting stated that one of the reasons for the Scottish Government's not supporting the LCM was that it was at risk of breaking the Sewel convention. Considering that the Scottish National Party is pretty obsessed with constitutional convention, does the minister now believe that the Sewel convention is intact?

Tom Arthur: The Sewel convention is fundamental to the functioning of relations between the UK Parliament and the Scottish Parliament. All of us here, irrespective of our views on Scotland's constitutional future, should be committed to upholding the rights of this Parliament and recognising the importance of the Sewel convention.

As I have said several times, this process does not meet the highest standards, but—recognising the unique set of circumstances that we face—we have sought to move forward in a way that acknowledges the significant implications of the legislation and to work constructively in doing so.

Mr Rennie raised a number of points about the Dalzell site. I confirm to him that we are keen to see the site restart. We continue to work closely with the GFG Alliance to understand how it can do that.

So far, the Scottish Government has not been formally asked to provide support, but I advise the member and the chamber that the issue was part of my discussions with the UK Government minister yesterday.

The legislation extends to Scotland, and the steel undertaking would capture the site.

Willie Rennie: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Tom Arthur: It would appear that the member is poised to intervene.

Willie Rennie: Was the minister aware that 4,000 tonnes of steel slabs would be coming from outside the United Kingdom and not from Scunthorpe? Did he know that it was going to be turned into a jobbing plant?

Tom Arthur: The member is bringing information to my attention for the first time, and I appreciate his doing so. I will certainly follow that up with my officials following this debate.

We recognise the sustained interest in the site, and we collectively want it to be a success. The legislation, as it relates to British steel and the broader strategic picture of the steel industry across the United Kingdom, provides an opportunity to contribute to a sustainable future for the Dalzell site.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister mentioned Dalzell. As the only plate mill that is left in the UK, it is critical to national infrastructure and to steel plate production for shipbuilding. We have already permanently lost the quenching and tempering facility for strengthening steel plates at Clydebridge. Given the information that Mr Rennie has supplied, will the minister make a statement in early course on what the Scottish Government intends to do to develop the Scottish steel industry?

Tom Arthur: I can feel the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans' eyes boring into the back of my head. It would not be for me to do that, and it would be for Parliament to decide that.

The member has registered his point, and his party is free to raise the matter through the usual procedures at the Parliamentary Bureau. I am happy to engage with the member on these matters.

I think that I have covered most of the points that were raised during the debate. I welcome members' engagement. I recognise that, ideally, we would have had the opportunity to consider the issue at committee. Should the committee wish to explore the matter in more detail following summer recess, my officials and I would be more than happy to engage with it to do so.

I ask Parliament to support the motion that is before it this evening.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on a motion of legislative consent for the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill.

Point of Order

18:13

Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. During today's First Minister's question time, I did not note my interest as an employee of NHS Lothian. Mea culpa.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Thank you. That has been noted.

Decision Time

18:13

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-00434.2, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

18:13

Meeting suspended.

18:16

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S7M-00434.2, in the name of Claire Baker. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was not able to log in. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

The Minister for Equalities and International Development (Simita Kumar): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My platform did not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect, either. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is 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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
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)
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)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
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)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
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)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

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)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00434.2, in the name of Claire Baker, is: For 92, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I advise members that, if the amendment in the name of Duncan Massey is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Finlay Carson will fall.

The question is, that amendment S7M-00434.4, in the name of Duncan Massey, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian

Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Presiding Officer: Kate Campbell has a point of order. You have just squeezed it in.

Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote is recorded.

For

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
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)

Against

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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
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)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)

Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
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)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00434.4, in the name of Duncan Massey, is: For 17, Against 102, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00434.3, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My device failed to connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote is 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)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
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)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
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)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
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)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
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)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00434.3, in the name of Mark Ruskell, is: For 15, Against 104, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00434.5, in the name of Finlay Carson, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My apologies. My system did not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

The First Minister (John Swinney): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My device would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is 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)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
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)

Against

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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
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)
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)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
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)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
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)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00434.5, in the name of Finlay Carson, is: For 27, Against 92, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The First Minister: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My device would not connect again. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is 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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
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)
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)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

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)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
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)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

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)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-00434, in the name of Gillian Martin, on meeting the challenge of climate change, as amended, is: For 92, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that climate change constitutes an emergency; supports the goal to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius; notes the consequences of climate change that are currently impacting populations and places around the world; condemns any spread of misinformation about and denial of the impacts of climate change that undermine the evidence base; reaffirms Scotland's commitment to delivering ambitious climate action and achieving net zero by 2045, in line with its statutory carbon budget targets; agrees on the need to enhance Scotland's climate resilience and adaptation efforts to safeguard people, communities, public services and ecosystems from the impacts of climate change; welcomes the transformative opportunities presented by climate action, including significant economic, social, environmental and public health benefits; acknowledges that delivery of the transition must be fair and inclusive for all; recognises that, in order to meet the 2030 targets and beyond, the pace of change has to accelerate, acknowledging that, if pace continues at the current rate, targets will be missed; calls on the Scottish Government to publish detailed plans on how it will meet interim targets, and further calls on the Scottish Government to move at pace to bring forward retrofitting and other measures to tackle fuel poverty and help Scotland reach its climate targets.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S7M-00454, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Calum Kerr (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order,

Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is 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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
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)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
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)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)

Abstentions

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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-00454, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill, is: For 93, Against 10, Abstentions 15.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, noting that the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 14 May 2026, makes provision that falls within the legislative competence of the Parliament, agrees to give consent to such provision as is made by clauses 1-7, 9-23, 25-43, 45-59 and 61-64.

The Presiding Officer: That ends decision time.

STV North News

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S7M-00227, in the name of Jack Middleton, on save STV North news. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament condemns Ofcom's reported decision to approve controversial plans to end STV's dedicated news coverage for the North of Scotland; acknowledges that the plans were strongly opposed by the Scottish Government, MSPs from five political parties, STV workers and the general public; notes reports that a survey of viewers across North Scotland found that only 4% were in favour of the plans, and further notes the calls on television regulator, Ofcom, to urgently reconsider this decision.

18:27

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to open the debate on what is a hugely important issue for much of Scotland. I am passionate about the campaign to save STV North news, not only because the decision to end it has a profound effect on my constituents in terms of jobs, advertising and economic activity, but because it is no exaggeration for me, as an Aberdonian, to say that that decision is an attack on our identity and seeks to silence our distinct voice in Scotland's national conversation—at a time, I might add, when the story of industrial vandalism in the north-east is more important than ever.

I know, however, that the decision impacts people far beyond the banks of the Dee and the Don—a fact that is reflected in the significant support that my motion has received from MSPs across Scotland and, importantly, across the chamber. Members from every party in Scotland's Parliament agree not only that the decision is disappointing, but that it flies in the face of overwhelming public opinion, and we must recognise that at the outset of the debate. I assure members that, although we must acknowledge that broadcasting in Scotland is a matter that remains reserved to the United Kingdom Government, I will not politicise the debate—it is far too important for that. Our national Parliament will speak with a united voice on this front so that those in the boardrooms of STV and Ofcom hear, loudly and clearly, our voices and the voices of the constituents whom we represent.

The top brass at STV want to end the distinct news programme for the north that has existed for decades. Ofcom, the television regulator that is tasked with ensuring that STV sticks to its licensing obligations, is not only waving that through with minimal checks; it has actively helped STV to do it.

It is a commercial decision that I strongly believe breaches the terms of STV's channel 3 licence agreement.

How did we get here? In September, STV management announced plans to cut 60 jobs and axe the STV North edition of its flagship 6 o'clock news programme. Thanks to Holyrood's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, we know that Ofcom described a back-and-forth conversation that ensued between itself and STV management, but, sadly, public access to records and minutes of those conversations has been denied.

Nevertheless, whatever the content of those conversations, the plans were watered down in December 2025. STV chief executive Rufus Radcliffe accepted that a complete cull of the north's distinct news coverage was unacceptable, but he felt that confining our regional news to less than a third of the bulletin and pre-recording that coverage from a studio on the banks of the River Clyde was acceptable. No clarity on the content of that regional news section, to be beamed from a studio in Glasgow and squeezed to less than 10 minutes, has been offered. However, Ofcom indicated that it aimed to accept the plans anyway, before the consultation was even launched. When it was launched, John Swinney led the charge, but I was heartened to see MSPs from all parties by his side.

It is my view that Ofcom seriously underestimated the strength of feeling on these proposals and that it has been taken aback by the number of responses that have been received—so much so that, in the run-up to a crunch election, it managed to unite all parties on a single issue. That is truly remarkable.

In a thinly veiled attempt to avoid scrutiny, Ofcom pushed back announcing its outcome until after the election. I think that that is cowardly and weak.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Jack Middleton for giving way, because he is making important points about Ofcom. One of the bizarre things that came out in the evidence that Ofcom gave to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, on which I sat in the previous session, was that it felt responsible more for the profitability of STV than for enforcing the terms of the licence that STV had sought, and which Ofcom had granted, for channel 3 broadcasting in STV North.

Jack Middleton: I thank Stephen Kerr for that point—I will come to that very shortly; I could not agree more.

On 1 June, Ofcom finally announced that it would back STV's plans. A total of 1,292 consultation responses were received—embarrassingly for STV, four of those responses were in favour of the plans, and one of them was from its own chief executive. It took Ofcom three months to consider those responses, and we have had no credible explanation as to why 99.7 per cent of them were simply ignored. That is on the back of a poll that found that only 4 per cent of viewers in the north were in favour of the plans. I find it difficult to understand how, in the face of such emphatic opposition, those views have simply been cast aside.

To rub salt in the wounds of STV staff, the chief exec said that he was delighted by the good news. That is an alarming level of disconnect that has led to 93 per cent of staff saying that they have no confidence in their senior management. A motion of no confidence in the chief exec and head of news has also passed. The strength of support for my motion demonstrates to me that the Parliament also has no confidence in the direction of the SNP's—sorry, STV's; I apologise—leadership team. [*Laughter.*]

Ultimately, I believe that this plan is a rebalancing of the books. At the same time as trying to axe newsrooms and an institution that we have trusted for decades, STV launched a commercial radio station at a cost of half a million quid. It is hard for anyone to argue that sucking money out of the existing business model while reneging on an obligation to deliver a distinct local news programme is anything other than a poor decision.

I am concerned that financial mismanagement, and a single set of financial results, can now become the driving force for a reduction in public sector broadcasting. That sets a dangerous precedent. The will of big money cannot be allowed to trample on the need to ensure that we have trusted local media. That is especially true in an era of widespread fake news and disinformation.

In closing, here is what I believe needs to happen to save STV North and protect the future of quality local news more widely. First, the Scottish Government needs to stick pressure on Ofcom regarding its conduct during the process and make it explain how STV can possibly be sticking to its original channel 3 licence obligations. Secondly, the Scottish Government must look at avenues to support and incentivise broadcasting in editorial jobs to be maintained in the north-east and across the wider north of Scotland. Thirdly, the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, led by Patrick Harvie, should ensure that one of its first acts is to haul in the senior leadership team at STV to answer a series of basic questions that they have so far simply failed to answer. Taking those measures forward together will ensure that

we are in the best position to save STV North news.

18:35

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank Jack Middleton for bringing the debate to the chamber. Its subject is of widespread concern, and will impact significantly on communities across the north of Scotland and in my North East Scotland region.

The ongoing situation at STV has been a farce that has been rolling on for months, causing untold stress to the staff at the station as uncertainty over jobs has continued. The worry about what that means for communities in the north of the country rolls on, too.

It is hard to think of a decision in recent times that has been more universally opposed. This Parliament, all parties, the National Union of Journalists, STV staff, the viewing public and many more have stood in opposition to the changes because we all know that quality local journalism matters. Indeed, the decline of quality local journalism that is embedded close to people is a tragedy. As many local newspapers face increasing issues with sustainability, it has become more, rather than less, important for the biggest companies and corporations to ensure that their journalism is rooted in communities. Such locally rooted journalism is, to be frank, the only route to sustainability for journalism, because it is unique and irreplaceable.

In my home city of Dundee, so rich in its history of journalism and its traditions that carry through to the excellent local and regional press that we still proudly host today, we will see the loss of our dedicated news from a national broadcaster in STV, and the opportunities that that creates.

Although it is a commercial decision from STV, backed by the regulator to this point, it is also the latest example of what is becoming an ever-growing list of services being centralised away from communities in Scotland. Those in the north-east and further afield have, over the years, seen the same situation before. On issues such as our core public services and where infrastructure spending is prioritised, it speaks to a worrying continuation of that recent story of devolution: that, while more powers are situated in Scotland, more power is taken out and too often centralised in the central belt instead.

The absence of regional journalism will only hasten that process, and whatever we might think, collectively, about the barrier and where the balance should sit, local people should have that accountability and the opportunity to make their case about where power is situated. We are talking about not merely the loss of a news bulletin in the evening news, but something that is deeper. It is about the identity of the communities that I represent: their ability to connect with what is going on in their areas, to tell their stories and express themselves and to understand what is happening where they are.

More broadly, I believe—Jack Middleton has touched on some of this—that the decision is an act of surrender to what is a wildfire of commoditised fear that is weaponised by tech oligarchs to purposely undermine real freedom in pursuit of power and profit. The locally trained ethical journalist in Aberdeen, Angus or Dundee will, in reality, be replaced not by a journalist in Glasgow but by an artificial intelligence server in orbit. That is the trend that we are seeing, and the direction that these processes are taking.

If the decision goes ahead, it seems a long way back to real local representation in the news. I therefore stand in solidarity with the journalists in Aberdeen and further afield. They are leading the news in our region, and I urge Ofcom and STV to think again and keep giving the communities in the north of Scotland the service that we need and deserve.

18:39

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I congratulate my neighbouring MSP, Jack Middleton, on securing his first members' business debate. He has chosen a very good subject: a topical one that matters to folk right across Aberdeen and the north of Scotland.

I grew up watching "North Tonight" on Grampian TV. When I was little, I would watch the news and learn what was happening around the world, followed by what was happening across the north-east. It made the news matter to me when I was a bairn. It was everything that local journalism should be: high quality, engaging and trusted. That is why I kept watching the programme under the various different names that it has been called over the years, and continue to do so. I am one of 277,000 folk across the north-east and the Highlands and Islands who tune in to STV to watch it. I imagine that the vast majority of those hundreds of thousands of viewers will be far from happy with the idea that their local news will no longer be local.

I know that I have given the viewing numbers already, but I want to emphasise how phenomenal they are for STV North news across the north of Scotland. There are 277,000 viewers—a 40 per cent viewing share—all tuning in to "STV news at Six". In a world of myths and disinformation online, where folk are increasingly questioning news sources, there is something we can trust in the fact that we are able to turn on the television and watch

the local news on STV, or, for that matter, walk into a shop and pick up a copy of *The Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express*. That trust and local connection resonates with folk in Aberdeen, and it means that they are more willing to trust those outlets on matters that are further away from home, too. That is why the decision by STV is disappointing.

Our local news is being taken away at the whim of a London-based chief executive, with the decision being rubber-stamped by London-based Ofcom. STV's argument is that it wants to focus on digital output instead. It feels that it can try to address the lack of truth that exists online by leveraging the trust that folk have in its news output. The problem is that the foundation of that trust is built on STV's local and regional news. I would love to see more STV content on social media, but STV will be able to retain the high level of trust that it enjoys only for as long as it continues to anchor itself in our local communities.

Aberdeen faces an uncertain future. We are an oil capital whose businesses have been battered by the energy profit levy. We are a coastal city during a climate crisis. We are home to critical national infrastructure, while Russia is becoming more of a threat. We are a cash cow whenever the UK Government cannot balance its books. Despite being surrounded by farms, wind farms, fishing boats and oil rigs, people are struggling with their food and energy bills. With all that going on, if folk cannot find news from a source that they can trust, some will turn to outlets that tell them what they want to hear instead. Local journalism builds trust, and the need for high-quality local journalism across every format is greater than ever. That includes TV coverage, and it includes STV North news.

STV and Ofcom are both in the wrong here, and I hope that one of them will see sense and reconsider before it is too late.

18:43

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank Jack Middleton for securing this debate. I was pleased to support STV workers in the last session, when plans to cut STV North were first announced, and I remain as resolutely against these cuts and behind those workers now as I was then.

As others have said, high-quality local news is crucial to supporting local and regional identities, building communities and strengthening our democracy. That is especially important in our country, where so much focus is on Glasgow, Edinburgh and the central belt. Our TV coverage should reflect life in all parts of Scotland.

Based in Aberdeen, STV North—formerly Grampian Television—has been providing local news by and to the north of Scotland for just three months short of 65 years. It has covered the inspiring community campaign to save St Fittick's park from development and the fight to highlight the miseries faced by residents affected by the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete situation.

STV North has served our Highland and Island communities well, too, with issues around ferries, depopulation, housing availability and the benefits and challenges of tourism being aired and discussed because of the journalists and camera crews in communities.

Stephen Kerr: Maggie Chapman is making an important point about the distinctive nature of local news coverage. That was the whole point behind there being a separate licence for STV North. The decisions that Ofcom has made in support of the STV management have completely undercut all of that. Would it not have shown more honesty on the part of everybody involved if STV had simply surrendered the licence and allowed Ofcom to attract someone else to provide that service?

Maggie Chapman: I agree with that point. The abrogation of duty under that licence agreement is a real concern, and I will say a little bit more about that in a moment.

We know that the north of Scotland, as such a diverse part of our country, needs dedicated local coverage that reflects the challenges of the communities to whom it broadcasts. My region, North East Scotland, is hugely dependent on oil and gas, and my constituents rightly want to be kept up to date on how the just transition to a net zero future is or is not going. That issue involves complicated, ongoing issues that require coverage from informed teams of journalists who are embedded in the region. With the best will in the world, TV news programmes with up to 70 per cent generic or shared content will just not be able to do justice to issues that are more local and, in some cases, more remote.

We know that jobs are on the line. Reducing coverage and moving production from Aberdeen to Glasgow will lead not only to an immediate loss of jobs but to an ongoing running down of jobs and training opportunities. People from privileged backgrounds are already overrepresented in the industry, so it is vital that we keep alive routes for underrepresented groups to get work experience in TV. Media and journalism students at Robert Gordon University and North East Scotland College, who have shown their commitment to the area by studying there, should be able to stay in that area for work. Moving production to Glasgow will lead to a loss of those opportunities, and it will be hard to re-establish them once they have gone.

The NUJ ran a truly inspiring campaign on behalf of its members, exposing the price that current and future news workers may have to pay for the mistakes made by management, and I thank it for its incredible work.

Before closing, I want to say a few words about the role of Ofcom, which I think has been found wanting. Ofcom has correctly said that it has no role in imposing requirements on STV's online content, yet it has repeatedly emphasised the mitigating role of online content in continuing to provide local coverage. Surely, if its role is only to regulate the TV element, it should not be taking the online element into account when ruling on varying the licence terms. That is also happening despite Ofcom's 2025 report, "Online Nation" noting that one in five people in the UK aged 75 or above lacks home internet, and the fact that evidence from the Save STV North News campaign shows that the algorithms make local public service content hard to find online.

I question how genuine Ofcom's consultation was. Well before the consultation finished, Ofcom wrote to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee saying that it was proposing to approve STV's request. It sounds like it had already made up its mind.

Ofcom's decision is worrying for the precedent that it sets. Local and regional journalism is already under threat, with Reach plc hollowing out Scottish local press. If Ofcom does not reverse its decision, it might pave the way for attacks on local TV coverage in other areas of Scotland, such as ITV Border.

Someone once said that all politics is local. That is true, but all news is local too. In many aspects of our life, we need a local news service that reflects the people, the environment, the society and the culture of our local areas.

18:49

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this important debate on the future of STV North. I commend my colleague Jack Middleton for leading the discussion.

As other speakers have eloquently set out, for people in my Moray constituency and across the north of Scotland, STV North news is more than just a television programme, and that is what I will focus my remarks on today.

STV North news tells the story of our communities. It puts a spotlight on local and regional issues and ensures that voices from across the north of Scotland are heard. In my constituency, STV North has been a powerful voice for our communities in the good times and the bad. When the UK Government threatened to close RAF Lossiemouth, when the Moray community came together to campaign for our maternity service and when people in Lossiemouth united after the collapse of the Lossie bridge, the team at STV North was there, just as those trusted reporters at STV North are there when severe weather hits, when businesses are innovating and creating jobs in our communities, and when our young people in schools are achieving great things. STV North is always there to tell our stories.

The communities that I represent deserve to hear their dialect and to see their lives, concerns and successes reflected in the media. They deserve a news programme packed with first-class journalism—journalism that, for many years, has been provided to my Moray constituents by well-known and well-respected reporters such as Nicola McAlley and Iain Ramage, journalists who have taken great time and great care to know our communities.

I hear all the time how people in rural communities such as Moray can often feel disconnected from national conversations. That is a key point. Cutting our regional news output means fewer opportunities for people across the north of Scotland to have their experiences, their culture and their way of life represented on screen, and to be part of the conversation. Decisions about the future of regional news in Scotland must recognise its unique public value. As the motion sets out, STV North news is deeply valued, with only 4 per cent of viewers in the north of Scotland being supportive of the proposed cuts.

Like Jackie Dunbar, I am old enough that I grew up on the OG news in the north, "Grampian Tonight", and I know the affection that my Moray constituents have for the presenters and reporters who have, over many years, beamed into their homes to tell their stories each night. Local news cannot simply be replaced by national coverage. Stories from the north of Scotland deserve to be told by people who know the north of Scotland.

Opposition to STV's plans comes from all quarters: viewers, trade unions, businesses and politicians. As Jack Middleton has pointed out, it is an issue that has united MSPs across the chamber, and that is no mean feat. Ofcom's decision to rubber-stamp these unpopular central belt-focused plans is a travesty. As has already been said, the decision-making process is not only deeply flawed, but it ignores the strong views of the people in our unique corner of the world.

It is not too late for Ofcom to admit that it has got this wrong, hold its hands up, reverse its decision and do the right thing, and to protect the future of quality local news coverage in the north of Scotland.

18:53

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Jack Middleton for securing this debate and congratulate him on his powerful speech.

I cannot understand, and I deeply regret, not only STV's decision to cut its dedicated north of Scotland news programme, but Ofcom's decision to approve it. It is appalling, short-sighted and hugely detrimental to the people of the north and the north-east of Scotland. What makes it even more frustrating is that it appears to have been rubber-stamped, despite reports that only 4 per cent of viewers in the north and the north-east supported the proposals. Yet again, our communities are not being listened to.

I well remember when STV announced plans last September to axe the north news bulletin and merge it into a single programme broadcast from Glasgow. At the time, I joined my Scottish Conservative colleagues in raising serious concerns about the impact that that would have on our constituents. As Laura Mitchell pointed out, that was not—and is not—a party-political point. Perhaps uniquely, we were—and are—united.

I remember that STV suggested that the proposal would save £2.5 million or so. However, given that, at the same time, it launched a £500,000 commercial radio station, I find that claim rather difficult to stand up. However, even should those changes save £2.5 million, the question is, at what cost?

There is a very real human cost. Some 10 per cent of the workforce is being cut, with a disproportionate impact on jobs in the north of Scotland. Further, there is a huge cost to news. For more than 65 years, the STV North news programme has done far more than simply report the news. As Maggie Chapman said, it has given a voice to rural and regional communities. It has reflected local priorities and provided scrutiny, balance and accountability at every level of Government and public life.

In my view, the provision of regional bulletins remains one of the most important public service broadcasting commitments, particularly for rural communities, which are too often overlooked. The proposals risk silencing the voice of the north-east.

I want to pick up on something that Michael Marra set out. Issues that matter deeply to our communities will, inevitably, receive less prominence and a lower depth of coverage in a centralised programme, where the focus will, as usual, gravitate to the central belt. That matters, because the reduction in regional output represents a substantial weakening of the service, of democratic scrutiny, of accountability and of representation for communities that already feel distant from decision makers. A single centralised programme cannot adequately provide the prominence, the continuity and the depth of coverage that are needed to reflect the distinct priorities and concerns of the north-east and the Highlands and Islands.

Jackie Dunbar made an important point. At a time when trust in mainstream media is under pressure and people are increasingly turning elsewhere for information, reducing trusted local journalism is exactly the wrong direction of travel, because, when local reporting disappears, misinformation, disinformation and fake news will all too readily fill the gap.

I am pleased that Jack Middleton lodged the motion so that we, as a Parliament, can come together to support regional journalism, stand up for the dedicated staff who are affected by these decisions, stand up for the communities that they serve and condemn the plans in the strongest possible terms. The fact is that public service broadcasting obligations must be judged by outcomes for audiences, not by operational convenience or corporate cost saving. That is why I support the calls in the motion. If public service broadcasting means anything, it means ensuring that every part of Scotland is seen, heard and represented.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Due to the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Jack Middleton to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Jack Middleton*]

Motion agreed to.

18:57

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank my friend and colleague Jack Middleton for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I will carry on with the love-a-thon that seems to be going on among members from across the parties. Liam Kerr and Jack Middleton are correct that this is not a party-political issue. In the previous session, on the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, Stephen Kerr and I regularly disagreed on the time of the day and what day of the week it was, but we agreed on this issue when we had a discussion on it.

We have lost our voices in Scottish broadcasting. Who will be the voices of the future in Scotland? Where will people go to learn their trade as broadcasters if organisations cut back on independent radio and TV? There is nowhere for those who want a career in broadcasting to go,

other than the old trip down south. That is why the issue is important.

It is not just about STV North and the STV North news programme. There will be an effect on me and my constituents, because a centralised news programme will have less time for Paisley and greater Paisley. Sport and news from the whole of Scotland will end up being crammed into half an hour. That will not work, and it will cause problems as people will not hear their voices and their stories. Why does that matter?

Stephen Kerr: George Adam makes good points about the importance of these media outlets in relation to career opportunity, talent development and all the rest of it. The reality is—I am sure he will talk a bit more about this, because I know that he is a passionate believer, as I am, in the medium of radio—that we see that in radio as well, where there is a consolidation of ownership. There are more radio stations than ever before, but there seems to be more of the same content and less opportunity for young Scots to make their way in their careers as presenters, engineers and all those other vital jobs.

George Adam: Stephen Kerr is correct. The first independent radio station outwith London in the 1970s was Radio Clyde. That was the first time that people could go and ply their trade as a Scottish person in an independent radio station, and other stations ended up coming from that. We have more radio stations than ever, but our problem is that they are owned by centralised networks, in effect. It is brave and challenging at best for STV to start a radio station in a market that we are constantly told is overcrowded for advertising and everything else.

The real issue, which everybody has brought up, is the fact that Ofcom is the bad guy in this scenario. If STV had used the system to its advantage in relation to Ofcom, it would know that Ofcom is a toothless tiger.

Ofcom exists to regulate, to protect public service broadcasting and to protect plurality—if I can even say it. Yet, every time Scottish broadcasting is weakened, Ofcom appears to wave it through, and that is the problem. Every time this issue comes up, Ofcom waves it through and says that there is another reason for it. Its job is not to talk about the sustainability of a company, although that is extremely important. STV has a proud role and history. It is proud of its regional roots and of knowing where it came from and what is important, but it will lose that because of this situation.

However, the threat is even bigger than that—anybody in broadcasting will tell you that. Tastes are changing and broadcasting is changing, and there is a centralisation of international groups of broadcasting companies. Recently, we have had Sky taken over by Comcast, which is a multibillion-pound American organisation. Sky in turn is going to do a £1.6 billion takeover of ITV.

The bizarre situation that we could be in is that that is small potatoes compared with everything that could happen. We could be talking about the fact that, all of a sudden, £100 million for STV would not seem difficult for a company of that size. We would not be talking about the STV news at 6pm being a problem—we would be talking about whether STV would provide news for us at all.

I will finish on a simple point. The people of Scotland are not asking for special treatment; they are asking for fair treatment. They ask for their communities to be seen and heard, because those stories matter. That is why this decision matters. I say to STV, remember where your strength came from. It came from serving communities throughout Scotland, not from reducing them to an afterthought. I say to Ofcom, start doing your job. Stop congratulating yourself on managing decline and start doing the job that the UK Parliament created you to do. A regulator that watches regional broadcasting shrink, local journalism weaken and media ownership become concentrated is not protecting public service broadcasting; it is presiding over disaster.

Scotland and our communities deserve better than that. If Ofcom will not stand up for Scottish broadcasting, this Parliament must do so and make its voice heard.

19:03

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): I congratulate Jack Middleton on securing the debate. He has been a strong advocate for the save STV North news campaign, and I am grateful that he has given members the opportunity to come together and coalesce around the issue.

Like many members, I am concerned about the centralisation of STV North. It is not simply a staffing decision but a cost-saving measure. It represents a fundamental change in how the north of Scotland is represented on television, and it risks weakening one of the few remaining sources of consistent, dedicated regional journalism for our part of the country.

Let us not forget that, for more than 60 years, STV North has provided coverage across the north of Scotland, including for my constituents across Caithness, Sutherland and Ross. As members from across the chamber have highlighted, it has not only delivered news bulletins but provided scrutiny of local decision making and ensured that issues affecting our communities are visible beyond the immediate area.

For those of us who represent sparsely populated communities in the north of Scotland and who are all too familiar with the challenge of ensuring that those voices are heard by Governments of all colours, which can all too often feel too distant, that role has been crucial.

The concerns about the proposals were strongly reflected in evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster. Nick McGowan-Lowe of the National Union of Journalists warned that they represented not a minor restructuring but a significant downgrading of regional journalism. He argued that moving production to Glasgow would undermine journalists' ability to cover breaking news in real time. He suggested that output would increasingly rely on pre-recorded material, which would mean that events in the north could be missed or coverage of them could be delayed as a result of the erosion of the very journalism that we need in our communities. As he put it, we

"would see the cultural centre of Scotland shifted down towards the M80."

I also share the concerns that have been echoed across the political spectrum tonight about not only the job losses that have been announced but the loss of opportunities for aspiring young journalists of the future. As a former student at the University of Aberdeen, I know how important it is that training routes and long-term career pathways outside the central belt are not only protected but strengthened.

Given the economic pressures that the broadcasting sector faces, I recognise the challenges that are involved, so I welcome the confirmation that STV's current bases in the north region will be maintained. Nonetheless, if skilled jobs and training pipelines are removed from places such as Aberdeen and Inverness, they will be extremely difficult to rebuild. Therefore, the Parliament has a wider responsibility in that regard. I welcome what Jack Middleton called for in his speech. I assure him that, as part of this morning's discussion in public of its work programme, the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee considered calling in STV bosses to hold them to account. I hope that we will do so, and I am sure that I will be able to speak to Jack Middleton about that beforehand.

I am sure that the rest of us will have questions for the Scottish Government about what assurances the wider creative industries sector will need. I have no doubt that the issue will need to be seen through the lens of the upcoming Screen Scotland reforms.

It is hard to come to any conclusion other than that the centralisation of STV North lets down not only staff—who, as we will all be aware, are reporting serious concerns about wellbeing that must be addressed by STV bosses—but our communities right across the north. I fear that trust has been lost, and it will be difficult to rebuild it.

19:07

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I did not enjoy Jack Middleton's previous speech from the back of the chamber, but I did enjoy the speech that he gave this evening, because I think that he captured the essence of the debate. All the speakers who have followed have been excellent in airing the issue.

I am not sure that I will say anything that is terribly original compared with what has already been said, but I will say that, in my many years of observing these matters, I have not yet seen a regulator that is any good. In my experience, they all seem to be toothless wonders. They have to be prodded, nudged and jabbed to do anything. This is a case in point.

If we have to have monopolistic arrangements for the provision of public services such as public service broadcasting, we need to have regulators that are prepared to do their job. What is the point of Ofcom awarding licences, as it did to STV, only for the announcements such as those that we are discussing to be made only months later? Frankly, it is disgraceful that more integrity was not shown.

I mentioned the word "honesty" in my intervention on Maggie Chapman. Would it not have been more honest for STV to surrender the licence? I genuinely mean that. I am sorry, but I have a real problem with STV making commitments to local communities, applying for and obtaining an extension of the existing licence to provide local broadcasting and then very quickly undoing all of that. I genuinely believe—I think that this was put to Ofcom—that Ofcom should have taken the licence back and had another go at finding someone who would meet its requirements.

I also have wider concerns. George Adam was right—this is a most unholy alliance, but he and I agree on the issue. I am genuinely concerned about the pattern of consolidation of ownership, which might result in there being very few UK-owned domestic broadcasters.

It is all going the way of international global streamers and huge American conglomerates. I am not happy about that, which is why I have changed my mind a lot—for example, about the BBC. At one time, I was quite a critic of the BBC, but now I think of myself as a number 1 supporter. As a number of members have said, we need to retain UK and Scotland-based operations, for the sake of reflecting who we are to the world, let alone to ourselves.

I grew up watching Grampian Television. That is why I am speaking in the debate and am passionate about the issue. I come from Angus, and I grew up with the great names of Grampian TV. I am one of the oldest members now, and I am replying to a debate secured by one of the youngest, so I do not expect Jack Middleton ever to have heard of Jimmy Spankie. There was Ron Thompson, the music of Calum Kennedy, and George Kidd, who was a celebrity in many ways in Dundee. I remember going to my grandparents for the weekend, and on a Friday night they always watched "Bothy Nichts" when it was on. Those of us who are old enough will know it—it was a celebration of our culture in that part of Scotland. They were much more than programmes; they were a shared experience.

To create a cohesive society, we need more shared, local, identifiable experiences. That is why members from across Parliament and from all parties, I think—we have yet to hear from Helen McDade, but I am sure that she will be broadly supportive—support the retention of the licences as they have been awarded.

I have very little that is positive to say about Ofcom. Maggie Chapman mentioned STV's online content. Ofcom has regulatory responsibilities for online content, which is a huge issue for this country, as it is globally. I worry that Ofcom will be as toothless in enforcing online safety, as per the Online Safety Act 2023, as it is in relation to broadcasting. I have a range of concerns about the current state of broadcasting, but I will not exercise your patience, Presiding Officer, or that of my colleagues, by detailing those. I will say, though, that although ignoring viewers and communities is one thing, it completely bamboozles me that Ofcom has ignored the very licence conditions under which a licence was awarded.

Michael Marra spoke well, as he always does, in my experience, even when I disagree with him. He talked about the importance of local news journalism, as did a number of other colleagues. I am running out of time, but I want to say how important that issue is. I find the state of local journalism heartbreaking. I pick up my local newspaper, and it is largely national news that has been stuck in to fill out the pages. Local news is increasingly relegated to a few columns and a couple of pages, which is not good for our democracy.

We need good information to be available to the people of our country so that they can make good judgments and decisions. If information increasingly comes from tainted sources online—often sponsored by foreign bad actors, with a clear political agenda to create division and distrust between us in this country—we should wake up. I and my Conservative colleagues are delighted to support all the other parties and their voices in relation to this vital issue for our country's national security.

19:13

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I thank Jack Middleton for securing the debate.

Other members have talked about the process regarding Ofcom and STV. I do not know about that, but Jack Middleton said he was surprised that 99.7 per cent of responses to the consultation were ignored. All I can say is that we probably get more cynical with age, because I am not surprised. As has been mentioned, there will be big money behind the decision and people who think that these communities are not important. Once these things have started down a certain road, it is hard to roll back. It is a really retrograde action.

Geographically, Scotland is a large country that is sparsely populated, and STV North supplies a huge area. I have lived in Thurso, Aberdeenshire, north-east Fife and now north Perthshire, and I have been served by STV North in all those areas. It covers a huge area, but we never feel, "Oh well, that's about up there—the far north," or, "That's about Aberdeen," because we have all watched the same thing. I grew up in Thurso, and there is something about bringing together rural north Scotland.

David Green mentioned that breaking news will be lost, which is an important point. Sometimes, something important is on STV North but, if I watch the other side—because I have to know what is going on—there is nothing about it, which is because they have nobody up there. Nowadays, when broadcasters want to interview, they will say, "We'll do it online." I might say, "Why don't you come to Perth and interview me there?" It is just Perth; it is not Thurso. However, they are not interested.

Sadly, that is what we face. When I watch the other STV, occasionally, when I am in Edinburgh—it can also be watched online—it does not even mention really major things. To go back quite a long way, to a significant anniversary of the Piper Alpha disaster, the news on STV North looked at the ceremony but it was virtually not mentioned on the national broadcasts. That is an important point.

The journalists are trained and embedded in the area. I remember being interviewed about pollution in the Ythan, and STV North turned up with about five Gaelic trainees. That was when it was starting the Gaelic programme.

We need to fight for STV North. It is very difficult to see how to roll back such decisions once they have been made. It has been pointed out that the

Scottish Government has an advertising revenue. Can that have some weight? We need to fight at national and UK levels to continue to get STV North, because—members should make no mistake—once it goes, they will come for ITV Border. I am therefore delighted to have had the opportunity to speak.

19:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): I thank Jack Middleton for securing the debate. I was very pleased, recently, to meet him along with the Minister for Business and Fair Work. He and others are absolutely right to reflect both the cross-party consensus on the issue and the support across civic society. I add the Scottish Government's voice to that support by being absolutely clear that STV's choice to reduce news coverage in the north-east and Ofcom's decision to approve that are completely unacceptable for not just the audiences who are directly affected but the people across Scotland who are experiencing the erosion of their right to access relevant, reliable and trustworthy news, which—as has, rightly, been reflected on tonight—is absolutely fundamental to local democracy and accountability.

Scotland's areas and regions are distinctive. We are made up of different communities with different interests, different needs and, as both Laura Mitchell and Helen McDade have reflected, different emerging news stories. The issues that are important to people in Glasgow will not always be the same as those that are important to the people of Aberdeen, and we all have a right to be informed about our local area, our local interests and our local people. It resonated with me when Jackie Dunbar said that that local voice is what fosters trust—and trust in our news and public service broadcasting is under threat like never before.

It is simply not good enough that STV can just decide that it no longer wishes to fulfil its public service broadcasting obligations. There is huge opposition to that from audiences. Liam Kerr was right to say that only 4 per cent of audiences have demonstrated support for the plans. It is also not good enough that the regulator, Ofcom, can approve those plans with apparently no regard for the interests of the audiences that it is supposed to protect. That is exactly why broadcasting has to be devolved to Scotland. It is clear, not just from that decision but from decisions across the piece, that our priorities will not be best served by public service broadcasting that is organised on a UK level—or, crucially, by a regulator with a UK-wide remit.

The Government and I believe that the people of Scotland—both audiences and the creative professionals, whose interests we have been right to reflect on here tonight—have a right to a broadcasting ecosystem that reflects and represents us not only in news but in entertainment, sport and the cultural programmes that we watch. We deserve services that meet a proper public service broadcasting obligation, not only in letter or spirit but also in fact.

If broadcasting were devolved, the Scottish Government could ensure that television and radio truly met the needs of the people who live and work here, including by ensuring that Gaelic broadcasting was properly supported. Members of this Parliament would be able to hold us directly to account on that. We will continue to press for the devolution of broadcasting; however, until that happens, we will use every avenue to advocate for our creative workforce and our audiences across Scotland. I assure members that we will not stand by and accept any more steps backward in reporting and coverage, whether of Scottish, UK or global news.

We have rightly focused our comments on STV, but last week the BBC announced deep cuts across its services, which so far represent a disproportionate impact on Scotland. I understand that the BBC and other public service broadcasters are facing significant financial challenges, but it is incumbent on them to provide comprehensive coverage for all nations of the UK. Of course, the BBC is funded by the licence payer, and those considerations should be paramount for it. Any further reduction of Scotland-specific content across the BBC's output, as in STV's, puts audiences and our broadcasting workforce at risk and is unacceptable.

Stephen Kerr: The cabinet secretary will understand that I do not agree with everything that she has said, but I understand why she has said it. At the same time, it is important that we take a moment to celebrate the fact that we have some fantastic Scottish content and that fantastic things are happening in this sector. We had a debate last week to celebrate what is being done on screens small and large—I think that Alyn Smith lodged the motion. It would be wrong not to celebrate some of the achievements of, for example, STV Studios, which is part of the STV world, and some of the tremendous productions that have been commissioned from the BBC and independent companies. We do have things to celebrate—it is not all doom and gloom. However, we need to be real about this particular issue, which relates to the channel 3 licence in the north of Scotland, don't we?

Màiri McAllan: I do not think that anything I said would contradict the fact that excellent output

exists across Scotland. I responded to the debate on Screen Scotland. In fact, when we talked about the freezing effect on opportunities and job creation that STV's decision is likely to have in the north-east, I reflected on the fact that we celebrated the opposite last week in relation to Screen Scotland's work and the opportunities that it creates for training across the board. Unfortunately, tonight's debate reflects the opposite trend.

I want to say a word about Ofcom. Its first priority must always be to protect audiences and ensure that they have access to the information that they need and the cultural representation that they deserve. I will meet Ofcom, the BBC and other relevant partners to ensure that they closely understand Scotland's requirements.

I reflect again that the value of public service broadcasting has never been more important. As many members have reflected, as misinformation and disinformation become pervasive in our society, public service broadcasters must step up and be the trusted voice of impartiality on which we can rely.

I hope that Mr Middleton, along with everyone in the chamber, is clear that the Scottish Government joins him in absolutely condemning STV's plans and Ofcom's decision to approve them. The First Minister has made that point in written exchanges with those organisations, and I reiterate it.

I have sincerely welcomed the passion across the chamber in putting the case for local news and the creation of culturally relevant content close to home. I assure members that I will reflect their views vigorously when I meet Ofcom in the coming weeks.

Meeting closed at 19:24.

Correction

The First Minister has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The First Minister (John Swinney):

At col 26, para 6, line 3—

Original text—

The budget for 2026-27 provides the SFRS with an additional £23.8 million compared with the previous year, bringing its total budget to £535 million, which is a 5.7 per cent increase.

Corrected text—

The budget for 2026-27 provides the SFRS with an additional £23.8 million compared with the previous year, bringing its total budget to £435.96 million, which is a 5.7 per cent increase.

This is a draft *Official Report* and is subject to correction between publication and archiving, which will take place no later than 35 working days after the date of the meeting. The most up-to-date version is available here: https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report

Members and other meeting participants who wish to suggest corrections to their contributions should contact the Official Report.

Official Report
Room T2.20
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Email: official.report@parliament.scot
Telephone: 0131 348 5447

The deadline for corrections to this edition is 20 working days after the date of publication.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba