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Wednesday 24 June 2026

CONTENTS

Col.

PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME **1**
CLIMATE ACTION AND RURAL AFFAIRS **1**
Food Production Systems 1
Animal Welfare (Farrowing Crates) 2
Marine Protected Areas and Priority Marine Features (Management) 3
Hyperscale Data Centres (Climate Impact Assessment) 4
Hyperscale Data Centres (Environmental Impact Assessment) 5
Data Centres (Cumulative Impact Assessment) 7
Farming (Species Management) 11
Wildfires and Vegetation Fires (Management) 12
Wildfires (Prevention) 13
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND GAELIC **14**
Breakfast Clubs (Primary and Special Schools) 14
Post-school Skills Pathways 16
Skills Development (Young People) 17
Learning Priorities (Primary Schools) 20
Learning Estate Investment Programme (School Buildings) 21
Care Leaver Payment (Kinship Care) 22
Island Communities (Support for Festivals) 23
Teachers (Workforce Planning) 24
School Leavers (Positive Destinations) 25
REFORM UK PRIORITIES **28**
Malcolm Offord (West Scotland) (Reform) 28
The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur) 31
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab) 35
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) 38
Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD) 42
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) 45
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP) 48
Jenny Young (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab) 51
Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform) 52
Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP) 55
Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform) 57
Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP) 59
Amanda Lindsay (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform) 62
Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) 63
Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP) 66
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD) 69
Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con) 72
Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green) 74
Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab) 77
The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville) 78
Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform) 82
NATIONAL SECURITY (STATE THREATS) BILL **86**
The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray) 86
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab) 88
Amanda Bland (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform) 88
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green) 89
Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) 90
BUSINESS MOTIONS **93**
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION **96**
MOTION WITHOUT NOTICE **97**
DECISION TIME **98**

NUCLEAR POWER IN SCOTLAND **106**
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con) 106
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP) 109
Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) 111
Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab) 113
Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con) 116
Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con) 117
David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD) 119
The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins) 121
CORRECTION **125**

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 24 June 2026

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

Portfolio Question Time

Climate Action and Rural Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is climate action and rural affairs. I remind members that questions 5, 9 and 10 have been grouped together. I will take any supplementaries on those questions after all three have been answered. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Food Production Systems

1. **Joe Fagan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to develop fairer food production systems. (S7O-00106)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): I welcome Joe Fagan to the chamber. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting agriculture, food production and our food and drink sectors in a fair manner. In March, we published our first rural support plan, outlining support for the next five years and providing the clarity, certainty and opportunity to plan. We have committed to continuing direct payments to active farmers and crofters and to delivering key outcomes for Scotland, but also to ensuring that there is proportionality for our valuable small producers. We have also committed to a phased transition from the legacy common agricultural policy to the new tailored domestic support schemes, which were developed in partnership with the sector, to avoid cliff edges in support.

Joe Fagan: The Scottish Government knows that the benefits of community wealth include shorter, more resilient supply chains and more of the wealth being built locally and retained within communities. Does the Government agree that the question of community ownership, as referenced in the good food nation plan, must be about more than access to land and should be explored further? Does it also agree that growing the co-operative economy in the sector can help to build resilience and economic justice in a changing and uncertain world?

Jim Fairlie: I agree with Joe Fagan: co-operation is absolutely essential, whether it is about land ownership, food production or getting food into the public sector. We have just announced that there will be a public sector task force, and co-operation and collaboration are exactly what will make it a success. I welcome Joe Fagan's question.

Katie Hagmann (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I welcome the ambitions of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022. I also welcome the fact that the good food nation plans will be expected to have regard to

"the role of a sustainable food system".

When will the Scottish Government introduce secondary legislation under the 2022 act, to ensure that the plans can be developed within relevant authorities?

Jim Fairlie: The process is ongoing as we speak. There is a desire to make good-quality local food accessible through the good food nation plans across the country.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Farmers are at the heart of any food production system. The fundamental problem that we are facing is that, with the poor rural support plan, current subsidies such as the less favoured area support scheme are not hitting the mark. More and more farmers in my area, the Highlands and Islands, are raising the question of the future of LFASS. Will the minister confirm what the future is for subsidies such as LFASS?

Jim Fairlie: Tim Eagle knows very well that the Government has been absolutely crystal clear that support for our primary producers is essential and we will continue to provide it. The shape of the support will be developed in the next number of years. The industry has been asking for certainty, and we have certainty between now and 2030—that is already guaranteed. We are working on what LFASS and the voluntary coupled support scheme will look like, and we are ensuring that active farmers receive support so that rural communities are protected. I give that assurance to Tim Eagle and the farming community.

Animal Welfare (Farrowing Crates)

2. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its programme for government 2021-22 commitment to consult on the phasing out of farrowing crates. (S7O-00107)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government remains committed to that work. Indeed, in September, in the Scottish Parliament, I hosted and chaired a constructive round-table discussion on alternative farrowing systems with representatives from the Scottish pig industry,

animal welfare organisations and academia. Work is ongoing, which has included my officials having further discussions with academia to find a definitive direction as to what replaces farrowing crates while improving sow welfare and supporting the viability of the industry. We will continue to listen to and work with the industry and key stakeholders on how best to achieve improvements in animal welfare.

Clare Haughey: Roughly half of the more than 25,000 mother pigs in Scotland are housed indoors, almost all of them held in farrowing crates. Animal welfare organisations such as Humane World for Animals have been calling for a phasing out of those crates for years. Will the minister commit to legislating swiftly on the issue and ensuring a transition to free farrowing pens?

Jim Fairlie: I point out to the member that we are doing this in concert with the UK Government. There is a joint consultation ongoing as we speak, and I have confirmed with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ministers our agreement to do that joint consultation. Therefore, we will be working closely with the UK Government and other devolved Administrations on the delivery of the programme. *[Jim Fairlie has corrected this contribution. See end of report].*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member who lodged question 3 is not in the chamber, so we will move to question 4.

Marine Protected Areas and Priority Marine Features (Management)

4. **Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will implement management measures for inshore marine protected areas and priority marine features. (S7O-00109)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): Bear with me, Deputy Presiding Officer. You caught me out there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I will give the minister a moment.

Jim Fairlie: The answer to the question that Gillian Mackay asks about marine protected areas concerns, I have to admit, a new element of my portfolio. I am working on it with our officials and stakeholders right now. I took receipt of the petition that was presented yesterday in front of the Parliament building, and I am actively working on it as we speak.

Gillian Mackay: I am pleased that the minister is getting up to speed on that part of the portfolio.

Scotland's network of marine protected areas was intended to be a vital marine safeguard, but the designation itself does not protect our marine environment from the impacts of trawling and dredging. Will the minister set out a clear timeline for the consultation and development of those management measures, to give assurance to our coastal communities?

Jim Fairlie: As I said, I am currently working on that consultation. The cabinet secretary has given a commitment that it will be done as soon as possible. However, a considerable amount of work needs to be done to make sure that we ask the right questions and get robust plans in place and, at the same time, make sure that rural coastal communities are protected.

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): What lessons has the Scottish Government learned from the disastrous highly protected marine areas consultation in 2022-23, and what engagement has taken place with coastal communities, including the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, ahead of any further consultation in this area?

Jim Fairlie: I give an absolute guarantee that there is consultation right across the sector and across all sectors. We are cognisant of the fact that this will be a very contentious issue. Some people will be very unhappy with the results either way. Therefore, we are taking our time in order to make sure that we are asking the right questions and consulting with all the people who will be involved.

I will approach this in exactly the same way as I have approached every other contentious thing that I have had to do, which is by bringing people together, working out what the issues and problems are, finding a balanced position and then getting that implemented through the consultation and the work that is ongoing just now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next questions are grouped.

Hyperscale Data Centres (Climate Impact Assessment)

5. **Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what national assessment it has made of the climate impact associated with hyperscale AI green data centres. (S7O-00110)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government has not undertaken a wholly national assessment of the remit that the member specifically outlines on data centres. However, we are currently engaging with industry and partner agencies to better understand the cumulative impacts of data centre developments on the environment. Currently, when new planning applications come forward, planning authorities have a responsibility to consider the environmental implications of all development proposals on their individual merits. That is the case whether they are

data centres or, indeed, other developments. In cases in which a proposal is likely to have a significant environmental effect, those powers are further supplemented by the procedures set out in the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017.

Mark Ruskell: I hear what the cabinet secretary says about her engagement with industry, but it is communities that are facing a deluge of applications for data centres. There are people here today from Fife and across Scotland who are raising their concerns. Answers are needed, cabinet secretary. Fife Council has now asked the Scottish Government for direction over the environmental assessment of the proposed data centre at Auchtertool in Fife.

Is it not the case that the Scottish Government has been totally caught out on this issue? Coming up with a definition of a green data centre next year will be far too late for decision makers such as Fife Council. Does the cabinet secretary agree that she needs to sit down with the planning minister, sort out the guidance and, in the meantime, put in place a moratorium on decision making?

Gillian Martin: In my answer, I did not say just industry—I said industry and other partners, which involves local authorities as well. I am getting a lot of correspondence from new MSPs on the issue, and a number of questions today as well.

One of the issues with data centres is that they have to be in the right place. For example, there are some advantages to siting data centres next to an offtaker, so that the heat from the data centre is effectively taken and used, displacing the fossil fuel heating to an infrastructure project. Planning officers have to take such matters into account, and, as I said, the 2017 regulations already provide the tools for assessing any development.

However, we are actively considering the issue because, as a result of some of the incentives that have been put in place by the United Kingdom Government for locating data centres in the north of England and in Scotland, we are seeing a lot of speculation at the moment. Some of those proposals might not go to planning, but some of them will. We are working to make sure that we have everything in place, to give our planning officers throughout the country the tools to assess the applications correctly.

Hyperscale Data Centres (Environmental Impact Assessment)

9. **Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any impact on the environment of the construction and operation of hyperscale data centres. (S7O-00114)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): I need to apologise, because I am going to be giving similar answers to a lot of questions as they are exactly the same. As I said, the Scottish Government is building an understanding of the environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of hyperscale data centres.

When new planning applications are made, planning authorities have a responsibility to consider the environmental implications of the proposals based on their individual merits. As I have said, in cases in which a proposal is likely to have a significant environmental effect, those powers are supplemented, by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017.

Gary Bouse: Many of my constituents have been in touch with me to express their legitimate concerns about the impacts of a proposed full application for a hyperscale green data centre at Larbert, which is among several applications that have been made across the country in recent weeks. What discussions have taken place with Scotland's chief planner to define a green data centre in environmental terms? What guidance is planned to be published on that specific issue prior to the Government's digital infrastructure guidance, which is not expected until 2027?

Gillian Martin: I am sure that Gary Bouse will appreciate that I cannot comment on planning applications and particular developments, and I do not think that he would expect me to.

I recognise that, in general, hyperscale artificial intelligence data centres are an evolving sector, about which there is a lot of speculation at the moment. The national planning hub has been working with planning authorities, infrastructure providers and industry stakeholders to share an understanding of the emerging impacts and benefits. The national planning hub was set up by me and the now Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform, Ivan McKee, to help local authorities to deal with developments for which they did not have the particular expertise in house and to get that expertise as they need it.

Technology and methods around data centres are evolving. There is some risk that an explicit definition could be counterproductive. It could potentially limit the use of professional planning judgment if focused on methods that are becoming out of date. As I said, an evolving piece of work is being done between the national planning hub and local authorities. We will need to consider carefully with stakeholders how a definition could be applied in practice. In the short term, we will consider whether there is further clarity that we can give to support assessment and decision making.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Gary Bouse.

Gary Bouse: I have already asked my supplementary.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): My apologies. I call Alan Brown.

Data Centres (Cumulative Impact Assessment)

10. **Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to carry out a cumulative impact assessment of the number of planning applications proposed for artificial intelligence data centres, including the power and water resources required and the impact on climate emissions. (S7O-00115)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): Alan Brown will have heard my answers to previous questions on the issue of a cumulative assessment. We are taking a whole-system approach to understanding the full implications of data centre developments, including, as Alan Brown mentioned, the consideration of energy and water demands, potential economic benefits and the views of communities and local stakeholders.

Through continued engagement with the National Energy System Operator, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Water, we will look to ensure that data centre investment takes place in a resource-considerate manner, mitigating negative impacts and maximising positive impacts wherever possible—I mentioned some of those impacts in my answer to Mark Ruskell.

Although the Scottish Government is not currently undertaking a formal national assessment, we are working with partners to assess the impact of AI data centres and to look at whether current planning conditions are appropriate.

Alan Brown: Rufus AI data centre, which was proposed at Hurlford in my constituency, will use the equivalent power output of the United Kingdom's largest wind farm, Whitelee. Twenty-four data centres are proposed across Scotland, which is why there is a call for a centralised impact assessment. Can the cabinet secretary explain how the assessments that are being undertaken will feed into individual planning assessments?

Is she aware that my local authority of East Ayrshire is seeking clarification on what constitutes green data centres? Indeed, it is looking for guidance on assessing planning applications, which are applications only in principle and do not have enough detail from developers who are looking to get approvals and to flog those centres for a quick buck.

Gillian Martin: I am aware that local authorities and planning departments are calling for a little more clarity. In the AI strategy, we already committed to publishing guidance on what factors are prevalent in a green data centre. Planning authorities might use a range of factors when considering those matters. I do not think that Alan Brown would expect me to comment on a particular development, as that would not be helpful at all.

We are looking to consider matters around whether the data centre is powered from renewable energy sources, whether it makes use of energy-efficient technologies, whether it seeks to minimise water consumption by using a closed-loop system and whether it supports the reuse of excess heat for applications such as the ones that I have mentioned. Planning consideration could also be given as to where data centres are sited in order to allow industrial decarbonisation opportunities.

Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green): Six of the current proposed 24 data centres are in my region. The amount of detail for each one and the planning stage that they are at vary hugely. The very favourable policy for addressing that, the national planning framework, came out four years ago but it feels as if no work has taken place in the interim on nailing down that detail. We have had a series of very muddled answers, which does not help my constituents from the Lammermuirs, some of whom are in the gallery, to feel that they are on a level playing field with landowners and developers. Will the cabinet secretary support the Scottish Greens' call for a moratorium so that that detail can be ironed out and we can start afresh with clarity on what a green data centre actually is?

Gillian Martin: I will be honest: I will not support a moratorium on that, because we feel that planning regulations are already in place for any development, whether it is a data centre or another development, and that a lot of work is ongoing in relation to the particular conditions around data centres.

The member has pointed to the fact that there is an awful lot of speculation in that area. Of course, I cannot comment on particular planning applications but, as I have said in the answers that I have given, we are working with local authorities to see whether any additional regulation is required in that area. That work will continue. The volume of questions that I have had, particularly on data centres, means that we might have to expedite that work.

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD): I thank members for asking questions on this

topic. There are plans to build one such data centre near Bishopbriggs in my constituency, and a number of local residents have contacted me with concerns about the potential impact. It is really important that people who could be affected have the chance to be heard and to understand the potential impact of such centres. Does the cabinet secretary agree that every effort should be made to ensure proper consultation with local residents?

Gillian Martin: It is essential that proper consultation is undertaken with residents, regardless of the development.

There has been a lot of speculation on data centres, particularly since the UK Government announced Scotland's AI growth zone in Lanarkshire. Indeed, there are similar pressures in the north of England, where conditions have been made favourable for investment. We need to be alive to the need to site the data centres in the right place and with the explicit consent of nearby communities.

As I have said, there are a lot of opportunities for data centres to be sited in places where other developments can make use of the excess heat. I would like planning officers to take that into account.

As I have said to many members before, we are looking at environmental impact assessments to see whether they are fit for purpose for our data centres. However, regardless of the development, there must be public consultation.

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her previous and extensive answers on the topic. Will she outline how the Scottish Government will ensure that any future developments deliver local economic benefits, while also ensuring that planning authorities have the capacity and support that is required to properly assess these large-scale projects and protect Scotland's climate ambitions?

Gillian Martin: The answer is, in general, yes. Data centres and developments that bring employment opportunities and investment to Scotland are welcome, but they must dovetail with our other national priorities. If the associated environmental impact does not meet our guidelines, that would clearly be a problem.

The applications themselves, and the types of technology that they use—for example, to limit water consumption and to partner with other companies that might act as off-takers for excess heat—could provide an almost closed-loop system.

We must look not only at the economic opportunities. We must also be mindful of where developments are located—there needs to be an economic benefit for the areas that they serve.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): We have a deluge of speculative applications for AI data centres across the country. We have heard already that the area that I represent, North Lanarkshire, is designated an AI growth zone. Is not the truth that we need national guidance from the Scottish Government on where those data centres should be and on how many the country requires? That work needs to be expedited at pace over the summer.

Gillian Martin: Graham Simpson is right that the UK Government announcing the AI growth zone in Lanarkshire has meant that there is an awful lot of speculation at the moment. Many of the speculative projects will not even make it to the planning stage.

The member is absolutely right that the work is continuing. I have outlined some of the work that is under way with the national planning hub in order to inform decision making. If anything additional is needed—such as regulatory changes—as a result of this emerging technology, we need to be alive to that as well. I have been in post for three weeks in this area, but I want to ensure that this is taken forward.

There is a great deal of interest in the issue across rural portfolios. I will ensure that the work is expedited so that planning officers are not placed in a position where they lack the information that is needed to proceed.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Last year, the UK Government announced plans to introduce AI growth zones, which would involve giving data centres a £24 per megawatt-hour discount in Scotland, starting from April 2027.

Given the enormous opposition that local communities such as mine in Auchtertool have to these data centres, and their rightful concern about demand on local water and power, which has been mentioned, does the Scottish Government have an updated stance on the AI growth zones in Scotland?

Gillian Martin: As Julie MacDougall said, the AI growth zone is a UK Government initiative, and that initiative has resulted in speculation in the areas that were designated as growth zones, as in Lanarkshire. Our stance on the growth zone initiative is that, obviously, we recognise that, where a data centre development is proposed, it must have strict environmental impact assessments associated with it, and we must have an idea of the number of data centres that are likely to go through planning. We also need to ensure that our regulations are fit for purpose.

There are opportunities that arise if data centres are sited in the right locations, and I have mentioned a few of those opportunities. We have an enormous amount of constrained renewable electricity that cannot make its way into the grid and which is being wasted—indeed, constraint payments are given to the generators. Data centres can provide an outlet to use that renewable electricity, but they cannot come at the expense of other environmental concerns.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): A number of members have indicated that they wish to ask a question on this issue. I will take one further question, which will be from Claire Baker, although I ask her to keep it brief.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The UK Government has updated its planning policy, and there is a clear strategic approach to where data centres are sited, which is what members are calling for in Scotland. On the question around environmental impact assessments, at the moment, it is not mandatory for local authorities to carry out such assessments. Will the Scottish Government consider changing that to ensure that environmental impact assessments are part of the process?

Gillian Martin: Obviously, that question strays into Mr McKee's domain. I will take some of the members' questions on planning regulations to Mr McKee, and he will see in the *Official Report* what members have been asking for today. I will play my part with regard to environmental impact assessments and giving advice to the cabinet secretary with responsibility for planning.

Farming (Species Management)

6. **Amanda Lindsay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support farmers in mitigating the negative impacts of certain plant and animal species on their businesses. (S7O-00111)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government recognises the challenges that certain plant and animal species pose to agricultural businesses and is supporting farmers to manage those impacts. Ministers engage directly with land managers through forums such as the strategic wildlife and species land managers forum, which promotes collaboration and balanced solutions. Financial and practical support is also available through species management schemes. Further support is available through the agri-environment climate scheme, which helps farmers to manage land sustainably alongside wildlife.

Amanda Lindsay: Many farmers and crofters are bearing the impacts and dealing with the consequences of species management, both financially and mentally. Will the Scottish Government increase the funding and commit to a multiyear ring-fenced budget that is fit for purpose? Will the Government also commit to implementing a more pragmatic licence application scheme for the removal of species where the impact on business and other conservation species or habitats is clear?

Jim Fairlie: As Amanda Lindsay points out, there is a management scheme. Licences are available and there is funding through various schemes, such as the sea eagle management scheme or any number of other schemes that we have and through which funding is available, such as the goose management and goose mitigation schemes. We already have practical solutions that involve working with land managers to help to tackle any issues that arise. However, that does not mean eradication, which is sometimes what people call for. We are looking for a balanced approach to ensure that we can farm alongside nature.

Wildfires and Vegetation Fires (Management)

7. **Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with specialist organisations regarding equipment and systems used to tackle wildfire and vegetation fires, in light of the increasing risk of such fires affecting rural communities, woodlands, parks and urban green and open spaces across Scotland. (S7O-00112)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): Responding to wildfires and vegetation fires is an operational matter for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which ensures that any specialist resources are utilised in the most appropriate way to safely respond to incidents. As the experts in the area, as well as the main responder, it is for the service to consider how best to engage with organisations regarding specialist resources and their potential procurement.

Clare Adamson: Systems such as those developed by Fire Fogging Systems Ltd, which is a business in my constituency, are in place, and the technology is welcome. However, prevention is better than cure, so what can our at-risk areas do to prevent wildfires?

Gillian Martin: Clare Adamson is absolutely right: prevention is key. Following on from the good work that was done on the wildfires strategy in the previous parliamentary session by Jim Fairlie and by Siobhian Brown, the former Minister for Victims and Community Safety, a great deal of work is being done on prevention. Indeed, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service launched a public awareness campaign on wildfire prevention on 5

March. Its key message is that there is no such thing as a harmless fire, regardless of the size of the spark or flame.

I also commend our national parks: the Cairngorms national park will ban fires and barbecues in public places between 1 April and 30 September, and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park has byelaws in place on designated camping management zones, plus a great deal of signage. Therefore, prevention involves education, ensuring that we follow the byelaws when lighting any fires and being mindful that, in our countryside and even in some urban areas, even the smallest spark can cause a wildfire in dry conditions.

Wildfires (Prevention)

8. **David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what advice and support it provides to rural communities on wildfire prevention ahead of the heightened risk of such fires during the summer months. (S7O-00113)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government's wildfires strategic action plan sets out a partnership approach to preventing, preparing for and responding to wildfires. Local authorities, national park authorities and public bodies proactively promote responsible outdoor behaviour through signage, education, communication and, as I mentioned in relation to our national parks, byelaws.

On 5 March, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service launched a communications campaign to raise public awareness of wildfire risk and to discourage risky outdoor behaviours. During periods of heightened wildfire risk, such as now, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service works closely with public authorities and land managers to ensure that clear and consistent public messaging on wildfire risk is conveyed to local communities in a timely and effective way.

David Green: The response from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and local land management to the severe wildfires that were experienced in the Highlands last year was exceptional, and I put on record my thanks to them.

Given that wildfires are breaking out, as the cabinet secretary has referenced, including in Lochinver in my constituency this April, we are already seeing the risk. The recent introduction of fire byelaws in the Cairngorms national park, which the cabinet secretary referred to, demonstrates that a targeted approach to prevention is possible. Given the recent wildfires, will the minister urgently commence the powers in the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 to allow local authorities to introduce similar protections where they are needed?

Gillian Martin: Following the passing of the 2026 act in the previous parliamentary session, all aspects of the act are being progressed by Mr Fairlie and me.

First, I put on record my thanks, as David Green did, to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. It worked in partnership with farmers, landowners and people in the communities. For example, people who have expertise in muirburn were key to managing some of those fires.

Since the launch of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's wildfires strategy, £1.6 million has been invested in operational equipment, so there has been an increase in resource. With regard to muirburn, NatureScot has worked through the muirburn code working group to develop the revised code, some of which went through via the 2026 act.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Apologies to those members whom I was unable to call.

Education, Culture and Gaelic

14:34

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next portfolio is education, culture and Gaelic. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Before question 2, I will allow members on the front benches a moment to take their places.

Breakfast Clubs (Primary and Special Schools)

2. **Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what specific support it plans to provide to primary and special schools to enable the delivery of universal breakfast clubs. (S7O-00117)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): This year, we will invest £3 million in our bright start breakfasts fund, which will provide 9,000 breakfast club places and support more than 20,000 children across Scotland, including those in Edinburgh and East Lothian, in ensuring that they have a healthy start to the day. Our commitment to provide a universal breakfast offer from August 2027 is supported by £15 million of investment in this financial year, which will be used to prepare for the transition.

Katherine Sangster: The United Kingdom Labour Government is rolling out breakfast clubs at pace and is ensuring that primary schools are offered expert support and advice on how clubs can be delivered in a stigma-free way for the children who need them most. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Will the Government commit to engaging with the UK Government and learning from its roll-out to ensure that, in Scotland, we have access to the best possible practice and expert advice?

Màiri McAllan: I am always interested in how other jurisdictions are pursuing policies. We look across the border and elsewhere in that regard.

It is worth noting that a great deal of work has already been undertaken in Scotland on the roll-out of breakfast clubs. Nearly half of all primary schools in Scotland already provide one. In my initial answer, I mentioned the transitional funding that the Government is providing, and we have identified ongoing funding, too. Work is under way with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities to ensure that every child can access the co-benefits of a breakfast club. Equally, we recognise that, given certain practical issues, including those relating to rurality, there will have to be flexibilities.

Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Every child's day should start with a nutritious meal. We know that that benefits their learning experience and that wraparound care aims to accommodate parents' working hours. Will the cabinet secretary outline the role of breakfast clubs in supporting Scotland's families amid the cost of living crisis?

Màiri McAllan: In an earlier response, I mentioned that there are co-benefits to universal breakfast club provision across our primary and special schools. We know that, in order to learn well, children must eat well. Although most children can rely on doing so, many cannot, so such meals will provide a nutritional start to the day. With up to an extra hour of care for children being provided at the beginning of the day, the policy also helps parents and carers through the cost of living crisis by allowing them to take up employment or increase their working hours.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Duncan Dunlop.

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): Apologies, Deputy Presiding Officer. I did not mean to speak on this question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): You had pressed your request-to-speak button, but that is not a problem.

Post-school Skills Pathways

3. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the provision of post-school skills pathways. (S7O-00118)

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Ben Macpherson): This year, building on previous work and initiatives, the Scottish Government has introduced a new Government-led skills planning model—which has been developed in close partnership with stakeholders, including those in industry—to ensure that our post-school education and skills system becomes even more responsive to Scotland's strategic skills priorities. The collaborative work is ongoing. For example, I held a round-table meeting with different organisations and business voices this morning. I will aim to update the Parliament on the work in the autumn.

Daniel Johnson: I thank the minister for that answer, particularly the point about industry collaboration, because he knows that that is important to me.

However, the overall numbers paint a dark picture. In 2025, Scottish Engineering estimated that we need to grow the engineering workforce by 46 per cent, but the number of engineering apprenticeship starts has fallen over the past 10 years. Moreover, last year, there were 24,849 modern apprenticeship starts, which was the lowest number since 2013-14 if we do not include the Covid years. Given the demand for skills and the fact that more young people are economically inactive, what is the Government doing to increase the number of starts, instead of that number continuing to fall?

Ben Macpherson: Daniel Johnson knows that I like to be constructive in my dialogue in the chamber, but I must gently point out that one of the key problems that those in industry have emphasised to me is the impact of the national insurance increase, as well as other pressures and costs that have affected the number of apprenticeship starts and the ability of employers to recruit more generally.

One of the areas that we are focusing on, and where we have stepped up with additional funding, concerns how our college sector can play an even more pivotal role in delivering the apprenticeships that we need. We are working collaboratively with the college sector and have increased its budget by 10 per cent this financial year.

We are also undertaking a review of the contribution rates, so that, despite the external pressures—including the extra costs arising from reserved changes by the United Kingdom

Government—we are looking to support employers to take on more apprentices.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): In this atmosphere of collaboration, I, too, wish to recognise the point that Daniel Johnson and the minister made about involving industry. I see great examples of that, one of which involves Renewable Parts in Lochgilphead and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks working with Oban high school.

The latest statistics on positive destination are demonstrative that the Scottish National Party Government's investment is reaching where it matters most. What work is under way to ensure that access to work, training or further study is not limited by a young person's background, given the unique challenges facing rural and island communities, such as those in my constituency of Argyll and Bute?

Ben Macpherson: There are many initiatives and policies in this space to encourage and support our young people to ensure that they can fulfil their potential, including the free tuition that the Government has provided for students. More than 750,000 students have benefited from that policy since it was introduced by the first SNP Government. We are investing more in our college sector. In 2024-25, 93.5 per cent of school leavers were in a positive follow-up destination nine months after leaving school, and we congratulate them.

We are not complacent. We realise the challenges that we are all facing, with technological change and the pressure in the economy around recruitment, but our young people are doing well, and the Government stands to support them as much as we can.

Skills Development (Young People)

4. **Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports the development of skills and encourages apprenticeships, in light of reported concerns that young people are steered towards some degree courses that offer limited value. (S7O-00119)

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Ben Macpherson): We want to support all our young people to choose a pathway that suits their strengths and enables them to fulfil their potential to the greatest extent, developing their skills and critical thinking.

Our all-age careers support, delivered by Skills Development Scotland and other partners, promotes every pathway to our young people. We are investing £198 million a year in around 25,500 new modern apprenticeships, 5,000 foundation apprenticeships and more than 1,500 new graduate apprenticeships. We are committed to increasing apprenticeship opportunities to 150,000 over the course of this session of the Parliament, supporting our economy and our society.

Universities are autonomous organisations. They choose which degrees they offer. It would be helpful to understand from the member's supplementary question what he means by degrees that "offer limited value", so that we can understand the point that he is trying to make.

Thomas Kerr: I will get a list over to the minister. I am always happy to educate the education front bench about pointless degrees.

Working-class communities such as mine have been shafted, with more money being spent on pointless degrees, rather than on useful skills and apprenticeships. Reform believes that money for apprenticeships should be ring fenced to ensure that it is not spent on pointless courses and that it actually assists our young people into learning.

Does the minister accept that apprenticeship levy funding was intended to expand apprenticeship opportunities, not to plug wider budget gaps? Can he guarantee that every pound that has been allocated to apprenticeships is being spent on apprenticeship training, rather than elsewhere in the education budget?

Ben Macpherson: The member needs to spend some more time understanding how we deliver the different opportunities within our system, through the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland. Those streams—apprenticeships, college funding and university funding—are coming together, which will provide a better operational position for achieving parity of esteem between the different choices that people make and creating even more collaboration across the system.

The apprenticeship levy is a subject that has been raised with me multiple times during my tenure in this role, including in the chamber. We are committed to working with industry to provide more apprenticeship support. I refer to the measures in our manifesto, which I discussed with the stakeholders I met this morning.

There is growing demand for apprenticeships, and the Government wants to support our young people to achieve in the way that suits them best. However, it is not helpful for any member to come to the chamber and state that one avenue is potentially preferable to another. We are trying to create a situation with parity of esteem, in which everyone can fulfil their potential and best contribute to the economy and society.

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): I associate myself completely with the remarks that the minister just made. My supplementary concentrates on supporting our

universities—I think that we can find some common ground on that.

Yesterday, the principal of the University of Glasgow informed staff that a voluntary severance scheme would be launched. Jobs are on the line and, understandably, university staff are worried about what it will mean for the future. In the past decade, there has been a 39 per cent real-terms cut to Government funding for Scottish students. Does the minister appreciate how concerning that news of the scheme is for staff and trade unions involved in the University of Glasgow and, more broadly, does he accept that something needs to change to fix the damage that his Government has done to Scotland's universities?

Ben Macpherson: As I mentioned in the members' business debate a few days ago, the question of the future of our universities will be pertinent for all of us who have the privilege to serve in this Parliament for the next five years.

The cross-party work that was established before the election on the framework for the sustainability and success of our universities has three pillars of exploration and collaboration. That work is going on right now—with a variety of stakeholders—to come up with proposals for how to make the changes that are required for our sector to continue to be successful. We are thinking ahead about the decades to come and making sure that we are agile and changing in the way that is necessary.

Responsibility for the pressures on the funding of our universities does not sit entirely with our Government. There are many reserved aspects that have caused higher costs for our universities. In particular, issues of immigration law make it much more difficult for universities to recruit internationally. The national insurance increase was a surprise and a very high cost for our universities.

Jenny Young: The Scottish Government cut their funding.

Ben Macpherson: We realise that support for our universities from the devolved Government is important. However, in relation to that question, we do not exist in isolation. It is worth remembering that, in the most recent budget, we increased the budget for universities by 5 per cent and that we are liaising closely with them.

With regard to the University of Glasgow situation, although, like all universities, it is autonomous, we strongly urge universities to consider redundancies only as a last resort.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Heather Anderson to ask a short question, and I ask for a short answer from the minister.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): I associate myself with the comments of the previous two speakers. I welcome young people entering further and higher education; their choices should not be talked down or denigrated in any way. There was bumper funding for the education portfolio for this year. Can the minister give some information about how that funding is supporting young people to make the right choices so that they meet their full potential?

Ben Macpherson: I have already talked about the increase in the college budget and the university budget. The Government is investing £3.5 billion in the sector as a whole, in order to improve outcomes and ensure that our young people can fulfil their potential in further education, higher education or apprenticeships.

As a Parliament, we will soon enter a period when we make budgetary decisions. It will be the choice of the Parliament how much we invest in education in the next budget. If we want to realise our potential as a nation, engage in preventative spending, remain competitive economically and improve our society, education is an excellent investment to make.

Learning Priorities (Primary Schools)

5. **Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government what it considers to be the top three learning priorities for primary school pupils. (S7O-00120)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): We believe that every young person should receive an excellent education that equips them to succeed in life. The Scottish Government's priorities are to ensure all learners achieve the expected levels in literacy and numeracy, and that they engage in learning across the curriculum while developing attributes necessary to be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Scotland's curriculum is designed to equip young people with the foundations that they need for success. It has been endorsed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as the right approach for Scotland.

Senga Beresford: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response, although I am surprised that she mentioned literacy, as I recently spoke to a former deputy headteacher who currently serves in a senior role on Dumfries and Galloway Council, who told me that spelling is not deemed important in our current education system, due to the rise of spellchecker and Google. I ask the cabinet secretary to tell me how someone can google a word that they cannot spell.

Màiri McAllan: I will frame my response on the generality of the question, which was about the importance of literacy for our young people. Literacy plays an absolutely foundational role in lifelong learning, wellbeing and tackling poverty, which is why, in response to the initial question, I ranked it among the top issues.

I remind members that the latest data shows that the proportion of pupils who are achieving their expected curriculum for excellence levels in literacy has reached its highest recorded level for the second consecutive year in both primary schools and secondary schools.

Learning Estate Investment Programme (School Buildings)

6. **Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a serving councillor on Renfrewshire Council.

To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it is giving to future phases of the learning estate investment programme to support local authorities in delivering modern and sustainable school buildings. (S7O-00121)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): Although local authorities have the statutory duty for managing and maintaining the school estate, the Scottish Government is working closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities and the Scottish Futures Trust to drive further improvements. We are also developing a business case for a successor to our £2 billion learning estate investment programme, advice on which will come to ministers for consideration later this year.

That work builds on real progress. Our latest school estate statistics show that 92 per cent of school buildings are now in a "good" or "satisfactory" condition. As well as being a record high, that represents a significant improvement on the figure of 62.7 per cent in 2007, which was the position that we inherited when we took office in 2007.

Michelle Campbell: In my constituency of Renfrewshire North and Cardonald, the positive investment of the learning estate investment programme is essential in supporting local authorities in delivering modern and sustainable school buildings. Does the Scottish Government consider joint campuses to be a viable option for local authorities to maximise that investment?

Màiri McAllan: Local authorities will make estate decisions in consultation with communities to ensure that solutions for campuses reflect local priorities and deliver the best outcomes for learners. However, it is worth noting that our learning estate investment programme already includes examples of integration and inclusion across age groups, denominational and non-denominational schools, learners with additional support needs and community users. Examples include the Dunfermline learning campus, the Faifley community campus, the Neilston primary school campus, the Tain three-to-18 campus and the Wallyford learning campus.

Care Leaver Payment (Kinship Care)

7. **Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether children and young people in kinship care are eligible to receive the care leaver payment. (S7O-00122)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Siobhian Brown): The Care Leaver Payment (Scotland) Regulations 2026 state that, to be eligible for the care leaver payment, a young person must have been looked after under section 17(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 on or after their 16th birthday, and they must also have left care or continuing care on or after 1 April 2026.

The purpose of the payment is to help care leavers—those who have been looked after in accordance with section 17(6) of the 1995 act—to overcome financial challenges and to provide additional financial security when they leave care. Section 17(6) includes children who are in looked-after kinship care, which means that they are looked after by the local authority that places them with kinship carers. Young people who are subject to an order under section 11 of the 1995 act are not looked after for the purposes of section 17(6) and are therefore not eligible for the payment.

Duncan Dunlop: I thank the minister for that clarification. I would like to raise a specific example. We have been contacted by a grandmother who has looked after her grandchild as a kinship carer since they were a baby. This summer, the grandchild turns 18 and is looking forward to taking their first steps towards college and living more independently, with their granny's continued support and the financial cushion of the progressive care leaver payment that the Government brought in. However, because their grandparents were advised by the local authority to care for them under a section 11 order rather than a section 17(6) order, they are not eligible for the payment, as the minister pointed out.

In my view, that is a technicality. Similar discrepancies in relation to who can access the care-experienced students bursary have been ironed out. We know what the consequences are of not giving care-experienced people enough support through later life. Will the minister meet me and the grandmother to understand her situation with a view to removing that discrepancy for her

grandchild and all care-experienced people who are currently under a section 11 order?

Siobhian Brown: I am more than happy to meet the member. More broadly, however, we have to recognise the vital role that kinship carers play in caring for children and young people. That is why, earlier this year, we published "Scotland's vision for kinship care: our offer of support for families", following the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026, and introduced new rights for kinship carers and the children they care for.

We are now working with partners to develop a delivery plan to improve support and outcomes for kinship families across Scotland, so I would welcome a conversation with the member.

Island Communities (Support for Festivals)

8. **Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it will provide to festivals in island communities to ensure that they are sustainable. (S7O-00123)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): The Scottish Government and Creative Scotland have currently committed more than £13.5 million towards festivals on the islands. That comprises 16 awards totalling £12.9 million over three years, through multi-annual funding, and seven awards totalling £662,000 this year, through the expanded festivals funds, all for arts organisations delivering island festivals. Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland also support island festivals through Culture Collective, Screen Scotland's film festivals fund, Film Hub Scotland, the open project fund and the National Lottery awards for all. We are very pleased to do so, noting the value of those events.

Kristopher Leask: I welcome the cabinet secretary's answer and the additional support that has gone to island festivals.

Festivals on our islands, such as the Orkney Folk Festival, contribute hugely to island life and our national cultural offering. Although festivals in our cities and the central belt can grow due to the ability to add more venues and the availability of accommodation provision and transport links, our island festivals do not have the same opportunity to develop. They face constraints and are victims of their own success, in that they cannot increase their income substantially, yet have increasing costs.

Will the cabinet secretary commit to considering, alongside Creative Scotland and EventScotland, how we can deliver a pilot island festival fund to provide stability to those vital cultural events in unique circumstances?

Màiri McAllan: I absolutely take on board the points that the member raises. My initial answer set out that more than £13.5 million is already being made available for festivals on the islands, but I understand the point that he makes about those festivals having to be facilitated by transport links and so on.

I am happy to continue to work with the member and my ministerial colleagues in the transport portfolio to ensure that what is quite a significant investment can be put to best use through the availability of excellent transport links.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I associate myself very much with the comments and requests of Kristopher Leask.

This weekend sees the second Water Sound bluegrass festival take place in Burray, in my Orkney constituency. I therefore ask the cabinet secretary to offer congratulations to the organisers, Pete and Gail McAndrew, for getting the festival up and running. Will she also acknowledge that sustaining festivals of that type relies heavily on musicians such as my good friend Douglas Montgomery, who was recently inducted into the Scottish traditional music hall of fame for services to the community?

Màiri McAllan: I absolutely recognise the contribution of the folks whose names Liam McArthur has put on the record. I wish Pete and Gail McAndrew the very best of luck for the festival. I think that he said that it is taking place this weekend, in which case I hope that the weather holds up, as that could add something very special to a bluegrass festival.

On the general point about Scottish traditional music, I remind members of the Government's manifesto commitment to create a new national performing company for traditional music, which I think we all agree is exciting. I will be absolutely sure to engage with Liam McArthur and take advantage of the expertise of his constituents as we develop that new and exciting proposal.

Teachers (Workforce Planning)

9. **Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its priorities are for teacher workforce planning. (S7O-00124)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): The priority is to ensure that every pupil has access to high-quality teaching by having the right numbers of teachers in the right places across Scotland. Census data shows that, as a result of our continued investment, the number of teachers in our schools has increased for the first time in three years. Further, our 2026-27 budget provides local

authorities with an additional £186.5 million to protect teacher numbers.

We are undertaking a detailed national evidence-led teacher workforce planning exercise as we seek to understand and project the requirements for newly qualified teachers. We also have bursary schemes for hard-to-fill subjects. It is worth noting that we recently delivered a campaign to recruit more teachers into areas where there are shortages, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects.

Although we are committed to working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and others on long-term workforce planning, local authorities are ultimately the employer.

Adam Harley: Right now, a huge number of newly qualified teachers cannot find permanent full-time contracts. That forces many of them into temporary work or even into seeking teaching jobs abroad. Last week, Alex Cole-Hamilton raised that with the First Minister but, unfortunately, the First Minister did not answer the question.

Many of my constituents are stuck in that bind. They just want a solution that provides some certainty and allows them to teach. What steps will the cabinet secretary take to get the situation sorted for the benefit of teachers and pupils across Scotland?

Màiri McAllan: I will answer the question in two parts. The Government has worked hard to create and foster conditions to make teaching the attractive and exciting career proposition that we all know it can be. We have done that not least by ensuring that our teachers are the best paid across the United Kingdom but by ensuring the continuance of the best pupil teacher ratio across the UK—good classroom settings in which to teach.

Secondly, we are adopting the new policy of the three-year job guarantee for newly qualified teachers, directly in response to having heard concerns—exactly like those that Mr Harley has put on the record—from newly qualified teachers who are looking for a degree of permanence. We will be developing that policy, and I will be pleased to update the Parliament with more detail in due course.

School Leavers (Positive Destinations)

10. **Zen Ghani (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP):** I declare an interest as an elected member of Glasgow City Council. To ask the Scottish Government what steps were taken to achieve a near-record 93.5 per cent of school leavers heading into positive destinations in 2024-25. (S7O-00125)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Apologies—there has been a request to make a point of order.

Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP): I apologise—that was made in the wrong place. I was hoping that Zen Ghani would finish first. I will make my point of order thereafter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): There is no point of order, so we can move on. I believe that Zen Ghani wishes to speak.

Zen Ghani: Presiding Officer, I will ask my question again.

To ask the Scottish Government what steps were taken to achieve a near-record 93.5 per cent of school leavers heading into positive destinations in 2024-25.

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Ben Macpherson): I am sure that, collectively, we all want to congratulate the 2024-25 school leavers, 93.5 per cent of whom were in a positive destination nine months after leaving school. We will also, I am sure, want to recognise together the dedication of the practitioners who supported them to achieve that.

Those outcomes reflect sustained investment across our education system, including more than £1 billion through the Scottish attainment challenge and wider support for learning. We have strengthened employer engagement with schools and funded targeted support from professional careers advisers. There is more to do—always—but the foundation that we have is strong, as the figures show.

Zen Ghani: I welcome the minister's response and the positive work that has been done by schools across Scotland. Will he outline the work that has been done in my constituency of Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok, and the positive impact that it has had on local school leavers?

Ben Macpherson: We absolutely recognise the important work that is taking place in constituencies such as Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok, in which our local authorities, schools and partners are working together to support young people into positive destinations. Data is not available at a constituency level but, in Glasgow City, 94.9 per cent of leavers—which is even higher than the national figure—entered an initial positive destination in the academic year 2024-25. That is a very strong position across the city—a significant part of which the member represents.

The Government has engaged through headteacher round tables—for example, at Castlemilk high school—as well as with area leads for Developing the Young Workforce. If Zen Ghani would like any support from the Government to

connect with Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council or other stakeholders that may be of assistance in his constituency, we stand ready to help and serve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): That concludes portfolio question time.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sure that you are aware that employers are not liable for national insurance contributions for apprentices under the age of 25. Could you advise how one might correct the record if they had misled Parliament with regard to that fact?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): As the member is aware, that is not a point of order. However, he has put the matter on the record.

We have another point of order. Does Gary Bouse intend to make a point of order this time?

I remind members that if they wish to make a point of order, they should press the point-of-order button. If they do not wish to make a point of order, they should not. If Mr Johnson wishes to make a point of order in the future, I ask him to press the button, and I ask Mr Bouse not to if he does not.

Gary Bouse: Thank you, Presiding Officer. You are quite right—I apologise.

I should have declared an interest to members during my question earlier when I talked about the Larbert data centre, because I live in Larbert. I did not do that earlier, and it is probably right that I do. I apologise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): That is not a point of order. We move on to the next item of business.

Reform UK Priorities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00446, in the name of Malcolm Offord, on Scotland needs Reform: five years to 2031. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:06

Malcolm Offord (West Scotland) (Reform): We have had six weeks of debates on a variety of topics on which the Scottish National Party, as the largest party in the chamber, has set out its vision for Scotland for the next five years. The purpose of this debate is to state clearly that Reform Scotland does not share the SNP's vision of mediocrity and to make clear that Reform Scotland is far more ambitious for Scotland than has been set out by the SNP in the past six weeks.

The first debate in the new session of Parliament was a very half-hearted attempt by the SNP to put independence back on the table, even though the constitution is a matter that is reserved to Westminster and despite the fact that there is no appetite for separation in Scotland. That is mainly because the SNP still cannot answer basic questions on currency, pensions, borders and defence, and how on earth Scotland would ever join the European Union with a structural annual deficit of £30 billion versus a Maastricht maximum requirement of £10 billion. If the SNP were serious about independence, it would have spent the past 12 years since the independence referendum in 2014 preparing Scotland for separation, so that debate was purely performative. Reform Scotland is firmly of the view that, unless and until the SNP is able to answer the big questions of separation, the issue should be put firmly on the back burner and all our focus should be on making Scotland the most prosperous part of the UK.

We then heard several statements on the economy, where the SNP got into competition with the Greens about how many public services can be given away for free, as if that is the correct basis to judge any strong economy. Scots are too canny to be fooled by that. Nothing is for free. If it is not paid for by you, it is paid for by somebody else. With 1 per cent of Scots already paying 30 per cent of income tax and 10 per cent paying 50 per cent, it is pretty clear that we need more high earners to pay for all the freebies, so why on earth impose wealth taxes that drive away the highest earners? It is bonkers.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland has confirmed that Scottish taxes are too high and the six bands act

as a barrier to productivity, the Scottish Fiscal Commission has warned of a £5 billion black hole because welfare spending is out of control and the new Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform has stated that his plans do not envisage any cuts. Reform Scotland rejects that la-la land.

Instead, our vision of a prosperous Scotland is one where our citizens are incentivised to work, by allowing them to keep more of their own money through lower taxes; where welfare will always be available to those in need, but we put maximum effort into helping half a million Scots back into the workplace to allow them dignity and pride and the means to look after their families; and where we reduce state spending by cutting duplication and waste.

We know that, after excessive taxation, the second reason that is causing low growth in our economy is that we have the most expensive energy in the developed world. However, in yesterday's debate on energy, this place was literally an echo chamber, with all parties regurgitating the same old tropes of climate crisis and climate emergency. Meanwhile, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has quietly dropped those two emotive words from its lexicon because of the science.

Reform Scotland is clear that ideological net zero policies are causing disproportionate harm to the United Kingdom, given that the UK accounts for less than 1 per cent of global emissions, and that the fastest way to get our energy prices down is to pump our own North Sea gas onshore for domestic use only. There will be a complementary role for renewables, but only if they are commercially viable instead of relying on 50 years of subsidies, which has been the biggest transfer of money, from poor people to rich people, since Robin Hood.

If we truly want a growing economy to provide prosperity for everyone, which is the only sustainable way to combat rising costs of living, we need to get back to properly educating our young people. In the past 20 years, the SNP has presided over the collapse of our once gold-standard education from outstanding to average, but it does not call a debate on that subject—how cowardly. Reform Scotland would make education an urgent priority, to ensure that our young people can get real jobs in the real economy, with technical jobs that will not be taken away by artificial intelligence, for which skills and training are provided through tertiary colleges and apprenticeships, and universities that are focused on degree courses that will lead to high-value employment.

Finally, as well as a wealthy Scotland, we want a healthy Scotland—a society where our local communities feel valued and prioritised; where we will always welcome newcomers, so long as they contribute economically, respect our values and do not jump the queue for public services; and where a kinder Scotland is not defined by allowing men into women's spaces, and our children are allowed to grow up as normal girls and boys.

Those are the topics and policies that Reform Scotland's 17 newly elected MSPs have debated, in the first six weeks of the new session of Parliament, without fear or favour, but with knowledge, common sense and passion. Our group has real-life experience as well as significant technical expertise in all areas of policy, and we will be a strong voice for the silent majority.

The chamber should be chastened by the fact that, on May 7, 2 million Scots chose not to vote—a record low turnout, which proves that this chamber has lost its relevance to the Scottish people. When we come back in September, I ask that we have no more groupthink, please. Why? It is because, to paraphrase what General Patton once said, when everyone is thinking the same thing, no one is thinking. Reform Scotland is so ambitious for Scotland, and the status quo will not cut it. Our 17 MSPs will do the thinking, even if other members do not, and that is why Scotland needs Reform.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that strong and sustained economic growth is the foundation of a successful nation, where everyone can feel hope that effort will be rewarded, with opportunities and high-quality services for all; recognises that the Scottish Government's policy choices are constraining economic growth, including Scotland becoming the highest-taxed part of the UK, which risks disincentivising work and investment and undermining confidence in the economy; further recognises that high quality jobs and opportunities provide more than just tax for the Government, as the loss of purpose experienced through unemployment or not being able to use their skills in work is a major factor behind the reported rising mental health crisis; further recognises that economic growth depends on a diverse range of pathways into employment, not solely through university, and calls for greater emphasis on apprenticeships that provide real skills and faster entry into the workforce, alongside a broader subject offer in schools, including targeted action to be directed at core literacy due to one in four primary school aged children still not reaching expected levels of literacy; acknowledges that net zero will come to describe the level of economic growth should current environmental policy continue on its current trajectory; considers that economic growth also relies on secure, affordable and reliable energy, and that increasing North Sea production is essential for price stability and security of supply as part of a broad, market-driven energy mix; believes that too many net zero policies such as low emission zones are a regressive tax for those on lower incomes, which only further harms individual opportunities and economic growth; further believes that sustainable economic growth requires public policy that commands broad confidence and is grounded in evidence, and notes concerns that recent policy approaches, including on gender, have alienated a majority of people, and failed some of those they were intended to benefit; considers that

Lady Ross's landmark legal ruling on transgender prison guidance is a condemnation of the deviation from evidence backed policy and must be swiftly complied with; recognises that population policy and migration must support economic sustainability and public services, and calls, therefore, for the use of devolved powers to reduce incentives for illegal migration, such as through not allowing non-citizens access to social housing or Scottish welfare, and to ensure that limited public resources are focused on supporting economic participation and long-term growth.

15:13

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): First, I welcome colleagues across the chamber who join me in condemning the violence, xenophobia and racism that were experienced right here in the streets of our capital on Friday last week. There is no place for violence in the streets, homes, or communities of Scotland—whether it be race based, faith based or otherwise. My thoughts are with everyone who has been impacted by that appalling act—not just the victims who are directly affected but the communities who are now anxious and worried that they could be next to experience hatred by virtue of who they are, where they were born or the faith that they practise.

I thank and recognise Police Scotland for all the hard work that it does every day, and, in response to recent events, to make the people of Scotland feel safe and supported. Scotland is a place that values hope, tolerance and solidarity—values that are shared both by people who were born here and by those who have privileged us by choosing to make Scotland their home.

I hope that those values are shared by those who are fortunate enough to be in the chamber. We must all come together to ensure that our values as a welcoming, tolerant and hopeful Scotland are protected. The Government will lead from the front to tackle all forms of violence, division, and prejudice.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD): I welcome the minister's remarks about the Edinburgh attacks. Does he recognise, as do members on these benches, that as well as expressing solidarity with the Muslim community of Scotland, we owe them a debt of gratitude that there was no call for activism and action on the streets of Scotland by the Muslim community? There were no mass protests, violence, or police officer assaults, which shows a tremendous amount of restraint from a faith that is absolutely rooted in peace, tolerance and openness.

Tom Arthur: I welcome Mr Cole-Hamilton's remarks and associate myself with them entirely.

We want Scotland to be more than just a welcoming country. We want it to be a place that people actively want to live or locate in. That is why the Government is prioritising an economy with a strength that is felt by people, businesses and communities across Scotland. Scotland is a great place and, collectively, we are making it even greater. Delivering more jobs and higher wages and a progressive taxation system that funds high-quality public services will improve the lives of our people and support our businesses.

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): The minister talks about being a welcoming nation. Does he also recognise that we must be a functioning nation? Can he explain how the SNP intends to accommodate the growing population pressure? When we face such things as a housing shortage, general practitioner appointments that no one can get, and school places that are under pressure, how do we cope with increasing pressure on our resources?

Tom Arthur: The member may wish to dress it up in moderated tones, but let me call it out for the dog-whistle politics that it is. It is utterly transparent. We see it, we will not tolerate it and we will call it out.

Fair and progressive taxation creates the foundations of a productive economy. It allows us to invest in our people through measures such as our tuition free university system or our national health service that is free at the point of need. It helps to create the stability that our businesses need to invest, grow, and thrive. It makes Scotland an attractive place to live in, move to, start a family in, and start and grow a business in. The approach that is taken by the Government is contributing towards that. The newly released EY "UK Attractiveness Survey 2026" has found that Scotland remains the United Kingdom's top destination for foreign direct investment outside London for the eleventh consecutive year. Recent investment successes demonstrate the impact of the approach, including the investments by Ryanair at Prestwick and Center Parcs in the Scottish Borders.

Scotland is in an enviable position: we have great talent, institutions and opportunities. We do not lack in economic assets or ambition. A strong wellbeing economy is foundational to everything that the Parliament seeks to achieve, from eradicating child poverty to tackling the climate crisis and delivering quality public services. Economic growth must be felt by people, places, and businesses: felt as we eradicate child poverty through sustainable employment and support for families; felt as we deliver a just transition to net zero, creating industries of the future and protecting our climate; and felt as we sustain the public services that make Scotland the great place that it is to live in. Maintaining Scotland's reputation as a world-class place to live and make a home in is key to our current and future success.

There is no place for xenophobia in Scotland. Those who choose to make Scotland their home and to contribute to our culture, economy and communities should be welcomed, not demonised or frightened.

Angela Ross: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Tom Arthur: No, thanks.

We have the welcome challenge of an ageing population, and the demographic challenge of imbalances in how our population is spread across the country. Some parts of Scotland are depopulating, while others are growing at a breakneck pace.

Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Tom Arthur: No, thank you.

The positive impact of migration must be embraced if we are to succeed in our ambitions for this country. The Scottish Government recognises the critical importance of migration to secure our economic future and strengthen our communities right across the country. This Government is creating the conditions where all the people of Scotland can contribute to and benefit from the opportunities before us. Both the Scots born here in Scotland and the new Scots who have chosen to make this their home are critical to a strong wellbeing economy that is felt, and communities that thrive.

To deliver more jobs, higher wages and stronger communities, we need to seize the opportunities before us. To do that requires fast action now, deploying people and skills immediately to capture those opportunities. That means helping to attract some of the skills, talent and people from outside of Scotland and apply them here to seize the initiative and capture the benefits of our nation.

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Will the minister take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: No, thank you.

If we get this right, we will build a foundation for the future, locking in investment, jobs and industries that will provide opportunities over the long term. However, we cannot do that alone.

Energy is at the heart of our economy and will remain our largest economic opportunity into the future, delivering more investment, more good jobs and lower costs for households and businesses. Our priority is to secure maximum economic advantage and employment from that spend by capturing supply change and high-value jobs in Scotland, giving investors confidence that projects can move at pace and will benefit communities.

Malcolm Offord: In relation to the much-vaunted jobs in Scotland, how does the minister respond to the fact that, among all the turbines around our country, there is not a single blade made in Scotland?

Tom Arthur: I want Scotland to be able to fully benefit from all the economic opportunities, and that is what this Government is committed to doing. This is a devolved Government. It does not have the full range and suite of powers of some of our near neighbours, such as Denmark or Norway. However, we work constructively to attract investment and create local supply chains to benefit our economy. The biggest threat to that is the anti-net zero policies of Reform.

Let me be clear that delivering a just transition is a challenge. However, the Scottish Government will not retreat in the face of a challenge, especially when it is accompanied by opportunity—and the scale of that opportunity is massive. Scotland's energy networks alone plan to invest about £40 billion over the next five years to strengthen our electricity grid and make full use of our renewable energy. That £40 billion investment in the grid will create real opportunities for the people and businesses of Scotland. It is expected that between 10,000 and 20,000 jobs will be created in the short term, and those jobs will put real money into people's pockets.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): You do not have time to take an intervention, minister.

Tom Arthur: My sincere apologies, Liam Kerr.

However, this is not the full story. Over and above the build-out of our energy grid, Scotland can secure billions more in investment across onshore and offshore wind, battery storage and hydro schemes, as well as new sectors such as heat networks, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. Over the long term, forecasts estimate that up to almost 80,000 jobs could be supported by low-carbon energy sectors. We have the potential to harness that investment to make Scotland a leading exporter of renewable energy skills and innovative new technologies, and competitive in the global renewable supply chain. However, again—this is the crucial point—we need the skills, people and talent now if we are to seize this opportunity and build the foundations of our future economy and turn opportunity into jobs, wage growth and vibrant local economies.

That is why I am asking the Parliament to work together to create the conditions to deliver growth, and to back the Government's amendment.

I move amendment S7M-00446.2 to leave out from first "believes" to end and insert:

"condemns xenophobia, racism and hatred in society, including recent instances of intimidation, violence and disorder; further condemns the actions and language of those who seek to stoke such sentiments and division; agrees that such beliefs and actions do not reflect those of the vast majority of people living in Scotland, who value being a welcoming nation; welcomes the valuable contribution that migrants make to Scotland's communities and economy; reaffirms the Scottish Parliament's commitment to human rights and equality for all; supports an economy that gives opportunities and helps to deliver investment through progressive taxation to sustain the public services on which everyone relies, and recognises the economic opportunity that a just transition can offer to Scotland through investment and innovation."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Daniel Johnson to speak to and move amendment S7M-00446.1.

15:23

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Malcolm Offord opened the debate by saying that, through its motion, Reform rejects the SNP's version of mediocrity. What was clear from the rest of his speech was that that is because he has his own very special version of mediocrity.

The whole of Reform's approach to the debate is summed up by the motion. Somebody should really have told Reform members that this will not be the only Opposition debate that they will get, because they tried to put absolutely everything in the motion. I am sorry to poke fun, but they came to the Parliament saying that they were going to change things up. Let me say this to them: being inflammatory is not challenging consensus; being controversial is not the same thing as offering critique; and being chaotic is not delivering change.

We could forgive the Reform members for being inexperienced, but they have made this debate about them, so let us talk about them. I do not think that they do themselves any favours whatsoever. There is a place to talk about difficult issues and perhaps to challenge the consensus, but let us look at some of the things that they are talking about. We need to reform our public services, but scrapping 132 public bodies is not credible. That would include all the health boards, in one go, and it would include Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. Are we really saying that those should be run directly by the Government?

Angela Ross: Will Daniel Johnson give way?

Daniel Johnson: In a moment.

The proposal would also include things that the Government absolutely should not be running, such as the courts service. That is not credible.

Likewise, on energy—we need to talk about what a sensible mix looks like, but, if you wrap yourself up in climate denialism, you absolutely delegitimise your argument.

We do need to talk about migration. Did my party get it right when we opened up so quickly to accession countries? That should be debated. Was a net inward migration figure of 900,000 sustainable? I do not think that it was. We have to talk about the consequences, but, if you wrap yourselves up in the rhetoric of racism and intolerance, you totally devalue your arguments and you make it impossible to talk about the nuance that we must tackle.

Angela Ross: Would you not accept that when we talk about Scottish people, we mean people of all colours and faiths who are in Scotland?

Daniel Johnson: Were it only about the terminology that Reform is using, it would be one thing, but it is not. Let us look at some of the words used by Reform politicians, both here and in other places: calling for "cold rage", describing our justice system as being "two tier" and describing recent migrants as being of "fighting age". Those words constitute incitement and they are deeply problematic.

Let us go through why. First of all, those words are alienating. They actively and deliberately place divisions between fellow citizens and fellow residents of this country. They inspire a sense of conspiracy in the system itself. Ultimately, what they are deliberately designed to do—I think that members across the chamber know this—is instil a sense of threat among many people in our country.

When people feel threatened, they resort to violence. That is why I absolutely associate myself with the minister's words. We must all take responsibility for our words and reflect on the current circumstances and situations. Whether or not there is a direct causal link is one thing, but, in the context of recent violence, both in Scotland and elsewhere, it is certainly deeply irresponsible to use such rhetoric and language.

I understand and recognise that, in the new Reform group in the Parliament, there are many different members from many different backgrounds. I have got to know many of you and I have had conversations with you. I understand that some of you come from public service backgrounds and that most of you are here to do a job and to make a difference. However, I say this to you: is this the party that you want to be? Are these the politics that you want to enable and represent? [*Interruption*.]

Thomas Kerr is laughing. If he thinks that violence in this city is funny, I am outraged—

deeply outraged. He should think very carefully, because people in this city were injured. There was a clear incitement and the words that he and others in his party have used do not help that situation.

Malcolm Offord: Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: I will give way to Malcolm Offord.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Before that, I remind everyone that they should be talking through the chair and not directly to individuals or groups.

Malcolm Offord: I say to the member that the only incitement going on is coming from him as he raises his voice in this manner. [*Interruption*.] I said on the record last week, and I say it again now, that violence is never an answer to any problem. I will say it again: violence is never the answer to any problem, but that is not to ignore the problem. We need a cohesive society. Right now, we do not have that, and Reform is for cohesion in our communities.

Daniel Johnson: If Malcolm Offord does not believe that violence is the answer, why does he use rhetoric about people being of fighting age? What does rhetoric about fighting invoke? It directly and explicitly invokes violence. That intervention was not credible, and Malcolm Offord should think again.

Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Daniel Johnson: I am afraid that I do not have time for another intervention—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Mr Johnson, there is a point of order.

Julie MacDougall: Forgive me, Presiding Officer—I do not have the rule number in front of me, but I believe that my point of order comes under the rule on decency and courtesy. Pointing fingers in the chamber is disrespectful. We talked about respectful politics last week, but I cannot see much of that today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Thank you for the point of order. I remind all members about the standing orders on dignity and respect in the chamber.

I invite Mr Johnson to conclude his remarks.

Daniel Johnson: I am sorry if my finger offended anyone.

This is the 10th anniversary of Jo Cox's death. Only six members of Parliament have lost their lives while serving in office. Jo Cox's death in 2016 was at the hands of a right-wing extremist, and Sir David Amess's death in 2021 was at the hands of an Islamic extremist. In the past 10 years, our politics has become more filled with hate, which we should reflect on. We must confront difficult issues, but we must reject the politics of hate and violence. It is up to members to choose which path they want to pursue.

I move amendment S7M-00446.1, to leave out from

"strong and sustained economic growth"

to end and insert:

"only by fundamentally reducing inequality and creating an economy that works for everyone will Scotland be able to tackle division and hatred; condemns racism in all its forms and rejects a politics that aims to pit people against each other, exaggerating differences and exploiting disillusionment for personal political gain; agrees that building a fairer and more prosperous Scotland will depend on delivering economic growth that creates wealth and opportunities across the country and uses progressive taxation to fund strong public services; rejects the wasteful and short-sighted approach of the Scottish Government, which leaves working people in Scotland paying more but feeling like they are getting less in return, and believes that a better future for Scotland is possible but will depend on the Scottish Government finally unblocking housebuilding, reforming the skills system to support industry and workers and creating the energy jobs of the future so that the next generation continues to be better off than the last."

15:31

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This has been quite a lively debate so far. I might take a slightly more sympathetic approach to Reform than other colleagues who have spoken. To be fair to Reform members, they have been on a steep learning curve in relation to how they approach debates in the Parliament.

The kindest thing that I can say about the Reform motion is that it is an amateur production. I do not think that I have ever seen such a shambolic and convoluted conflation of so many different issues in a motion as I have today in Malcolm Offord's motion. The motion ranges from the economy and taxation to skills, apprenticeships, education, net zero, oil and gas, low-emission zones, transgender prisoners, immigration, housing and welfare. As far as I can see, the only things that have been left out—

Angela Ross: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I will give way in a second. The only things that have been left out are the NHS and justice. Virtually every topic in the remit of the Parliament is covered in the motion, as are some topics that are not in the remit of the Parliament. It is almost as if a troop of monkeys with typewriters

has been given the job of writing a motion to cover as many policy areas as possible.

Angela Ross: Does Murdo Fraser not think that all the topics that we cover in our motion are important for our voters and the public? Does he not think that those topics are worth a debate in the Parliament?

Murdo Fraser: I appreciate that Angela Ross and her colleagues are new to the Parliament. I will make what I hope is a constructive suggestion, which is that it would be more helpful to have a debate on any one of those topics to allow us time to discuss the issues in detail. We will all be here for another five years, so Angela Ross should not fire all her bullets at once. There will be plenty of opportunities in the next five years to come back and discuss the topics in detail, instead of pushing everything together at the start of the session.

I gently say to my Reform colleagues that they have some experience on their benches, and they might want to make use of it. Graham Simpson is an experienced parliamentarian who knows how to write a comprehensible motion, so they should perhaps turn to him for his talents.

We should perhaps not be surprised that Reform is in a state of confusion. After all the promises that were made about Reform members coming in to shake this place up, they cannot even get the basics right. If these are the foxes in the hen house, the chickens will be sleeping pretty safely tonight.

That seems reflected in Reform's most recent electoral performances. In last week's by-elections, Reform failed to deliver on expectations. In Makerfield, to the delight, I suspect, of colleagues on the Labour benches—or some of them, at least—there was an overwhelming victory for Andy Burnham in a seat in which Reform had originally been expected to do well. Closer to home, in Arbroath and Broughty Ferry, Reform trailed in third place behind our excellent Conservative candidate, Jack Cruickshanks, who managed to not only finish in second place but increase the Conservative percentage of the vote.

Most significantly of all, we had a superb Conservative victory in the Aberdeen South constituency, with my good friend Douglas Lumsden winning just shy of 50 per cent of the vote—a massive swing from the SNP. Reform received just 2,478 votes, or 8.6 per cent of the total. To put that in perspective, in the equivalent seat of Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine just last month, Reform managed to secure 17.7 per cent. Their vote is down by more than half in the course of a month.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Murdo Fraser: Perhaps Mr Simpson has an explanation for that.

Graham Simpson: I have personally congratulated Douglas Lumsden for winning that by-election.

However, the only reason for the by-election was that I managed to get double jobbing banned. Is it not ironic that Mr Fraser's party leader, Russell Findlay, opposed that move? Would he care to condemn Mr Findlay for that now?

Murdo Fraser: I thank Mr Simpson for that. That just shows what a wasted talent Mr Simpson is on the back benches, when he should be down the front, leading the charge for Reform.

We can reasonably conclude from recent elections that peak Reform has already come and gone, and Scottish politics will be all the better for that.

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): On the issue of electoral performances, will the member remind us where he currently sits in the chamber and how many members are on the Tory back benches? He might get the leadership role at some point, but that would be quite irrelevant at this point.

Murdo Fraser: Oh, Mr Kerr! I do not think that it is my leadership ambitions that people in his party need to worry about.

Let me turn, if I can, Presiding Officer, to the substance of the motion. There is much in Mr Offord's motion that we would agree with. Time does not permit me to deal with every policy issue.

Max Bannerman: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Yes, Mr Bannerman.

Max Bannerman: Although I am enjoying Mr Fraser's performance as the grandest of grandees in this Parliament as he gives us all a lecture on proper parliamentary procedure, will he offer an analysis of why, after 10 years as the Opposition in the Parliament, his party has been reduced to a rump of 12 seats and we are now sitting where he used to sit?

Murdo Fraser: I do not think that I could ever be as grand as Mr Bannerman. I am afraid that he is out of date. He is referring to results from a month ago; I am referring to results from just last week. The tide has turned already. It is the Scottish Conservatives that are on the way up, and it is Reform that is on the way down. [*Interruption*.] I will happily give way again, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We have to move on. Perhaps we could speak to the content of the motion that is front of us.

Murdo Fraser: I will go on all afternoon, if members wish me to.

Let me talk a little bit about the motion, because Malcom Offord makes a significant point that I agree with: the need for

"strong and sustained economic growth"

as the starting point for getting everything right in our society.

The first duty of Government should be to support that economic growth. Despite what Tom Arthur said earlier, Scotland has been badly let down over the past 19 years. Over the past decade, Scottish economic growth has lagged behind the rest of the UK. Even UK growth has not been great during that period, but Scottish growth has averaged only half of the UK rate. If only we had matched average UK growth rates over that period, we would have had billions more to spend on public services.

As part of the economic backdrop, we need constitutional stability, which is why the SNP talking continually about independence does not help the situation. It does not help investment.

Let us remember that the rest of the UK export market for goods and services from Scotland is worth three times what the EU single market is worth to Scottish businesses. However, the SNP's bright idea is to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom so that we can forge closer links with Europe, which clearly would be to the detriment of our business community.

We know that there are members on the Reform benches who are ambivalent about our place in the United Kingdom. Malcolm Offord has suggested that Scotland could have another referendum within 10 years. There are others, such as David Kirkwood, who has openly supported independence and said that he would vote for it once more.

It is clear that Reform cannot be trusted when it comes to Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. If people across Scotland want a party on the centre-right—

Helen McDade: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I am afraid that Mr Fraser must conclude and move his amendment.

Murdo Fraser: I will get to that at the end of the sentence, Presiding Officer.

If people across Scotland want a party on the centre-right that has grown-up policy solutions, that knows how to write motions in Parliament and that puts forward a credible platform to reduce taxes and improve economic growth, that party is not Reform, but the Scottish Conservatives. That point is made in my amendment, which I am very pleased to move.

I move amendment S7M-446.4, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"agrees that strong economic growth is essential to raising living standards, creating jobs and funding high-quality public services; notes with concern that, after nearly two decades of a Scottish National Party administration, Scotland continues to suffer from weak growth, low business confidence and poor productivity; further notes that Scotland has become the highest-taxed part of the UK, leaving workers paying more and making Scotland less competitive for investment, jobs and enterprise; recognises that Scotland's economic prospects are strengthened by its place in the UK, which remains Scotland's largest market and provides the stability, scale and security that businesses need to invest; believes that the Scottish Government should use the powers of the Scottish Parliament to grow the economy, lower the tax burden and support business, rather than pursue constitutional division, and calls on the Scottish Government to focus on making Scotland more competitive, more productive and more attractive as a place to work, invest and do business."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Willie Rennie to speak to and move amendment S7M-00446.4.

15:40

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): Daniel Johnson's remarks were powerful, and he identified an issue that is sometimes uncomfortable and that we need to address. The country faces difficult issues, and we do ourselves no favours by ignoring those issues. Some of the points that Daniel Johnson made about immigration were right, and we need to discuss them. We should not be called racists just because we raise such issues—Daniel Johnson was right on the mark with that.

Equally, we have a responsibility to address questions, whoever they come from and whichever party they come from, with dignity and respect, but with that comes a responsibility for those who ask the questions. We have been in politics for long enough, so we know about loaded language and the use of particular words in particular ways. Again, Daniel Johnson highlighted that when he talked about comments on "fighting-age men", "strangers" and "two-tier policing". We know what those terms mean and what they are appealing to.

Thomas Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Yes, I will take an intervention from Mr Charmer himself.

Thomas Kerr: I have been called a lot worse in this chamber.

On the point about watching our language, Mr Johnson forgot to mention the word "stranger", which was interesting because, in May 2025, it was Keir Starmer who used the phrase "island of strangers". Where was Mr Johnson's faux outrage about that when he was banging on his desk? Is that outrage contingent on his comments being about Reform?

Daniel Johnson: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I am sorry, but I am not going to allow an intervention. The intervention was on Mr Rennie, not on Mr Johnson.

Willie Rennie: I do not want to speak for Mr Johnson, but I think that the Prime Minister corrected that and said that he regretted using that language. I just wish that Mr Kerr would reflect a bit more on the language that he uses, because it does him no favours. We all make mistakes—I have made plenty of mistakes in my life—but the important thing is that we understand when we get something wrong.

We need a society that is cohesive and that pulls together, because we can achieve the society that we want only by pulling together and by working together in partnership rather than by pitting one part of the community against another. We have some wonderful people in our country. No matter where they come from, who they are or who they identify as, they are wonderful people whom we should cherish and support.

Members will have heard me talk about my deep concern that so many people are economically inactive and that growing numbers of young people are unemployed and unable to find a job. I am concerned about the significant growth in issues around neurodivergence and mental health, and the fact that, in schools, more than 40 per cent of young people have an identified additional support need. That is a huge loss of talent and of good people, and we should look to provide the support that they deserve. That is not just good for them; it is good for us as well, because our greatest asset in our economy is our people. That is why companies come from all over the world to base themselves here—to access the talent that comes from our colleges and universities and from our excellent schools. All of that comes together, which is why companies come here.

Malcolm Offord: I agree with Mr Rennie, and I have been on the record many times talking about the 750,000 Scots of adult age who are not working. What is so wrong with us, in this chamber, recognising that and prioritising getting our own people back to work in good jobs in our community rather than bringing people in from outside the country? We have our own base of talent that we are not maximising. Why is it so controversial to say that we should get our own people back to work?

Willie Rennie: There is another one of those terms—"our own people". Who are "our own people"? The carers I met at Balnacarron care home in St Andrews on Saturday, who had come from Nigeria, are wonderful people who do a fantastic job. If people come here and contribute, that is wonderful. Why use the term "our own people"? Let us ditch that language.

Helen McDade: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now—I am trying to address Mr Offord's point.

I do not disagree with the fundamental point that too many people are not economically active and are held back for a variety of reasons. However, rather than dividing those people from others, let us focus on what they need. Let us come up with the good solutions that can get them back to work.

Malcolm Offord is nodding away, so why do Reform members not ditch the crap? They should ditch the language that divides, which does not help us at all.

The good solutions—it is about goodness—are what we should strive for. I want good, warm homes. I want to ensure that we have good and decently paid jobs. I want to have good, sustainable energy sources that are affordable for people.

Helen McDade: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

I want good early intervention in education and mental health. I want a good, enlightened society that is internationalist, tolerant and open minded—good people who look for goodness in society. That might sound all gooey, but it is what our Parliament should strive for: the goodness in our society that brings out the best in our people.

To deliver some of that—

Helen McDade: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: No, I will not take an intervention just now. I have taken several interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Mr Rennie, you will have to come to a conclusion.

Willie Rennie: Rather than seek division, I want us to seek unity. We will not do that by dividing; we

will only do it by uniting together to make a difference. Let us go for that. Let us achieve some goodness in this world.

I move amendment S7M-00446.4, to leave out from first "recognises" to end and insert:

"; further believes that Scottish Government policy should work for every region of Scotland, with adequate public transport links, infrastructure and housing to meet the needs of communities and both traditional and emerging sectors of the economy; recognises the need for a dynamic and skilled workforce, as well as significant and targeted investment in Scotland's world-class colleges and universities; further recognises that skilled inward migration is vital to sustaining key sectors of the economy; understands that the crisis in the NHS will only be addressed when considered alongside the crisis in the social care sector, and that migration is a key aspect of addressing those challenges; believes that Scotland has a proud history of offering safe harbour to refugees from across the world, and resolves to strive for a Scotland that protects the rights and interests of all, regardless of who they are or where they come from."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Patrick Harvie to make the last of the opening speeches.

15:46

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To be honest, I was tempted to ignore this debate altogether. I can think of a dozen better things I could do with a few hours than debate one of the most incoherent motions that I have seen in 23 years in this Parliament. Goodness knows what shape it was in when the chamber desk first got its hands on it and tried to sort it out. I saw little point in writing an amendment. I thought that, as long as there was at least one "delete all and replace" amendment, it would inevitably be an improvement, so I will vote for the Government's amendment.

However, dangerous and toxic arguments are being deployed here and they need to be challenged. That challenge is important because, when other politicians and the media choose to ignore the arguments of far-right populism or, worse still, excuse them under the guise of "legitimate concerns", they gradually legitimise them. We need to take the arguments on and set out clearly—not only here, in Parliament, but around the country—why they are wrong.

Let us start with the economic arguments. The motion repeats that tired old canard of Scotland being the

"highest-taxed part of the UK",

which is a claim that ignores the higher council tax rate in England, costs such as tuition fees and prescription charges and the progressive nature of income tax, which taxes the highest earners a bit more. If you earn a little bit above average, the difference in your income tax bill is tiny; if you earn a lot more, you start to pay your fair share. That is how we build, to quote the motion,

"a successful nation, where everyone can feel hope".

It is how we pay to protect public services, tackle poverty and more. However, how could we expect a political party that is run by millionaires and funded by billionaires to understand that or even to care? It will always serve the interests of the super-rich.

The motion talks about incentivising work, but that mindset says that, to motivate the wealthiest to contribute to society, they must be offered ever greater wealth and, to motivate the poor, they must be threatened with ever deeper poverty. The idea of collective solutions for our shared social welfare is anathema to Reform, which is why its priority is massive tax cuts for the rich, massive welfare cuts for the poor and even more austerity for public services.

On net zero, which yesterday's debate showed most political parties understand to be a necessity and an opportunity, Reform members repeatedly said that they support the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change position even as they appealed for ever more fossil fuels while the mercury rises outside.

Let me tell the chamber what the IPCC chair said only last month. He said:

"At current levels of warming, we can already see the effects of extreme events, including intense heat, wildfires, flooding, heavy rainfall and tropical cyclones. These cause disruption and devastation, highlighting the vulnerability of our globally interconnected societies."

As Brian Hoskins, the chair of the Grantham research institute on climate change and the environment, has said,

"the discourse around net zero is increasingly decoupled from that science and our changing weather. While it is right to debate costs and implementation, public and political discussion increasingly overlooks the fundamental 'why'. Net zero is not an arbitrary slogan, rather it is dictated by the laws of physics. To halt warming, net greenhouse gas emissions must stop. Pretending we can safely slow the transition ignores the certainty of escalating climate costs, which will fall most heavily on vulnerable, lower-income households."

Helen McDade: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: No, I will not be taking interventions.

Those are the voices that we should be listening to, not Nigel Farage's hand-picked politicians.

The anti-environment parts of today's sprawling motion are followed by a brief but deeply ironic call for evidence-based policy, before it moves on to its other major theme: the culture war agenda.

Whether it is transphobia or the immigrant bashing that we have heard for the past few weeks, it is all about encouraging people to blame some of the least powerful people in society for the problems that we face—problems that are, in truth, caused by austerity and the hoarding of wealth by the super-rich.

In just one line, the motion moves seamlessly from singling out so-called "illegal migration" to calling for measures against what it calls "non-citizens"—people who are, overwhelmingly, here legally. However, we all know that, just as we all know the effect—in my view, the intended effect—of such rhetoric. We saw it in the racist riots of 2024, and we have seen it this year in Belfast, in Glasgow and, most recently, in Edinburgh. It is not accidental. Those who use divisive and racist rhetoric are culpable.

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): I thank Patrick Harvie for his generosity in taking an intervention. Like him, I condemn the violence that we have seen in Edinburgh and elsewhere. He might be aware that, in my constituency, fascist and far-right racist disinformation led to a riot on the streets of Arbroath, with police officers being targeted with violence. I am sure that he condemns that, as I do. Does he agree that everyone in the chamber needs to stand up against that type of disinformation?

Patrick Harvie: I very strongly agree. I was not going to try to list every place where there have been riots, but I recognise the importance of the experience of Lloyd Melville's community. I have urged the Government to develop a disinformation strategy.

To be honest, the main thing that has surprised me about Reform since the election is how low key it has been. I think that Reform members expected to arrive here full of drama, as an anti-establishment force to shake things up, but not a word of Reform's motion would have been out of place in any Conservative Party motion in the past six years, and not a word of it would be out of place in a *Times* or *Telegraph* column. It is as establishment as it gets.

Being a low-energy populist is a bit like being a vegetarian vampire—it scares nobody and it will not even keep the audience entertained. I do not want Reform to succeed as a political party, because I think that its values are toxic, so I probably should not be in the business of offering it advice, but here it is anyway. If it wants to play the far-right populist card, it will need to do so with a bit of vim and verve—a bit of personality—which has been entirely lacking so far.

Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: No, I will not give way.

I do not think that Reform itself is the true threat that our politics faces. Despite its economic irresponsibility, anti-environment ideology and instinctive desire to punch down on minorities, I do not think—to be frank—that Reform members are good enough at the job to be a real threat in their own right. The real danger is if the Government comes to feel that that is the standard against which it will be judged—that all that it needs to do is say that climate change is real and that racism is bad, and that it will then look progressive by comparison. That must not happen. The Government should not be judged in contrast with the incoherent agenda that Reform has to offer. Instead, it must be judged against its promises to accelerate climate action, eliminate child poverty and truly build a more equal and sustainable Scotland.

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

15:54

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): It is my intention to stay as positive as I possibly can during the debate. I have seen people I have worked with on a cross-party basis—people I have respected for years—get extremely angry about some of the language that has been used in here. I feel their pain. It is easy for us to get to that stage. The people sitting on the other side of the chamber do not seem to see that. They do not seem to understand that their words actually mean something in the real world.

Before I turn to the motion, which Malcolm Offord did not actually do, I want to say something about Scotland today—the Scotland that I know. Today, in the United States, thousands of our citizens have once again shown what Scotland is all about, and they are doing our country proud. The tartan army have travelled in numbers, as they always do, and they have shown the world exactly what Scotland is all about. Scotland is good humoured, looks for friendship and shows respect to others and their culture—and is a wee bit gallus. With a determination to enjoy themselves while making friends wherever they go, the tartan army have been fantastic ambassadors for our country. They remind people that Scotland is a confident, generous and welcoming nation—a nation that is comfortable in its own skin and happy to open its arms to others. In a world where too many seek to divide people, the tartan army have once again shown the very best of who we are.

Tonight, Scotland face five-time world champions Brazil. People often say, "It's the hope that kills you." The sporting legend Muhammad Ali put it differently. He said:

"If my mind can conceive it and my heart can believe it, then I can achieve it."

That is what hope does. Hope is not a weakness; hope drives people forward. It is what makes Scotland fans believe that Scotland can beat Brazil, it is what makes communities believe that they can build better futures, and it is what makes nations believe that they can achieve more than others tell them is possible. It is hope that makes us want to win. It is hope that makes us want to overcome obstacles in front of us. It is hope that makes communities pull together, families support one another and nations strive for something better. Most of all, it is hope that makes us want to build a better future and become better people.

The spirit of hope, optimism and belief has always been part of Scotland's heart and Scotland's story, which is why the motion feels so out of place in our chamber. Where Scotland sees hope, Reform sees grievance. Where Scotland sees opportunity, Reform sees division. Where Scotland sees people coming together, Reform sees somebody else to blame. I have to confess that, when I first read the motion, I wondered whether it had been written in various stages during a very long night in the pub.

We know the type of motion. At first, it sounds reasonable enough: there is a discussion about economic growth, which is fair enough—we can all agree that we want a stronger economy that is good for jobs and opportunities for our young people. Then, however, paragraph by paragraph—or pint by pint—it becomes something else entirely. By the end, it reads like the ramblings of a very angry man sitting on his own in the corner of the pub, complaining about immigrants, about net zero, about equality, about young people and about Scotland—and eventually falling out with absolutely everyone else in the pub. It is less an economic strategy or a political vision; it is more "Last orders, please."

That is the problem with Reform. For all the noise, shouting and social media outrage, what is being offered here? Division, grievance and a constant search for somebody else to blame. The motion refers to growth, but it spends most of its time talking about migrants, gender issues and culture wars. It is as if somebody started writing an economic plan and, halfway through, they decided to go on to Twitter and saw what the latest ramblings were there.

Reform members would have us believe that they are the outsiders, the anti-establishment rebels and the voice of ordinary people, but let us consider who has produced the motion. It is millionaires lecturing working-class communities about hardship. The architects of Brexit are now turning up to explain why the economy is not working—you couldn't make it up. That takes a level of brass neck that would make some people in Westminster blush. Let us be honest: the biggest act of economic self-harm in modern British history was not net zero, low-emission zones or devolution; it was Brexit. Who is standing front and centre, waving the flags and making the promises? It is Nigel Farage—the same Nigel Farage who promised prosperity and delivered labour shortages, higher costs, barriers to trade and years of economic uncertainty—

Malcolm Offord: Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam:—and now he is back, demanding that Scotland trusts him again.

Talking of trust, I ask Mr Offord: is he going to say anything that the people of Scotland can trust?

Malcolm Offord: Does the member recognise the inconvenient truth of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development numbers that say that, in the 10 years since the UK left the European Union, growth in the UK was 13 per cent? That is not very good—in the USA, it was 26 per cent. However in France, it was 12 per cent; in Italy, 10 per cent; and in Germany, 6.4 per cent. What has been said is a fiction.

George Adam: His lordship's argument is that it is slightly better than it is for somebody else next door. That is complete and utter nonsense.

Presiding Officer, I used to be in the motor industry—if someone sold you a second-hand car that immediately burst into flames, you would not turn up and ask for a second one, would you? You would not trust them, and yet Reform expects Scotland to do exactly that.

The reality is that Scotland's future has never been built on division; it has been built on community and solidarity and, yes, it has been built by people who came here from elsewhere and made Scotland their home. The SNP amendment, rightly, recognises the enormous contribution that migrants make to our economy, our public services and our communities. In Paisley, as in every part of Scotland, we know that: our NHS knows it, our care sector knows it and our businesses know it. The only people who seem to be confused about all of that are those in Reform UK.

While Reform talks Scotland down, I prefer to look at what Scotland has achieved: free prescriptions, the Scottish child payment, investment in childcare, action on child poverty and a health service protected from the privatisation agenda that those in Reform all want.

Things are not perfect—of course they are not. No Government would ever claim that things were perfect. However, the answer to every challenge is not to point the finger at the nearest migrant,

environmental policy or minority group. That is not leadership; it is political laziness. What Scotland needs is confidence in ourselves—confidence to build our communities and confidence in our ability to build a fair economy that works for everyone.

We need confidence that our future is not bound up in the bitterness and division offered by Reform UK. When I look at Reform UK, I do not see a vision for Scotland's future; I see a party that is permanently angry at the modern world, which mistakes outrage for policy and volume for wisdom, and which seems determined to fight yesterday's arguments while Scotland is building for tomorrow.

I will continue to believe that Scotland's future lies not in fear, division and blame but in fairness, opportunity, love and hope. That is the Scotland that I know and it will certainly long outlast Reform UK.

16:02

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): No one in this Parliament could argue that Scotland is where it needs to be. We have thousands of Scots waiting for NHS treatment and schools that are falling down the international league tables. As Willie Rennie rightly pointed out, across the UK, more than a million people aged 16 to 25 are not in employment, education or training. Millions more face the prospect of never owning their own home, while more than 10,000 children in Scotland do not have a home to call their own. There is the existential threat of climate crisis, as the mercury rises and yet more heat records are broken this very week. With war, genocide and threats to our national security, it is little wonder that people across our country feel let down, left out and worried about the future. They work hard and pay tax but feel as though the system is rigged against them. It is—but not for the reasons that Reform UK wants us to believe. There have been 14 years of Tory austerity, 19 years of SNP waste and incompetence, and a political class consumed by navel gazing and culture wars, which feels increasingly detached from the people it is supposed to serve.

However, when they shift blame, populists of all political stripes serve only themselves and their own political ends. They deceive people when they say that there are easy answers to the difficult problems that our country faces—answers such as a new constitutional settlement, freeing ourselves from the shackles of Brussels or Westminster, or blaming the other—be it an immigrant, a refugee or someone on benefits.

As others have said, Reform's motion identifies some of the problems in our society—a flatlining economy, crisis in our public services and a lack of good, skilled jobs—but it is not interested in identifying who is really to blame or offering any genuine solutions.

There is underlying inequality in our society. For too many people, the die is cast from their earliest days. Structural problems—not least, the state of our education system and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few—leave people trapped in cycles and generations of poverty. That is why I am a member of the Labour Party and why I am in this Parliament to represent the interests of the people of my region.

Rather than hunt for the difficult, honest answers to the problems that our society faces, it is much easier for populists to point the finger at the outsider and the marginalised.

Last week, I led a members' business debate to mark the 10th anniversary of the death of Jo Cox. Jo Cox was murdered by a white supremacist with links to a US-based neo-Nazi group. As the forces of populism and the far right seek to take hold of our country, they must recognise that there are those who will respond to their incendiary rhetoric—for that is what it is—with violence. The events in Leith last weekend, which others have rightly condemned—I wholly associate myself with those remarks—are a potent reminder of that fact. For a politician or a tech billionaire, such rhetoric might just be words, but to the radicalised, the marginalised and the isolated, it is a call to action.

Jo Cox was a highly political person who had strongly held convictions. She was someone who knew right from wrong and was not afraid to stand up and be counted. She has been very much in my thoughts of late.

Helen McDade: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Young: No.

I genuinely want to find common ground in the Parliament, to recognise the humanity of those across the chamber from us and to work together with them for the good of the country, but there are lines that I will not cross. I appeal to those who seek to divide us to recognise what they are unleashing on our country and the devastating consequences that their words and actions could have.

16:06

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): I want to start by saying that I had no intention of coming into politics, but I have spent a long time watching people in the Parliament, who are apparently our politicians, behaving in a somewhat similar way to the way that they are

behaving today. I am disappointed. I entered Parliament because I was fed up. I came here to make a difference and to represent people out there who are completely fed up with how things are run in here. That is why half of them did not even bother voting. There are 17 Reform members in the Parliament because the other parties are failing.

I want to be a bit more constructive by turning to consider the particular area of education. I welcome the ability to speak on many different topics, because so many things are broken that that is necessary. Once our education system was the gold standard for the world, but over the past 20 years it has slipped from outstanding to merely average. With that decline has come the greatest period of uncertainty for Scotland's young people, who deserve better.

For too long the Scottish Government has presided over an education system that has drifted from its core purpose. It has narrowed opportunity, elevated one, academic pathway above all others and left Scotland's real economy crying out for the knowledge, skills, trades and technical expertise that our future depends on.

So, let me be clear. Today, Scotland stands at a crossroads. The path that we choose now will determine whether this nation rises to meet the future or resigns itself to decline. That is one of the many reasons that brought members of Reform into the Parliament. We must confront the most fundamental failure of all. One in four children in Scotland leave primary school without the appropriate level of literacy. Let us take a moment to consider that.

Yi-pei Chou Turvey (North East Scotland) (LD): The member says that we are at a crossroads and that we could be resigning ourselves to decline, but does she not think that Brexit, which happened 10 years ago as a result of the actions of the forefather of her party, is the source of the decline that has been hanging over all of us for the past decade?

Angela Ross: I strongly disagree. I think that we have had 20 years of a Government that has not delivered for the people of Scotland.

As I said, one in four children are suffering because they do not have the appropriate levels of literacy. That is unforgivable. As the *Times Educational Supplement* has warned, children who struggle to read at that stage of their development face a higher risk of lifelong difficulties, poorer health, unemployment and involvement with the criminal justice system, with disadvantaged children being the hardest hit. That is unacceptable.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Will the member give way?

Angela Ross: I am going to continue, because I do not have enough energy.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): What?

Angela Ross: Deputy Presiding Officer, may I continue?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member does not have to take an intervention, but if she does, she gets additional time.

Angela Ross: I will continue.

Literacy is the foundation upon which opportunity is built in life. We need a knowledge-based curriculum. We have lost the excellent curriculum that we once had. We need to assess learning. For literacy purposes, we need a phonics-first approach, which does not mix with cueing or whole-language methods. Someone said that Reform does not offer solutions, but that is a solution that is used successfully in England, Australia and Canada, which have higher attainment levels than Scotland.

Reform's ambition is to reinvigorate our education system so that every young Scot has early, clear and credible pathways into productive work and productive lives. That will benefit society, communities and our economy. Learning is not something that happens once at a single stage in life; it is a lifelong journey of acquiring skills and knowledge.

We must broaden the subjects on offer. Alongside science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, we must restore the arts, because creativity and critical thinking are not optional extras. They help young people analyse information, question assumptions, solve problems and make sound decisions in every area of life. They teach them how to think, not what to think. After our debate today, I am glad that we will be looking at doing that as part of our movement forward, because we need people who can scrutinise what is going on in the world around them. That is essential not only for innovation but for confidence, resilience and responsible citizenship.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member should start to wind up.

Angela Ross: In post-school education, we need to look more closely at apprenticeships and ensure that we offer additional options through partnering with industry. Engineering UK forecasts a shortfall of 20,000 engineers by 2030 unless apprenticeship numbers rise sharply. We should look at ensuring that apprenticeships are a

resource that can help young people build skills, confidence and careers.

Scotland can rise again—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member must draw her remarks to a close.

Angela Ross:—but only if we build an education and skills system that is worthy of our history and essential to our future.

Scotland needs Reform.

16:12

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a nurse in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and am an elected member of Renfrewshire Council.

I have agreed with many of the points that have been made by members, particularly those on this side of the chamber, which will come as no surprise. In particular, I associate myself strongly with the point that Willie Rennie made when he talked about his visit to a care home. It is important that we recognise that the issue that he identified is not just a fundamental issue now. Back in the 1960s, it was bus drivers that were needed. My papa came to the country and became a bus driver, because that is where we had a deficit at that time. Naebody wanted to do the job, we needed people to do the job, and we had people who were willing to do the work. That is a simple concept that needs to be digested right now.

At this time, it is also important that we recognise that our care industry relies on people having caring competencies. Not just anyone can do care work, and we should not be so disregarding of people who are doing such essential jobs. If we have people—highly skilled individuals—who we can entrust with the care of our vulnerable people, we should invest our time in that. We need to recognise the impact that Brexit has had in that regard. It has been devastating, because we had many people from across Europe who would do that job. We cannot recognise some parts of the issue and not recognise others.

Reform demonstrates nothing but contempt, disregard and ignorance towards this Parliament. Its own lack of understanding of good governance and parliamentary due processes sells the public an illusion that it cares for people in our communities who are finding it tough, when in fact all that it cares about is its multimillionaire funders and tax cuts for the highest earners, none of which best serves the people of Scotland. Reform would have our NHS decimated and in the hands of the highest private sector bidders without any hesitation.

Rather than pontificating and using inflammatory words, as has been pointed out by several members, Reform should consider what it stands for. It is weak on policy. It seems to think that it has everything wrapped in a bow in five policy areas and a couple of paragraphs. I may not agree with some of the policies and directions of the other parties, but at least they have them. That is what shapes debate and progresses the direction of decision making and the public duty that we have all been elected to serve.

The SNP has been in Government for 19 years in Scotland. The electorate chose to return the SNP as the biggest party in the Parliament. That was acknowledged and recognised only a few weeks ago in the SNP being returned to Government, without objection, in our democratic processes and with mutual respect and cross-party agreement in the chamber.

The political landscape has been volatile. The impacts of living through and recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic have been significant. We must recognise the cost in lives and wellbeing and to our society and economy. We could not have predicted the extent of that impact. As much as we all want to move on, that is not how recovery works. It takes time and requires focus and strong leadership—which we have under our First Minister, John Swinney.

Global conflicts impact not just our safety and security but our economy. However, sadly, the greatest cost of conflict is to the lives of those who are closest to the wars. In some dire circumstances, death is seen as peace, due to the inhumane torture that is inflicted. Gender-based violence is wielded as a weapon. Regardless of how much we have learned from past conflicts, the motivation of man and those with the deepest pockets and selfish endeavours cost us all the highest price—in human lives. Scotland will never sit quietly on the sidelines of injustice. Our international relationships and investments are for the betterment of our society and Scotland on an international platform. Our power, strength and growth are empowered by humanity, not just traditional economic drivers.

In the past few days, we have been reminded that,10 years ago, Scotland was dragged out of the EU against our will. Sixty-two per cent of our population who voted wanted to remain. Our vote was ignored and our requests for mitigations have been continually undermined and dismissed. When it comes to gross domestic product, there was a cut to public revenue of 2.5 per cent—£2.3 billion. That is not the action of a union of equals, and it is a restriction on our growth as a nation.

Despite that, the SNP Government is promoting Scotland as the destination of choice for international investment, and it often outperforms all other areas outwith London.

Progressive taxation is the fairest approach to supporting growth and investment for the future of public services. It allows for our national performance framework to have focus in sustainable development and in the reforms that are required to achieve that. Delivering on the agenda of a wellbeing economy is a shift change in our values as a society and, fiscally, promotes growth through resilience and stability.

When it comes to economic growth, macroeconomic levers—such as interest rates, trade and immigration—are reserved matters. It is a falsehood for Reform to paint a picture of "SNP bad". The SNP is mitigating the issues and best protecting our nation despite the constrictions of the current governance arrangements.

Ultimately, the Westminster system holds Scotland back. The full fiscal levers of Scottish independence are required for long-term planning and actions that would allow Scotland to flourish. If Reform truly wanted to support growth, it would support Scottish independence.

16:18

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): An interesting debate—shall we put it in that way? Reform has set out the issues and we are here to talk about those issues.

I have often wondered why the Parliament and, in particular, the Scottish Government have had such poor energy policies; why they have failed to grasp energy reality and not acknowledged that we have the highest energy costs in the world and that that fact is driving de-industrialisation and closing down some of our most important industrial sites, such as the Grangemouth refinery and Mossmorran; why we have a fragile grid, such that, if Torness or Peterhead power plants closed, we would have significant risks of blackouts; why the Scottish Government has a presumption against new oil and gas; why it refuses to fully back new, ready-to-go projects such as Jackdaw and Rosebank; and why it does not back new drilling and licences.

We heard the answer to some of that yesterday. It is due to an ideological adherence to the net zero agenda, the prioritisation of net zero above growth, jobs, the cost of living and, indeed, people's wellbeing.

The Government ignores any trade-offs and takes a *Pravda*-like approach by telling everyone that its plans are working and a fingers-in-the-ear approach by ignoring the realities such as higher bills, deindustrialisation and an utter failure to reduce our globally insignificant emissions since 2020.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will make one simple observation. Duncan Massey was talking about the realities of the net zero agenda and questioning why we have it, but does he recognise that France recorded its highest temperature on record yesterday and that that is a material consequence of the climate emergency?

Duncan Massey: I am not aware of the record or of whether yesterday's was the highest temperature recorded in France. The temperature in Britain yesterday was the highest it has been since 1976. At one point, I was worried that it was going to be the highest temperature recorded since 1966, which might have been a bad omen. However, I acknowledge climate change; I acknowledged it very clearly yesterday.

France provides one of the best examples in Europe of an energy system that actually works. That is because its energy mainly comes from nuclear. France took that decision a long time ago, because it has a serious energy policy.

Let us be clear: our policies are not working and they are not proportionate. That needs to change. We need a far more pragmatic energy policy.

First, we need to revitalise our oil and gas industry. We need our oil and gas industry for price stability and for security of supply. We will need oil and gas for decades. Increasing our North Sea oil and gas production will reduce imports and emissions, because imports have higher emissions associated with them. We can do that; the North Sea has a strong and vital future.

If we choose to do that, we need to urgently remove the energy profits levy; provide unambiguous support for Jackdaw, Rosebank and all new projects, licences and drilling; and restore maximum economic recovery as our guiding principle.

Much of oil and gas policy is not within the competence—literally—of the Scottish Government, but the Government is good at challenging the UK Government when it suits. It called for an end to the energy profits levy, so why not call for changes to the law around planning regulation for oil and gas? It is not that hard.

The industry's confidence is damaged because we have a devolved Administration that sits on the sidelines, sniping and jeering when we need the Scottish Government to be an unambiguous champion and supporter of our North Sea and oil and gas industry. What we have is the exact opposite, and we can see that in the petrochemical industry. The Government does not care about

Grangemouth or Mossmorran. It certainly does not care enough to change its policies.

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): It was not the SNP that closed Grangemouth. Had we been independent, we could have protected that strategic resource, which would have been producing jet fuel when it was in short supply. Had we been independent, Scotland could have been protected by the Scottish Government. Closing Grangemouth was a Westminster decision and it had nothing to do with us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Duncan Massey is already in additional time, so he should not take any more interventions.

Duncan Massey: What Alex Kerr said is fantasy. The SNP's intervention was to try and turn Grangemouth into a beetroot refinery. Those people are out of their minds.

It is simple: if we want real economic growth, industry, jobs and cheaper energy bills, we need a pragmatic energy policy that focuses on cheap, abundant and reliable energy. That means that we have to acknowledge that we have a failing system with the highest industrial energy costs in the world. It also means that we need to maximise our oil and gas resources in the short and medium term, increase our use of nuclear power—just like successful France, which I mentioned—and have renewables in a complementary role.

We can secure cheap energy for everyone if we ensure that we protect and add to our industrial base. That is what will reduce bills for everyone, keep the lights on for Scotland's future and reduce our carbon emissions in the long term.

16:25

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Please excuse me if I do not respond to every point in the motion—it is a 400-word rambling mess, and I have only seven minutes to speak.

I will start—because it has especially irked me—with the motion's reference to low-emission zones. That is not a net zero policy; it is a public health policy. The simple idea is that the folk who live in our city centres, and the children who go to city-centre schools, deserve to have clean air in their lungs to breathe. Who'd have thought it, eh?

I appreciate—

Duncan Massey: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Dunbar: Can I even get started? Mr Massey got six minutes, so I would like to use up my seven minutes after his huge ramble.

Anyway, I appreciate that the low-emission zones policy might inconvenience Baron Offord of Garvel, depending on which of his five cars he is driving at the time, but it will add years to the life expectancies of thousands of Scots. Two years on average, I believe, is the difference that reducing air pollution can make to life expectancy.

I will also respond to the motion title, which proclaims that "Scotland Needs Reform". Scotland does not need—or want—Reform UK Ltd. The party's politics are not welcome and its rhetoric about "strangers" is simply dangerous. I know that some of our Reform UK MSPs get upset when they are quoted, so instead I will use a quote from one of Reform's MPs, reflecting on what voters in Makerfield thought of Reform:

"We were either too racist or not racist enough".

At this point, I will take an intervention from any Reform MSP who wants to tell us whether they think that their party is too racist or not racist enough.

George Adam: Oh—nothing!

Jackie Dunbar: Perhaps I will use some different quotes:

"I told you time and time again, I'm protecting the country".

"Enough is enough. I have had enough".

Those are some of the words that a topless Lewis Hawkes screamed as he was arrested in Edinburgh just last week. I am not going to repeat the rest of what he said, as it makes me feel physically sick to my stomach, but he also made a reference to "our daughters". He has since been charged with five counts of attempted murder linked to terrorism.

I cannot help but think how familiar some of his words were, and how I seem to have heard them before. I wonder whether the MSPs who have been joining "street patrols" or the ones calling people "strangers" might see some similarities, too. I am not expecting them to stand up and hold their hands up, but those who are capable of quiet reflection may wish to try it.

I seem to be the sort of person that Reform UK members say that they care about. I am a woman, and they seem to think that I need protected. I had a working-class upbringing, living on the farms that my dad worked on. I did not go to university; I earned my living by working in petrol stations and supermarkets.

My partner and our daughter have both worked in the oil industry, and my dad and granda served proudly with the Gordon Highlanders. I do not believe for one second that Reform UK cares about people like me; it cares about division and power, and crypto donations from dodgy

billionaires. Reform UK does not represent me—it disgusts me.

I am under no illusion that folk are frustrated at so much of what is happening, and not happening, in the world today. Across the past two decades, we have lurched from the financial crash to austerity, to having a Brexit vote thrust on us, to a pandemic, to a European war and a cost of living crisis. In Aberdeen, we can also throw in the added challenges with oil and gas jobs. Throughout that time, we have seen inequality grow. We have seen the world's richest folk become even richer, and we now have our first trillionaire. While we have seen the economy grow, across the western world we have seen living standards decrease.

Some folk who have never struggled before are now struggling, and some folk who have struggled their whole lives now doubt that things will ever get better for them. They are seeing the consequences of austerity, of a lack of investment in jobs and of a lack of spending in their local communities. They are feeling the consequences of social security being stripped back. They are angry and rightfully so. They are being failed by a Westminster system that is not working in their best interests.

Today, we have the billionaire beneficiaries of that system and their pet politicians in Reform UK trying to tell us that the real reason for the state of society is immigrants, trans people and even wind turbines. If we got rid of all the migrants, we would not be any better off. Who would they blame next? Who would they target next? The same folk who were leading the fight against "benefit scroungers" a decade ago when they were in the Conservative Party are now in Reform UK saying that we should "look after our own". Maybe I am just not seeing what Reform MSPs are believing. For example, Baron Offord of Garvel may know more about small boats than I do—he spent the last election campaign boasting that he owned a fleet of them.

Let me finish by talking about where I see the effects of migration in Aberdeen. Where there used to be empty shops and empty buildings, there are now Polish food shops, Romanian stores, Indian takeaways, African food shops, Chinese restaurants, Malaysian supermarkets, Buddhist temples and, two doors down from my constituency office, there is a Filipino supermarket. Churches are staying open due to new members, and charity shops have new volunteers. For centuries, Scotland has been a nation of emigrants, with its people travelling all over the world, and I am proud of that. I am delighted that, over the past few decades, the world is coming to Aberdeen and, quite frankly, we are all the better for it.

Helen McDade: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Dunbar: No, I will not take an intervention from a jack-in-the-box who can stand up and speak later.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member cannot take an intervention, because she is coming to the end of her speech.

Jackie Dunbar: I do not get as much time as many others do.

Scotland does not need Reform; Scotland needs independence.

16:32

Amanda Lindsay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): We have heard much in the chamber about the harm that gender ideology is doing to women and children, but the damage runs deeper. It is dividing our society in ways that we have not seen for generations. From nursery through to secondary school, children are being indoctrinated, often using materials from activist organisations such as LGBT Youth Scotland that is funded or endorsed by the Government. In classrooms across Scotland, resources such as the relationships, sexual health and parenthood curriculum introduce contested gender ideology to young pupils, while genuine safeguarding concerns that are raised by parents and teachers are, too often, dismissed as bigotry. That is not compassion—it is harming the very children that it claims to help, including those who are experiencing gender distress. Yet that is only part of a much larger problem: the ideology of DEI—diversity, equity and inclusion.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Does Amanda Lindsay recognise that the biggest threat to women and children in our society is not trans people, but predatory men?

Amanda Lindsay: I fear that the member is more interested in defending ideology than addressing the real-world consequences for our young people.

What began with noble intentions—to foster greater understanding and respect—has morphed into a rigid creed that celebrates every diversity except diversity of thought. Equity now means engineering equal outcomes and, too often, inclusion means excluding anyone who questions the orthodoxy. Our institutions have been captured. In universities such as those in Edinburgh and Glasgow, staff are pressured to submit diversity statements and to decolonise curricula. Employees across the Scottish public sector are sent on anti-racism training that promotes discrimination against white people,

while students are told that they suffer from white privilege. Dissenters face silencing or cancellation. The result is groupthink, not genuine diversity.

Nowhere is that more damaging than in its effect on young men, particularly white working-class men. Positive action schemes and diversity targets in public bodies and higher education have, in too many cases, tipped into outright discrimination. That is not equality. It is racism. Martin Luther King dreamed of a society where people would be judged not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character. When did we abandon that principle and decide that it was acceptable to discriminate once again?

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

Amanda Lindsay: No. I am sorry, but I am going to make progress.

George Adam: Martin Luther King would have taken an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member has made it clear that she is not taking interventions.

Amanda Lindsay: I am not taking any more interventions.

Reform will end DEI initiatives across all Scottish public institutions, because, far from delivering fairness, they institutionalise division and discrimination. In our schools, we will withdraw materials produced by activist organisations, in order to protect children from an ideology that is causing real and lasting harm. And, while respecting people's personal choices, we will champion genuine equality of opportunity, not quotas or targets that pit one group against another.

To build a truly equal and united society, Reform will speak unapologetically for men as well as women, for working-class boys as well as girls, and for a politics grounded in merit, fairness and shared identity, rather than grievance and division.

16:36

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): At the risk of my party colleagues falling off their seats, I will start on a point of agreement with the mover of the motion. It is indisputable that the foundation of any successful nation is strong and sustained economic growth. Without that growth, we will not have the ability to support the public services that our people deserve, and we will not be able to lift people out of poverty in the way that we strive to do. However, although the member and I agree on that much, we part ways there.

I do not agree with the motion's claim that

"the Scottish Government's policy choices are constraining economic growth."

In that, as in so many things, Nigel Farage's Reform Party is just plain wrong. They might want to disagree with me, but the numbers from the Office for National Statistics do not lie. Annual real growth in Scotland is outperforming that in Wales and England. If that is constraining economic growth, then can Reform explain what is happening in England and Wales? It seems to me that Westminster could be doing with taking some lessons from the Scottish Government when it comes to economic growth.

Further to that, the news from EY's most recent report—that Scotland remains the leading destination for investment in the UK outside London—also puts paid to the argument that Scotland's economy is not well stewarded by the Scottish Government. It might interest MSPs to know that Scotland has been the leading destination in the UK outside London for 11 years in a row. In all 11 of those years, the SNP has been in government in Scotland.

Scotland continuously punches well above our weight. We have around 8 per cent of the UK population, but, when it comes to attracting investment, we have captured 14.8 per cent of all foreign direct investment projects in 2025, which is well above our 10-year average share of 11.6 per cent. One third of those planning investments in the UK say that they will choose Scotland, which is up on 27 per cent last year.

Angela Ross: Will the member give way?

Alex Kerr: In a moment.

Investors, with no axe to grind beyond making sound investments, cite Scotland's highly skilled workforce, strong infrastructure and overall business environment. Does Malcolm Offord, or perhaps Angela Ross, think that those investors are wrong? I will take her intervention now.

Angela Ross: Do you think it is correct that, in this country, one in five people is skipping meals because they cannot afford food, or that one in 10 of our young people is leaving education and going into unemployment?

Alex Kerr: No, of course I do not agree with that. However, do you understand that the only country in the UK where child poverty is falling—the only country—is Scotland? Again, that is due to policies such as the Scottish child payment. I do not know whether youse support it, but that policy is causing child poverty to fall in Scotland. Child poverty is not falling in any other nation in the UK. You can shake your head, but that is the reality of the situation.

All of those successes and continued growth come against a challenging global backdrop, which has included a pandemic, the shock of wars across the globe and other upheavals. We can see that in the number of projects across Europe, which fell by 7 per cent; the number of projects in the UK, the new economic sick man of Europe, fell by 14 per cent.

That brings me back to a point that I made earlier in the debate around the nations of the UK and their economic growth rates. Some members might have noticed that I mentioned only three of the nations that make up the UK—until now. The real-terms economic growth for Northern Ireland is far and away the strongest growth of the nations, coming in at 2.1 per cent. That is more than double the others. How exactly has Northern Ireland achieved that rate of growth? It has done so because when Scotland was dragged out of the EU against our will, the Boris Johnson Tory Government, in which Malcolm Offord eventually served as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, allowed Northern Ireland to be in the unique position of maintaining access to the European single market, while Scotland was denied that access. That is crucial to that continued thriving and economic growth, and the UK's loss of access to the European single market is why it has become the sick man of Europe.

Therefore, rather than coming here and questioning the SNP's positive record on Scotland's economy, Malcolm Offord should be coming here to apologise for the economic disaster that his boss Nigel Farage has brought upon this country and our neighbours in England and Wales.

A recent paper by a team of academics—

Julie MacDougall: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Kerr: In a moment.

A recent paper by a team of academics, including Eleonora Alabrese, assistant professor of economics at the University of Bath, found that Scotland has been made almost £30 billion a year worse off and is the worst hit of all the devolved nations.

Julie MacDougall: The amendment praises progressive taxation. Can the member point to a single major public service that is performing better today than it was before Scotland became the highest-taxed part of the UK?

Alex Kerr: As has been mentioned earlier, that extra £1.8 billion that we raised through progressive taxation—which has not led to the sky falling in, as it was claimed that it would do—has allowed us to fund things such as the Scottish child payment, which means that child poverty in Scotland is falling, while in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is not falling. I assume members over there welcome that, but I would like to hear that in some of their speeches.

Malcolm Offord is not a stupid man—I know that. He has had a successful life in business outside politics, as his numerous homes, cars and boats can clearly attest to, which means that Malcolm Offord must see the reality of the continued damage that has been unleashed on the people of Scotland due to the Brexit obsession of his boss Nigel Farage. I know, though, that just like Anas Sarwar, who plays the role of branch manager for Labour, Mr Offord, for fear of his head office in London, will not be able to admit those facts today or during the rest of the parliamentary session.

The only route to further and faster economic growth is to rejoin the European Union, and the only way to escape broken Brexit Britain and make that a reality is through Scottish independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Jenni Minto.

16:43

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Mòran taing, Oifigear Riaghlaidh. Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

I want to start with the words of one of my constituents:

> "I am not a politician, nor do I ever wish to become one. I am a leatherworker, a father and a business owner. I want to spend my life building my business, raising my children and living quietly in Scotland. However, I also believe that when ordinary people see a problem in society, they should not be afraid to speak up and propose solutions."

My constituent wanted to talk to me because he wants to find a way for Scotland to become a normal, independent country. Angela Ross's analogy of a crossroads is fair, but our decision as to which track we will follow is a different one. From my perspective, it is independence that we should choose.

On Monday, I met my constituent and his wife. He spoke about the impact that Brexit had had on his business and how, because of that vote, his order book collapsed. He had to find new ways of marketing and promoting his business to ensure that he and his family survived. He spoke about the support that he had received from the SNP to expand his business. He spoke about the support that he had received from the Scottish Government to employ apprentices. That support has allowed him to expand his business to a third workshop.

Angela Ross: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I will finish my story first, if the member does not mind.

That support has meant that those people have remained in Argyll and Bute, working in good jobs, contributing to the community and reducing population decline.

Angela Ross: Do you not think that the 2014 referendum would have taken you out of Europe in the same way that Brexit did—that you would have caused your own Brexit?

Jenni Minto: No, I do not. I believe that Scotland is a country that will be welcomed into the European Union. We have the most amazing resources, whether that is people, our landscape, the universities, the businesses or the energy. Moreover, from a strategic point of view, Scotland is incredibly important to Europe.

My constituent and I spoke about the benefits of living in Argyll and Bute and how Scotland will be the best independent country in the world. That is not the empty rhetoric that we have heard from Reform this afternoon; that is hope, dreams and someone who cares about Scotland. Like others, I had not intended to speak in the debate, because I do not do the dog-whistle politics that some people like in this chamber. However, having had that conversation on Monday, I was compelled to do so.

I politely suggest to Reform UK that its motion is an insult to hard-working Scots, whether they work in our schools, our hospitals or our small businesses. The utter negativity of the motion shows a complete lack of awareness of the amazing stuff that is happening across Scotland. I will touch on a couple of examples.

The Reform motion mixes up net zero policies, as my colleague Jackie Dunbar has talked about. It says that net zero

"harms individual opportunities and economic growth".

If any of the Reform members had taken part in my colleague Maggie Chapman's debate on university education, they would have heard me talk about the Scottish Association for Marine Science, which is in Oban, in my constituency. Scientists there are doing lots of things: examining the life cycle and behaviours of sea lice in order to tackle one of the main issues in fin-fish aquaculture; using underwater robotic vehicles to identify entanglement risks to aquatic mammals; restoring many of the bottlenecks in the emerging seaweed farming industry; providing crucial marine mammal data for marine renewables; and using net zero as a way to employ people and improve our businesses. That strengthens our communities, expands the economy and helps businesses to cope with climate change. Having a world-class marine science research centre such as SAMS has allowed Highlands and Islands Enterprise to develop its European marine science park, bringing specialist companies in high-growth sectors to the area and improving repopulation in my constituency.

Angela Ross talked a lot about education. I must say that I agree with her about one thing—although she is, in my opinion, contradicting one of her fellow party members—which is that art is not an optional extra. Art is one of the most important subjects, and we can all engage with it for many reasons, such as our mental wellbeing and the betterment of our country. I am interested to know whether Mr Kerr thinks that it is a pointless subject.

Yesterday, I met pupils at Sunnyside primary school in Glasgow, and we talked about climate change, the Celtic and Amazonian rainforests and the fact that Scotland is the proud host of a rainforest. In my constituency, Dunoon grammar school won the world's best school prize for community collaboration. That is the kind of schooling and education—and those are the kind of pupils—that we should be presenting.

Duncan Massey talked about grid infrastructure. In Kintyre and Mid Argyll, in my constituency, £400 million has been invested in infrastructure upgrade in order to increase grid capacity; we also have investment in distribution enhancements for network resilience projects, because climate change means that we need to improve resilience. Therefore, that investment is happening in Scotland.

I would like to reflect on Willie Rennie's comments. Bute welcomed families from Syria, who are now an integral part of the island. In Lochgilphead, Ukrainian families have settled and helped to revitalise the town's main street with two new businesses. As the Proclaimers sing,

"They're all Scotland's story and they're all the same."

I would like to strongly associate myself with Willie Rennie's remarks, and to recognise the amazing Nigerian and Baltic staff working at Balnacarron care home in St Andrews.

I agree with Labour's amendment. The importance of reducing inequalities is so important, and I whole-heartedly agree with the sentiments that Jenny Young expressed in her speech in the members' business debate on Jo Cox last week. That is where we should come together in this Parliament to improve things for everyone.

Oh no—I have lost the final page of my notes. I have never done that before.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member should be bringing her remarks to a close.

Jenni Minto: I am about to.

That is how we improve things—not by the constant negativity that we hear from those on the benches to my left.

George Orwell wrote "1984" in Barnhill on the Isle of Jura in Argyll and Bute. I cannot help but think of his warning that language can be used to distort reality. My constituent reminded me why I came to this Parliament—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member must wind up.

Jenni Minto: —not to tell people that Scotland cannot succeed, but to build a Scotland that does.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to closing speeches.

16:51

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD): This was an opportunity for Reform to prove everybody wrong and to pepper the chamber this afternoon with speeches that were measured in tone and full of bright ideas to fix the things that are wrong in Scotland. We have heard none of that today. As Maya Angelou reminds us,

"When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

Language matters. I was struck by something that Jackie Dunbar said when she referenced the language that we have heard from Reform. Lord Offord often talks, in the same breath, about the idea of cohesion and of "strangers", of "fighting-age men" and of "our people". I reflect—I make no causal link between these things—that, in the attacks in Edinburgh at the weekend, we heard a half-naked man who was wielding an axe shouting about protecting our country. Let that sink in, because the language of displacement and othering is the antithesis of the cohesion that Lord Offord speaks about so regularly.

Liberals believe in reform—of course we do. The Whig Government in 1832—

Amanda Bland: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will give way to Amanda Bland.

Amanda Bland: It is interesting to hear the reference to language. I agree that we must be really careful with the language that we use. In this Parliament, members have said of other parties that "they disgust me" and have referred to an individual as a "jack-in-the-box". Does the member agree that such language is inappropriate?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I fail to see a moral equivalence between the references that we have just heard and what is, in effect, the language of the Third Reich in some cases.

Liberals believe fundamentally in reform and in challenging the old order of things. We stand by that—cleaning up our politics, accountability and making Governments accountable to their people. Our approach to reform is about lifting people up.

Duncan Massey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Surely that language was unacceptable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): As the standing orders make clear, it is a matter of whether a comment is in relation to an individual or whether it is a point of debate. The point was not specifically aimed at an individual.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: It is important to address that, Presiding Officer. The terms "displacement" and "othering" have associations with the language of the Third Reich. I make no suggestion or implication that Reform would adopt the policies of the Third Reich. However, we must be very careful when we talk about displacement, replacement theory and othering, which have become more widespread as the Overton window has shifted. I apologise if any offence has been taken.

Daniel Johnson: Does the member agree with me that, although parties or individuals might not be fascist, they need to think about whether they might be enabling those who absolutely do proclaim and explicitly pursue fascism?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I absolutely agree with Daniel Johnson. The struggle for progress and equality is never truly won; we have to win it with every generation. We see in the rhetoric the measure of the challenge that falls to our generation.

Liberal Democrats believe in fixing what is broken, so let us talk about the things that we need to reform. One thing that absolutely is broken is our climate. I have heard several speakers from the Reform party talk about the climate emergency as if it is not a real thing. Net zero is part of how we fix our climate. It is not incompatible to support jobs in the North Sea and to recognise that we have a duty, as a nation, to play our part in driving towards net zero. Climate change is the final boss of the 21st century. If Reform members do not like the migration crisis that has been caused by war in continental Africa and other similar places, they are going to be horrified by the migration crisis that happens as a result of climate change making large parts of our world completely uninhabitable.

We also talk about aspects of our economy being broken. Of course that is true, and we need to reform things such as planning, skills and

housing to ensure that it is easier to build things here and to invest in Scotland. We must ensure that we have the skills pipeline that we need and that there are places for people to live. We need to build things again, think things again and ensure that the founders who create businesses in Scotland are encouraged to keep them in Scotland, employ Scottish people and make sure that they are sustaining the economy that then funds our public services.

Our health service needs fixed—my goodness, it needs fixed. We have heard several times in excellent speeches from across the chamber about the waiting times for people who are waiting for treatment and care. We have said many times that that is not a deficiency of our hospitals but a deficiency of social care.

Kim Schmulian (Glasgow) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am afraid that I have given way enough now and I must make progress.

Kim Schmulian: It is a short one.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I must make progress.

By investing in social care, we can get those 2,000 Scots out of hospital. They would much rather be at home or in a care home than taking up a hospital bed. We absolutely need to recognise that inward migration is a fundamental part of doing that. Actually, there are many care vacancies. It is not about getting "our people", as Malcolm Offord says, into work. Lots of jobs are going unfilled by Scots right now, and people from other countries desperately want to provide care and support to people in our communities.

Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member cannot take an intervention, as he is already in additional time.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: We need immigration, but we also need to recognise that we are a home for refugees. Scotland has a proud history of offering safe harbour to those who are fleeing war, persecution and intolerance, and we should proudly remember and embrace that, because it is very much part of our tapestry and heritage.

The title of the motion refers to "Five Years to 2031" as if that is some kind of countdown. I ask Reform members to reflect on their use of language today and the attacks that they have levelled against communities and people in this chamber, and to recognise that it is going to be a very long five years if we have to endure many more debates like this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Tim Eagle, who has up to five minutes.

16:58

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I will try to keep to that, Presiding Officer.

It has certainly been an interesting debate to listen to. My colleague Murdo Fraser talked about the word salad of the motion. I was not quite sure what I should zone in on, but I will start with the title, which is "Scotland Needs Reform". On that point, I think that there is broad agreement across the chamber. After 19 years of the SNP, I would certainly say that Scotland is in desperate need of change.

Reform seems to have arrived in the Scottish Parliament and in politics as some sort of revolutionary force. However, the reality, at least at the beginning, is far less impressive. The foxes in the hen house had barely unpacked their suitcases when they were putting the media in a pen outside, which I thought was pretty shocking. The truth is that being in opposition—[*Interruption*.] Thomas Kerr can shout from the sidelines all he likes, but he shouts enough online and nobody is listening any more.

The truth is that being in opposition is not about posting slogans on social media or unilaterally declaring yourself to be the voice of the people; it is about consistently holding Governments to account. That is exactly what the Scottish Conservatives have done, are doing and will do to take Scotland forward over the next five years. When businesses such as those who contacted me in Lossiemouth were crying out for support, it was the Scottish Conservatives who repeatedly challenged the SNP on non-domestic rates. We led the calls for a pause on NDR, but the SNP refused to listen.

Only this morning, I spoke, by chance, to a constituent whom I met outside the Parliament and who, having travelled more than 100 miles, was standing in the sun just to make the point that he is trapped in a cycle of despair because the empty property rates on a shop that he cannot sell and that he has had his entire life are taking his pension. Representatives of funeral parlours in Moray met me to say that hikes simply cannot be afforded, so they are being forced to increase the costs of a funeral. Yesterday's statement on non-domestic rates was a non-event—yet another discussion, yet another delay and an act of inaction when our businesses need to hear when change will finally happen.

When others were afraid to discuss welfare reform, we were prepared to have that conversation, not because it is easy but because responsible government requires difficult

conversations. When Scotland's ferries descended into chaos, it was us—the Scottish Conservatives—who continued to relentlessly pursue answers. That situation is an ongoing tragedy and is to the massive detriment of my constituents who live on the west coast of Scotland. When will we see CalMac and Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd brought together and local people put on the board so that they are truly empowered in decision making?

When promises on the A9, the A83, the A75 and the A96 were delayed, it was the Scottish Conservatives who stood up for the communities who were left continuously campaigning for the SNP to put the money in the pot. We still have no timeline for the Nairn, Elgin or Keith bypasses. When concerns were raised about the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, we led the opposition. When concerns were raised about the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, we fought the fight. When our fishing industry needed a voice, we were there for it. When our farmers needed certainty, we stood up for them, too, including against a new rural support plan that is less use than the proverbial chocolate teapot.

Reform members have mentioned immigration. In my Highlands and Islands region, communities have raised legitimate questions about pressures on housing, services and local capacity. The situation around Cameron barracks has been an example that has led people of all political persuasions to reasonably ask for clarity and reassurance. I do not approach immigration by seeking to divide communities or inflame tensions, as Reform appears to. I seek solutions even when they are difficult or unpopular in parts of this chamber.

Victor Currie: Britain is a multiracial country, and people of all backgrounds call this their home. When we have uncontrolled, unmanaged migration, the additional numbers create pressures on our hospitals, in our schools and elsewhere that are felt by people of all backgrounds. Those are the people we are standing up for, and the only people talking about race are other parties, not Reform.

Tim Eagle: I think you have to inwardly reflect on what you just said. I do not want to back up any other party in the chamber, but the point is—we heard this from the Liberal Democrats and Labour today—that your language is different outside the chamber. What you say outside the chamber inflames tensions in a way that we do not need. The language that you use, that Thomas Kerr—who shouted at me a minute ago—uses online and that Nigel Farage, your leader down in London, uses is horrendous. [*Interruption*.] It is absolutely inappropriate language—just stop. You need to learn how to do this properly.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Speak through the chair, please.

Tim Eagle: The Scottish Conservatives recognise that a strong economy is not some optional extra but the foundation on which everything else depends. I actually agree with Reform, and others, that it is all about the economy. Good public services and jobs and rising living standards require a strong economy, which means that we must be prepared to think differently.

Scotland definitely does need reforming, but reform is not a slogan, a marketing exercise or a newly arrived party self-righteously declaring itself to be the answer to every question. Reform is in the hard, often unglamorous work of challenging failure, standing up for business, supporting communities and demanding better from the Government. That is what the Scottish Conservatives have done, it is what we are doing today and it is the common sense that we need if we want a brighter future for Scotland.

17:04

Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): I would like to say that I am grateful to speak about the motion, but honestly I am just a bit bored. It is one that manages the considerable feat of somehow being simultaneously vague enough to mean nothing and specific enough to be so wrong. As the trans immigrant in the room—but, more importantly, as an educator—I almost feel that I have a moral or civic responsibility to speak about it.

As a writer, I believe in examining authorial intent. The motion's likely author, Nigel Farage, is not in the room. Seeing as he is not here, I will settle for Malcolm Offord, the ex-Lord Offord of Garvel, who might take some time to adjust to the acoustics that do not come with upholstered red benches. He is the man who, during a cost of living crisis, told Scotland about his six homes, five cars and six boats, as though he was speaking at an estate inventory rather than at the political stump. I note that, for those in Inverclyde who refused to elect him and who cannot afford one home, let alone six, hobbies in the English Channel feel somewhat remote.

The motion—along with the standard, or lack thereof, that it sets—is simply sad. It calls for evidence-based policy that "commands broad confidence", so let us apply that test. On net zero, the motion warns that environmental policies risk delivering net zero economic growth. That is a striking position from Malcolm Offord, who, in his maiden speech in the House of Lords, in January 2022, declared that

"COP 26 proves that our leadership still counts",

as it shows that

"it is possible simultaneously to grow our economy while cutting our emissions."

He said that the UK had

"the capital, the brains and the political will to meet the climate challenge."—[*Official Report*, *House of Lords*, 20 January 2022; Vol 817, c 273.]

During the election campaign, when he was challenged on those comments, he said that he was never "enthusiastic" about it and that he simply "read the lines" that he was given as a minister. He added, with infinite scientific precision, that

"The world heats up and cools down … so I don't want to get into that argument about science."

Members in this overheated and sweaty parliamentary chamber cannot afford to take that position. The world is heating up, and a man who disowns his own words the moment that they become inconvenient is not really a reliable guide to evidence-based policy.

On the immigration passage of the motion, the contradiction is just embarrassing and shows a degree of inefficiency and ineptitude that even the most hard-pressed migrant would not be guilty of. The motion begins by expressing concern about illegal immigration and calls for action to "reduce incentives" for illegal immigration. One line later, without a definition and without a distinction, the motion pivots to calling for "non-citizens" to be restricted from accessing social housing and Scottish welfare. Illegal immigrants and non-citizens are not the same people. They are not in the same legal category. They are not the same policy problem. Conflating them is not just an oversight; it is Reform's entire political strategy.

The people who would be most affected by further restrictions would not only be those who arrived here illegally; they would be EU nationals with settled status, migrant NHS workers, care workers, teachers and skilled workers on a visa—the people whom, as Malcolm Offord's own manifesto acknowledges, Scotland needs. No definition is offered. The motion just mentions "non-citizens"—a category so broad that it encompasses almost everyone in Scotland who was not born here, the overwhelming majority of whom are here entirely lawfully and are paying into the system from which they are being threatened with exclusion.

The motion talks about tackling illegal immigration. However, Reform's proposals would actually affect legal and skilled migrants. It is not a policy for controlling borders; it is a policy for making Scotland hostile to foreign-born people in general, and members in this chamber should say so plainly.

On Malcolm Offord's record on immigration, he says that he supports controlled immigration, but his own manifesto describes the Conservative years between 2021 and 2024 as the "Boriswave" of destructive mass immigration. He served as a minister throughout that entire period. He was appointed by Boris Johnson, reappointed by Liz Truss and reappointed by Rishi Sunak. If the "Boriswave" was a scandal, he was the minister who sailed on it—with all of his six boats, presumably.

On immigration statistics, when Malcolm Offord appeared on "Question Time" in December 2025, he claimed that only 1 million people came to the UK in the entire 20th century. *The Ferret* said that that was false. A few moments ago, he said that not a single turbine blade in Scotland was made in Scotland. That is false—23 per cent were made in Scotland.

Reform members say that they agree with controlled immigration, but they want me to be deported, apparently. They say that they want immigrants to work, but they do not want to give them the right to work. They say that they want to fix the care sector, but they want to cut health visas for skilled carers. They say that they want cohesion, but they will not support English as a second language courses for migrants.

On social cohesion, Malcolm Offord and his party cower in fear of trans people, who constitute 0.44 per cent of Scotland's population. He made homophobic jokes about George Michael and his bereaved partner at a rugby club dinner while ignoring Reform's Aberdeenshire by-election candidate who, reportedly, made social media posts about women's jaws hurting two minutes into oral sex. That is shameful.

The motion calls for apprenticeships, literacy investment and diverse pathways into employment, but the Fraser of Allander Institute found that Reform's tax proposals would turn Scotland's income tax net position from a surplus to a deficit. There would be a recurring annual cost, not a one-off. No credible pathway is provided to fund better schools, better apprenticeships and better mental health services using those arithmetic acrobatics. Reform has no answers other than more task forces and bad economics.

The subtitle of the motion is "Five Years to 2031". In 2014, Malcolm Offord founded a campaign called "Vote No Borders", but he now campaigns to stop the boats. He championed net zero as a minister and then abandoned it as a leader. He talks about "non-citizens" when he means illegal immigrants and hopes that nobody reads the small print. He pledges his salary to a charity that he controls with his personal assistant

with £12,000 in the bank. He boasted of having six homes on live television while standing in a constituency with a housing crisis. He even called his boat the Braveheart—after the story about Scottish independence—and he sailed it in the English Channel during an ongoing election campaign in Inverclyde. Hey—a man has to have hobbies.

Scotland does need reform, but many of Scotland's MSPs, and many of Reform's own MSPs, can do so much better than whatever this is. I will not be supporting the motion. I stand for a politics of care, not a whatever-it-is of Kerr.

17:10

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): On Saturday I attended a food festival in my constituency, as part of the inaugural Hebridean refugee week. Families from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan shared their food in a packed Stornoway town hall. It was a wonderful event that showed our community at its best—welcoming and open.

Now to the motion. There is no doubt that there is much in Scotland that could be better, and it must be better, but the populist approach that we have heard from Reform relies on simple solutions to complex issues and blames others for our problems. It is right that we debate where we can do better, but that should not be done through division.

One benefit of the Reform motion is that it covers so much ground that I can talk about just about anything in my speech. It will be no surprise that, as the member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, I approach a debate on what is not working in Scotland today by focusing on the issue that dominates daily life for many of my constituents: the ferry service, which we have already heard about from Tim Eagle.

For island communities, ferries are not a luxury but a lifeline service. Yet, since January 2023, more than 10,000 CalMac sailings have been cancelled because of technical faults. Families, patients, businesses and visitors have all paid the price for a system that has too often failed to provide the certainty and reliability that island communities deserve.

My colleague Daniel Johnson spoke about public bodies, and it is increasingly clear that the governance arrangements that sit behind our ferry service are not working. The tripartite model of Transport Scotland, CMAL and CalMac is failing islanders. A lack of clear lines of accountability, the organisations pointing the finger at one another when things go wrong and, ultimately, an unsatisfactory service being delivered all point to a need for reform of governance. Last week, at the Scottish Affairs Committee in Westminster, CalMac's chief executive officer Duncan Mackison indicated that he thought that a merger of CalMac and CMAL would be possible. I urge Ivan McKee to look closely at ferry governance as he considers public service reform.

Now that I have got my need to talk about ferries out of the way, I will turn to some of the speeches that we have heard. I associate myself with the comments made earlier by the Minister for Business and Fair Work, and by others around the chamber, who have condemned recent violence on our streets. We must call that out for what it is.

I welcome the speech by Willie Rennie. He talked about migrant workers in our social care sector. It is important that, when we are talking about that, we value the contributions that those people make to our social care services.

I acknowledge the contribution from Jenny Young, who spoke powerfully about the need for political parties to work together and to reject the politics of hate, division and violence. That message is particularly important in an era when political discourse can too easily become toxic. Her remarks were a timely reminder that disagreement must never become dehumanisation.

Along with members from across the chamber, I joined Jenny Young in marking the 10th anniversary of the murder of Jo Cox. Jo Cox's belief that there is more that unites us than divides us remains as relevant today as it was when she first said it. If there is a common thread running through the debate, it is that people expect better from us. They expect reliable infrastructure, effective public services and a politics that delivers solutions, rather than division.

For the people of our islands, that must begin with fixing our ferry service, but the wider challenges facing all of us are to ensure that Government works better, that public bodies work smarter and that politics works in the interests of those we represent. That is a responsibility that we share, and it is the challenge that we must all meet.

Kim Schmulian: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald MacKinnon: I am done.

17:14

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): In the past few weeks I have spoken to people who are worried about going into certain parts of our towns and cities at certain times. Why? Because of the colour of their skin, their beliefs, their background or their way of life. That is not having an impact just

on our largest cities; social media makes sure of that. This cannot and must not become normalised or excused in any way.

I start with that point because, in the debate, we have heard speeches that have stoked tensions and bred division. As many contributors have said, words do matter. In particular, words used in our national Parliament matter. I call out the members, particularly in Reform—in fact, only in Reform—who have used this debate and others since the election to sow further seeds of division in our society.

If history teaches us anything, it is that words have consequences, not only for how people feel about themselves and their place in society but because words can be seen as an encouragement for action, intimidation, attacks or further division. I will call out such language every time.

Thomas Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will in a moment. Let me make further progress.

I pay tribute to Daniel Johnson for his excellent, heartfelt contribution. He called out Reform's language and the fact that, although Malcolm Offord and others stand up in the chamber and say that they condemn violence, that does not make up for everything else that is said by Reform members in here and outside. It does not make up for what is implied or for when they stay silent.

I draw attention to the contribution of Tim Eagle, who rightly called out Reform's double standards in the Parliament and elsewhere. I also pay tribute to Jenny Young's moving speech and her reminder, once again, that it has been 10 years since the death of Jo Cox. I did not have the opportunity to sit through Jenny Young's members' business debate, but I have listened back to some of the speeches—it was a powerful debate and I thank her for securing it. Today, she is right to point to the fact that, whatever politicians or tech giants say and see only as words, other people see as a call to action, and they must reflect on that.

Helen McDade: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will give way to Thomas Kerr.

Thomas Kerr: The cabinet secretary is correct about some language. She said that she did not want to call out only Reform. Will she call out Alex Cole-Hamilton for mentioning the Third Reich or Daniel Johnson for making insinuations about fascism? Will she call out other members who have used the words "fascist" and "racist" in the Parliament about people who have genuine concerns about illegal migration? That is shameful. Surely double standards should be called out.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The members that Thomas Kerr mentions responded to those points during the debate. It is particularly rich and deeply ironic for members of Reform to come to this debate and, somehow, count themselves as the victims and as the people who are hard done by. The irony is not lost on me.

Willie Rennie was right that there are difficult issues that we need to discuss, in the Parliament and as a society. We also need to point out—we should not confuse the two aspects; I know that he does not—when people use deliberate disinformation to provide for fear and disharmony in our society.

Helen McDade: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is a good point at which to bring in Helen McDade.

Helen McDade: I want to go back to the comment about Jo Cox and ask whether the cabinet secretary would extend that sympathy to David Amess's family.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Of course I would.

Some of the disinformation in this debate has been truly astounding. The most ridiculous piece is that, apparently, there is some grand establishment plan to somehow indoctrinate our children in nursery.

There is also what is mentioned in the motion about housing. The motion would have us believe that people are queue jumping into social housing or being erroneously supported through the benefits system. I published a statement jointly with Shelter Scotland on 12 June that corrected inaccurate claims made in recent Reform Party commentary and highlighted that refugees do not receive priority for housing over other households facing homelessness. In Scotland, we have strong homelessness rights and I am proud of that. Our housing rights apply equally to all those who are homeless through no fault of their own. Shelter Scotland supports our position and noted:

> "These rights protect us all, and any backwards step weakens rights for us all."

Patrick Harvie: I recognise that regulation of areas such as social media is outwith the control of the Scottish Government. However, does the cabinet secretary accept that there is a need for the Government to adopt, across a range of portfolios, a co-ordinated strategy to address disinformation? Individual bits of that are happening, but they are not yet joined up enough to be effective.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Patrick Harvie has pointed to an issue that the Government needs to reflect on. Indeed, we all need to reflect on how we deal with such disinformation. As a Government, we must work with third sector partners to do so, as we did with Shelter in the example that I gave. I know that other ministers are, as I am, reflecting very seriously on that.

George Adam and others talked about Brexit and the fact that it is 10 years since the Brexit referendum. A new analysis by the University of Warwick on the regional economic impacts of Brexit indicates that Scotland has been the hardest-hit devolved nation, having suffered a 9 per cent loss in gross value added by 2023. I find the irony of the architects of Brexit coming to the chamber and wringing their hands about the state of the economy deeply offensive.

Another thing that I find offensive is the discussion about migration. As Michelle Campbell, Jenni Minto and others have said, the fact is that Scotland needs people and migration. Migration is vital for supporting our sustainable communities, our economies and our public services.

Scotland should also be a nation that welcomes refugees and those who are seeking asylum. We have a long and proud history of offering safety and sanctuary to those who are fleeing war. It is an international and a moral obligation to offer such safety and sanctuary, and we are right to do so.

We need to think very carefully about how we conduct ourselves in the chamber. Every time I walk into the chamber, I remind myself not only what an honour and a privilege, but what a responsibility, it is to be here, and I hope that all other members feel that way, too.

Members of different parties will disagree—indeed, even members of the same party will sometimes disagree. That is evident in the amendments that other parties have lodged today, which include critiques of the Scottish Government on policy, delivery and ferries—Mr MacKinnon will be pleased that that issue was brought into the debate. That is democracy. That is how debate works. Willie Rennie and others challenged us to have such discussion. They challenged us to show dignity and respect for people's questions, but they also challenged those asking questions to take some responsibility for how the question is framed. None of the amendments seeks to blame others. None of them seeks to blame minority groups. That is the type of debate that we should have.

I will close my remarks by quoting from a time for reflection that was led by Rabbi Rubin only a few weeks ago. He described an event that he went to at which children were, as he put it,

"simply being children—learning, celebrating and looking confidently towards the future."

He closed by saying:

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

Perhaps that is the challenge that is before all of us."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2026; c 2.]

I think that, not for the first time, Rabbi Rubin was correct, and I hope that we all rise to that challenge.

The Presiding Officer: I call Thomas Kerr to wind up the debate.

17:23

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): When I arrived in the Parliament, I used the phrase, "The fox is in the hen house." Judging by the reaction of our opponents today, I would say that that saying is pretty true. Alex Cole-Hamilton compared us to the Third Reich. Daniel Johnson used the word "fascism".

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Thomas Kerr: No, I will not.

The irrelevant lot sitting next to us—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Eagle.

Thomas Kerr: How dare the irrelevant lot sitting next to us lecture us about how good an Opposition they were. They did that without a hint of irony, despite where they now sit and how far they have fallen in the polls. We were also lectured about grievance and division by the SNP—a party that is all about division. You could not make it up.

We are all here to serve Scotland. We have been elected by its people to do the job of delivering, but we can do so successfully only if the people buy into the process. Today, we have heard a lot of bravado from SNP MSPs, but let me roll out some cold, hard facts for them.

More than 2 million people did not vote in May's election. The SNP won fewer than 900,000 votes, its result was down 10 per cent on its result in 2021 and it lost six seats. I am not saying that in a gleeful way—the SNP won—but I am saying it because there is a growing disillusionment with politics and politicians out there in the country.

Scotland is hurting. Inside our forgotten working-class communities, people feel abandoned by a political establishment that has ignored them. They see a First Minister who will not comment on police investigations such as the one into Peter Murrell or on the attack in the Calders in

Edinburgh, but who will comment on another horrific attack because it suits a political narrative.

We have said it once and we will say it again: we in Reform condemn all acts of violence that take place in our streets, no matter what.

George Adam: Will the member take an intervention?

Thomas Kerr: I am up for a laugh—go for it.

George Adam: I am glad that Mr Kerr is up for a laugh. We talk about respect in this chamber and he has just shown absolutely none whatsoever.

Mr Kerr talks about condemning violence and so on, but his language—his language in particular—is to blame for everything that happened across our country over the past weekend. Surely he must take responsibility for that, look himself in the mirror and own up to that.

Thomas Kerr: I will tell you what shows respect, Presiding Officer: taking an intervention, which the member did not do when I tried to intervene on him. It is quite funny how that works.

I will not take the blame for what happened in our streets. It is utterly shocking, and any act of violence should be called out. Trying to put the blame for that at my door is utterly shameful and the member should hang his head in shame.

George Adam: Think of the words you used. Be honest with yourself.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Adam.

Thomas Kerr: That brings me to this afternoon's debate.

SNP members can delude themselves all they like by shouting that they won and that we lost, but John Swinney's Government is built on sand and it will quickly sink. We have seen this show before, and members can ask Keir Starmer and the Labour Party where it gets them just a few years in.

This afternoon's debate is titled "Scotland needs Reform: five years to 2031". Why? Because this is the start of our party showing the country that Reform can and will win. In this debate, the chamber has heard real people with real expertise offering a real alternative. Reform's 17 MSPs have sat in this chamber and used our time to evaluate our broken politics. Now we offer solutions.

Scotland is broken and Scotland needs reform. Nowhere is that truer than in Scotland's broken housing system. Housing is one of the biggest issues facing Scotland today, not because politicians talk about it so often but because ordinary people are living with the consequences of SNP failure on housing. Successive Governments have failed to build enough homes, failed to plan for future demand and failed to put the interests of local communities first.

What is the result of that? A housing system that is under immense pressure. Waiting list numbers are high; temporary accommodation numbers are high; homelessness levels are high; private rents are high—the list goes on. Yet, too often, when those concerns are raised, politicians reach for excuses rather than solutions. Scots deserve better than that. The truth is that housing is governed by one unavoidable reality: supply and demand. If demand rises faster than supply, pressure increases. If more people require housing than there are homes available, waiting lists grow. That is just simple maths.

Lloyd Melville: Will the member give way?

Thomas Kerr: I will not; I am going to make some progress.

That is why Reform Scotland believes that we must have an honest conversation about local connection and housing allocation. People who have spent years contributing to a community should not feel like strangers in their own communities. People who were born in an area, who work there, who pay their taxes, who volunteer there and who raise families there should know that their connection matters. A local connection must carry weight. Unfortunately, too many people across Scotland feel that their concerns are dismissed the moment that they are raised, particularly when those concerns relate to migration and asylum.

Let me be clear that compassion and common sense are not mutually exclusive. A country can be compassionate while recognising political limits. For years, too many politicians in this chamber have refused to engage honestly with the housing issue, and now the public are feeling the consequences. People should not receive condemnation for asking perfectly reasonable questions.

The truth is that Scotland's housing challenges cannot be solved by pretending that difficult issues do not exist. They can be solved only by action, and that means building significantly more homes—no more broken promises. It means recognising that every housing policy must begin with the people already here who are struggling to find a place to call home, because Government exists to serve its citizens. That should be the starting point of every decision that is made in this chamber. The interests of Scottish residents should come first.

Reform's position is straightforward: build more homes; prioritise local connection; restore fairness to the housing allocation; recognise the pressures created by rising demand; and put the people of

Scotland first rather than prioritising strangers who broke the rules and jumped the queue to get here.

Scotland is broken and Scotland needs reform. Reform has arrived in this chamber. I urge members to back our motion, and let us get to work.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on Scotland needs Reform: five years to 2031.

National Security (State Threats) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00461, in the name of Neil Gray, on legislative consent for the National Security (State Threats) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

17:30

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): I note my thanks and appreciation to the Parliament for expediting consideration of this legislative consent motion. It is regrettable that we are having to expedite scrutiny on an LCM, which is due to the UK Government's timetabling for the National Security (State Threats) Bill. However, I want to make progress this evening to facilitate the passage of that bill.

Although I appreciate that the UK Government is of the view that the bill is reserved in its entirety, the UK Parliament's accelerated timetable has put us in the unfortunate position of having to suspend standing orders to ensure that this Parliament is able to give its view on the bill before our recess. It is the UK Government's intention to pass the National Security (State Threats) Bill before the UK Parliament begins its recess in July. Given that fact, the motion will be the Scottish Parliament's only opportunity to express its view on whether to consent to certain provisions in the bill, as set out in my legislative consent memorandum.

I recommend that the Parliament agrees to the motion to provide legislative consent to those aspects of the UK Government's National Security (State Threats) Bill that amend Scottish legislation—specifically, the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. The bill makes provision for the designation of bodies that are involved in threat activity that has been linked to a foreign power, within a framework that is modelled on proscription under the Terrorism Act 2000. That means that the UK Home Secretary may designate a body if they believe that it may be linked with foreign-power threat activity and they consider that designating the body is necessary to protect the safety or interests of the UK. New criminal offences will apply in relation to those designated bodies, including proxies being used by states to carry out hostile activities in the UK.

The areas of law that are covered by the bill are largely reserved, or else the provisions extend to England and Wales only. However, the provisions that create offences that relate to designated bodies subsequently expand the class of prisoners to whom specific provisions will apply on release. The schedule to the bill amends the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 to apply those

measures in Scotland. That means that the sentencing and release regime for individuals who are convicted of the new state threat offences will be brought into line with the existing release process for some national security and terrorist prisoners. They would be referred to the Parole Board for Scotland after serving two thirds of their sentence. If not granted parole at that time, they would be reviewed for parole again up to 12 months following.

As a result, the Scottish ministers will be required to take on responsibilities for referring any such prisoners to the Parole Board for Scotland. That will extend ministers' executive functions over the release of those types of prisoner. The Scottish Government therefore considers that the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament is required in relation to the amendments, as the proposed changes would alter the executive competence of the Scottish ministers. The reasoning behind that view has been set out to the UK Government, but my officials have not received a response at this time.

The changes are expected to have little to no operational impact on the Scottish Prison Service, the Parole Board for Scotland or justice social work services in Scotland, given that few prisoners are expected to be sentenced under the new offences—just as, currently, no national security prisoners are held in Scottish prisons. However, although the operational impact that will result from the changes is expected to be minimal, I still advise the Parliament to give legislative consent to the relevant sections of the bill. It is important to maintain alignment with England and Wales in relation to the sentencing of individuals who are convicted of national security offences. Such offences are addressed on a UK-wide basis, which makes consistency essential in how offenders are treated in both sentencing and release arrangements. Consenting to the arrangements will ensure that Scotland is aligned with the rest of the UK on the sentencing and release of individuals who have been convicted of the new state threat offences that are set out in the bill, and on the introduction of the new powers that aim to disrupt and deter the activities of state-linked entities. That will strengthen the Scottish Government's response to state threats and, ultimately, help to keep the people of Scotland safe.

In light of those points, I urge the Parliament to support the legislative consent motion.

I move,

That the Parliament, noting that the National Security (State Threats) Bill, introduced to the House of Commons on 9 June 2026, makes provision that alters the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, agrees to give consent to such provision as made by paragraph 5 to the Schedule to the Bill.

17:34

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): As we heard from the cabinet secretary, the UK Government's National Security (State Threats) Bill introduces new offences of supporting or assisting organisations that are linked to foreign powers.

As has been noted, the bill was introduced to close loopholes. However, although it was introduced only this month, the reason for its introduction is clear: MI5 has reported a 35 per cent increase in state threat activity. That includes cyber operations, espionage and political interference, which I am sure members of the Parliament are interested in. Therefore, although the bill is not a matter for the Scottish Parliament, the wider issue is of interest to everyone.

I agree with the cabinet secretary that there is an argument for having consistency across the UK. As national security is a reserved issue, we want to align our systems to ensure the same level of public protection regardless of where someone is convicted.

The Scottish Government and the Parliament were given very limited time for scrutiny, so I understand why standing orders have to be suspended.

Scottish Labour supports strong action on national security but, as we have always said, we also want to ensure that we protect the integrity of the Scotland Act 1998, and if there are any implications for the devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament—for example, in relation to the early release of prisoners—clearly it is a matter, albeit a minor one, for the Scottish Parliament.

Scottish Labour is content to support the Scottish Government's legislative consent motion.

17:36

Amanda Bland (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform): The central purpose of any Government is to protect its citizens. In an increasingly interconnected and digital world, threats to our national security no longer come solely from conventional military conflict. Foreign states can interfere in elections, steal sensitive information, target critical infrastructure and exert influence through covert means.

The bill is designed to address those modern challenges. It updates our laws to meet contemporary threats. Doing so helps to safeguard the integrity of our democratic society. We support strong national security measures while continuing

to hold Governments accountable for how those powers are used.

Although safeguards and oversight remain essential, the need for effective protection is clear. Hence, we support the motion.

The Presiding Officer: Maggie Chapman joins us remotely.

17:37

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): [*Inaudible.*]—the need to protect Scotland and the UK from hostile states, and, as it is framed, the bill covers state threats, it is ultimately individuals who will be investigated, prosecuted and convicted under the new offences that it creates. That means that we need to tread carefully in our scrutiny of the legislation. When we change the law, particularly criminal law, the Parliament needs time to consider carefully the justification for such changes and to assess their intended and unintended consequences.

When those changes come from Westminster and legislative consent is required, we need time to consider all the issues properly. That has not happened here. The UK Government did not share the final text of the bill before it was introduced on 9 June, despite the fact that, for more than a year, it has had a report recommending that the actions be taken. The Scottish Parliament goes into summer recess tomorrow. Therefore, in practice, we have been left with only eight days to scrutinise proposals that will alter Scots law and the functions of the Scottish ministers.

The justification for such a rushed process is not convincing. The UK Government has argued that the legislation is entirely reserved, but it should have been obvious—as it was obvious to Scottish Government lawyers—that the bill has consequences for Scottish sentencing, parole and release arrangements, and therefore that it requires a full and timely legislative consent process.

As the policy memorandum notes, there has been no opportunity for the Scottish Government to consult stakeholders on the effects of the changes to Scottish legislation. That is not how good law is made, which is a key reason why Scottish Greens cannot support the motion.

We are also concerned about wider issues in the bill that deserve more scrutiny than the Parliament has been able to give them. The designation regime and the new offences relating to support, assistance and material benefit are very broad. Humanitarian organisations, peace-building groups, journalists and others working in conflict-affected areas will want reassurance that legitimate humanitarian engagement cannot inadvertently expose individuals to criminal liability.

The Government may believe that adequate safeguards exist, but Parliament has not had sufficient opportunity to test those claims, hear evidence or examine possible unintended consequences. The lack of scrutiny matters, because, although national security legislation is often enacted in response to genuine threats, its effects can extend well beyond the circumstances that prompt it.

The Scottish Greens recognise the case for ensuring consistency in sentencing and release arrangements across the UK where these offences apply. We also recognise the importance of protecting our national security. However, we cannot ignore the inadequate process that has brought us to this point, nor the missed opportunity for proper consultation and scrutiny. For those reasons, although we will not oppose the motion, we are not persuaded that the process that has been followed merits our support, and we will abstain.

17:40

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The first duty of any Government is the security of its people, and that duty has become more challenging in a world where hostile states increasingly operate through proxies, front organisations and state-backed networks that are designed to undermine democratic societies and advance the interests of foreign powers. The purpose of the bill is straightforward: it gives authorities stronger powers to act against organisations that are involved in foreign state threat activity and creates offences for those who support, assist or benefit from them.

The Conservative Party supported the bill at Westminster. Indeed, Conservative colleagues argued that some of its provisions should have gone further, but the principle is absolutely right: those who act on behalf of hostile foreign powers should face serious consequences.

The issue before us today is a narrower one. The legislative consent memorandum ensures that those convicted of such offences in Scotland will be subject to the same sentencing and release arrangements that apply elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I welcome that. Scotland should not have a less robust release regime for those who are involved in activities that threaten our national security, nor should there be different standards of treatment depending on where in the United Kingdom an offender happens to be prosecuted.

It is important that there are no gaps or inconsistencies in how offenders who are convicted of these offences are managed across

the country. At a time when hostile states are becoming more aggressive and more sophisticated, consistency and deterrence matter, and the United Kingdom's ability to act decisively in defence of its own national interest matters.

National security is one of the clearest examples of the strength of the union. The threats that we face are shared. The intelligence services that protect us, and the armed forces that defend us, are shared. The response to hostile foreign powers must also be shared, for those who seek to undermine our security do not distinguish—

David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: I am happy to give way, if I have time.

David Barratt: Would the member reflect on why it took the French Government to identify that the Scottish National Party was a target of threats from abroad such as hacking and attacks on our social media channels?

Stephen Kerr: I deprecate any foreign state involvement that undermines our democratic processes, regardless of which party it affects. I think that all our parties have, to some degree or other, been subject to misinformation and downright lies. However, we should be clear that those who seek to undermine our security do not distinguish between any of us in our party colours. They do not distinguish between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom—they target the United Kingdom and all of us. Our response must therefore be united, robust and unwavering. For those reasons, I support the motion.

17:43

Yi-pei Chou Turvey (North East Scotland) (LD): As the justice spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, I confirm that we give our full support for this bill. We have been calling on and on, since 2024, for the IRGC to be proscribed, and we are disappointed at the constant delay of the Government in doing so. The previous Conservative Government failed to proscribe the group, even though it suggested that it would in 2023.

The independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, Jonathan Hall KC, recommended more than one year ago terrorism-style powers to deter state-backed actors such as the IRGC. We need to undertake this measure urgently but also to do so through due process, with strong scrutiny.

The country is constantly targeted by state-backed influencers and actors, and it is crucial and vital that we have strong legislation to stop them. Furthermore, the IRGC has been at the core of brutal domestic repression and threats to UK security and, by blocking it, we will ensure the safety of all Iranian and Jewish communities across the country.

17:44

Neil Gray: I have nothing further to add. The issues have been well aired and I am grateful for the indication of multiparty support for the motion.

Business Motions

17:45

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of revised business motion S7M-00480, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, revising this week's 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 Thursday 25 June 2026—

after

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert

followed by Oaths and Affirmations

delete

1.30 pm General Questions

2.00 pm First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)

insert

followed by General Questions

followed by First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)

delete

5.05 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.10 pm Decision Time—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S7M-00462, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 1 September 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by General Questions

followed by First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 September 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Social Justice and Housing;

Economy, Tourism and Transport

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 September 2026

1.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.30 pm General Questions

2.00 pm First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Tuesday 8 September 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by General Questions

followed by First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 9 September 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Finance and Local Government, Parliamentary Business and Veterans;

Public Service Reform, Europe, External Affairs and Energy

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 10 September 2026

1.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
1.30 pm	General Questions
2.00 pm	First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)
followed by	Scottish Government Business
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 31 August 2026, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted. —[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:46

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S7M-00463, on designation of a lead committee. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Armed Forces Bill.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Motion without Notice

17:46

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, that decision time be brought forward to now. I invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 5:46 pm.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:46

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Tom Arthur is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Daniel Johnson, Murdo Fraser and Willie Rennie will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-00446.2, in the name of Tom Arthur, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00446, in the name of Malcolm Offord, on Scotland needs Reform: five years to 2031, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:47

Meeting suspended.

17:51

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S7M-00446.2, in the name of Tom Arthur. Members should cast their votes now.

For

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

Against

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
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)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00446.2, in the name of Tom Arthur, is: For 75, Against 25, Abstentions 17.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-00446, in the name of Malcolm Offord, on Scotland needs Reform: five years to 2031, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should vote now.

The vote is closed.

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My apologies. My technology did not work. I would have voted yes.

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

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My apologies. I had difficulty connecting. 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)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
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)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
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)
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)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (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

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (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-00446, in the name of Malcolm Offord, on Scotland needs Reform: five years to

2031, as amended, is: For 91, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament condemns xenophobia, racism and hatred in society, including recent instances of intimidation, violence and disorder; further condemns the actions and language of those who seek to stoke such sentiments and division; agrees that such beliefs and actions do not reflect those of the vast majority of people living in Scotland, who value being a welcoming nation; welcomes the valuable contribution that migrants make to Scotland's communities and economy; reaffirms the Scottish Parliament's commitment to human rights and equality for all; supports an economy that gives opportunities and helps to deliver investment through progressive taxation to sustain the public services on which everyone relies, and recognises the economic opportunity that a just transition can offer to Scotland through investment and innovation.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-00461, in the name of Neil Gray, on the National Security (State Threats) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Please cast your votes now.

The vote is closed.

Joe Fagan (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My device did 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)
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)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
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)
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)
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)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (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)

Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (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

MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)

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-00461, in the name of Neil Gray, on the National Security (State Threats) Bill, is: For 102, Against 1, Abstentions 15.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, noting that the National Security (State Threats) Bill, introduced to the House of Commons on 9 June 2026, makes provision that alters the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, agrees to give consent to such provision as made by paragraph 5 to the Schedule to the Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S7M-00463, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Armed Forces Bill.

The Presiding Officer: Before I conclude decision time, I wish all the best to Scotland in their match against Brazil tonight. [*Applause*.]

I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

Nuclear Power in Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S7M-00258, in the name of Liam Kerr, on nuclear power in Scotland.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament considers that nuclear power in Scotland produces cheap, dependable and green electricity; notes the findings of the Nuclear Industry Association that Torness Nuclear Power Station, which is set to cease production in 2030, has generated 307 TWh of clean electricity since 1988, which it believes is sufficient to power every home in the country for 36 years, and has averted a minimum of 101 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions; understands that nuclear power brings significant financial benefits and supports hundreds of jobs and contractors; believes that Scotland's civil nuclear industry could have supported over 10,000 jobs if the sector had experienced the same growth rate as that in England; considers that the "no new nuclear" position of the Scottish Government has led to an exodus of workers from Scotland; recognises calls from the Nuclear Industry Association for the Scottish Government to end its political opposition to nuclear power in order that this can form part of a balanced energy mix that it considers the country needs, alongside its North Sea oil and gas industry; notes the view that this must be supported, encouraged and no longer subject to a presumption against oil and gas, and further notes the view that the Scottish Government must act decisively to protect jobs, deliver energy security and provide cheaper energy by unlocking nuclear energy production in Scotland.

17:59

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In the years since I first contributed to a debate in this Parliament on new nuclear power in Scotland, four of the six parties in the chamber have come to support the proposition that I put forward, in some form or other. In that, they are on the side of the majority of the public, which supports nuclear power. Indeed, in Scotland, around 54 per cent of people support nuclear energy and only 29 per cent are opposed. Even among Scottish National Party voters, the majority now supports new nuclear in Scotland's energy mix.

However, the SNP Government remains opposed, even though new nuclear is the critical piece of the jigsaw puzzle that would let the SNP achieve exactly what it wants. For years, the Scottish Government has sought to present itself—and, by extension, Scotland—as a leader in the fight against climate change. In 2019, it even legislated for a 75 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030, although it scrapped that target five years later because it could not meet it. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Scotland's climate ambitions would be much closer to realisation today had ministers been willing to embrace every available low-carbon technology. However, they were not.

We have some of the best renewable energy sources in Europe, but we must be honest about the limitations of any energy source. Wind power depends on the weather. There are regular days when wind generates more electricity than we can use, which, along with the challenges of crossing the grid bottleneck, leads to hundreds of millions of pounds in constraint payments. There are also days when wind generation drops. In fact, over the year, wind turbines operate only around 25 to 40 per cent of the time.

The point is that we must be able to guarantee electricity when homes, businesses and hospitals need it. That means baseload: electricity that is there and can be called on anywhere, any time—on days such as today, for example, when the grid put out a capacity warning due to low wind and high heat. Yesterday, prices for gas back-up were nearly £1,000 per megawatt hour. Without Torness, they would have been between £1,500 and £2,000 per megawatt hour. That is why we need nuclear.

That is just the state of play at the moment. Most credible pathways project electricity demand in Scotland doubling or even tripling by 2050. No wonder: electric vehicles, heat pumps, hydrogen production, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence and high-tech industries all require enormous amounts of reliable power. That means nuclear.

However, we do not just need reliable power. We need local power. The events of recent years, particularly the war in Ukraine, have reminded us that energy policy is also national security policy. Countries that rely too heavily on imported stocks leave themselves exposed to international shocks and geopolitical instability. The United Kingdom currently requires around 900 tonnes of uranium a year, and the UK—I stress the UK—has about 110,000 tonnes stockpiled.

The environmental argument stacks up. A nuclear station can generate vast quantities of low-carbon electricity on a comparatively small site. Producing the same amount of electricity through ground-mounted solar—a technology that I stress I support and that must form part of our energy mix—requires many times more land.

Most of us would agree that reducing emissions matters. The climate does not care whether a unit of low-carbon electricity comes from a wind turbine or a nuclear reactor. On that measure, nuclear power performs exceptionally well. Life-cycle emissions are comparable to offshore wind.

Then there are the economic benefits. Nuclear supports around 18,500 jobs in Scotland. It directly employs more than 5,400 people, and around 30 per cent of those are in Scotland's most deprived local authority areas. Nuclear contributed around £1.5 billion in gross value added to the Scottish economy in 2024.

The case for new nuclear in Scotland is absolutely compelling. Scotland cannot decarbonise its economy, strengthen its energy security, grow its industrial base and provide baseload while simultaneously ruling out one of the world's most reliable sources of low-carbon electricity.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The member keeps talking about baseload. Does he realise that, as long ago as 2015, the then chief executive of National Grid said that baseload was an "outdated" concept? Further, does he acknowledge that, on average over the long term, nuclear power stations are operational only 78 per cent of the time, so we cannot even rely on nuclear power being available when we absolutely need it?

Liam Kerr: For the member to stand up and say that baseload is an outdated concept is an extraordinary intervention. As I reminded him about three weeks ago, he does not seem to know what he is talking about when it comes to energy. He does not seem to realise that nuclear is operational 90 per cent of the time and is non-operational only when it is entirely planned.

I am grateful for the member's intervention, because it allows me to put him straight yet again. He actually adds to the counterarguments that I will no doubt face from the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy.

In previous debates, I have had thrown at me, "What about safety?" Well, the UK has operated civil nuclear power stations for more than half a century without a major nuclear accident affecting the public.

On economics, Alan Brown asked me the other week about Hinkley Point C. In the latest contracts for difference allocation round, fixed-bottom offshore wind was priced at £95 per megawatt hour; that is around £125 per megawatt hour when back-up is factored in. Floating offshore wind comes in at £230 per megawatt hour. The current strike price for Hinkley C—the Scottish National Party's bête noire—is £131 per megawatt hour.

Finally, on waste, nuclear power is unique in that its waste is fully identified, regulated, contained and managed. Carbon emissions are never released into the environment, while the radioactive waste is safely stored and monitored. The volume of that waste is remarkably small. In fact, I would be exposed to more radiation on my next flight to Ibiza than I would—[*Laughter.*] What? I would be exposed to more radiation on that flight than I would were I standing on top of the Torness reactors.

The choice facing Scotland is not between renewables, nuclear, and oil and gas; it is whether or not we want to be able to meet the huge demand that is coming down the track with a mature, evidence-based approach to all three.

My view is that Scotland should continue to lead in wind and other renewable technologies, and give full support to oil and gas, but we should not exclude a proven source of reliable, low-carbon electricity. Nuclear power supports our climate ambitions, strengthens our energy security and provides the firm power that is needed for future economic growth. Let us follow that evidence and pursue informed, long-term, strategic planning choices that recognise the importance of oil and gas, acknowledge the need for new nuclear baseload and strive for a future alongside, and in partnership with, renewables.

18:07

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I congratulate the member for securing the debate, which seems, in effect, to be on behalf of the trade body the Nuclear Industry Association. It will come as no surprise to the member that I disagree with a lot of what he said, but I also have to say that his motion contains several inaccuracies.

Nuclear is not green. It is low carbon, but producing radioactive nuclear waste, which in some cases must be stored underground for thousands of years, cannot be classed as green.

As for energy security, we were originally told that Hinkley would be required to be online by Christmas 2017 in order to keep the lights on. Once the contract was signed, the project was to be delivered by 2025. Hinkley is now delayed to 2030, while three existing nuclear stations have now shut down, yet there is still no panic for energy reliance. The reality is that a new station that has taken 15 years to build does not address energy security.

The other point concerns low cost. The projected cost of Hinkley Point C station is now £50 billion, but the original estimate was £18 billion. Sizewell C has an upper estimate of £48 billion, and all the financial risk on the project is borne by bill payers.

I will look at the strike rates, as I interpret them differently from Liam Kerr. He is right that the Hinkley Point C strike rate is currently £130 per megawatt hour, which is indexed to 2024. That is far more expensive than onshore and fixed offshore renewables. Critically, however, the Hinckley strike rate is over a 35-year contract, unlike the 15 to 20-year contracts for renewables.

Liam Kerr: What the member has said is not true. As I said in my remarks, Hinkley Point C's strike price is about £131 per megawatt hour, and the strike price for floating offshore wind is about £230, so the member has just misled the chamber.

Alan Brown: The member is not listening to me. Okay—I said that the strike price was £130 for Hinkley Point C, and it is £131, so I stand corrected there.

The strike price for floating offshore wind is listed at £216 per megawatt hour, but that is for a 20-year contract. If we compare the unit price over different contract periods, we see that floating offshore wind is actually comparatively cheaper than Hinkley, so the member is wrong on that.

A recent national audit report confirmed that the equivalent strike rate for Sizewell C is £131 to £155 per megawatt hour. Nuclear is the only energy technology that has not got cheaper over the years, whereas subsidies for renewables bring cost reductions. Then there are the hidden subsidies for Hinkley and Sizewell, which are paid to connect to the grid, whereas Scottish renewable projects have to pay to connect to the grid.

When Liam Kerr talked about managing waste, he did not mention that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority estimates the legacy clean-up costs to be £136 billion and that a new geological disposal facility will cost up to £69 billion. That is more than £200 billion of costs that are conveniently forgotten and disregarded.

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): The member makes some good points about Hinkley Point C, but that probably highlights issues with the planning and regulatory regime in the UK, as is the case with a number of high-profile projects that have extended budgets and not met deadlines. However, does he acknowledge that there are great examples of nuclear projects around the world that have succeeded, notably in South Korea, which has delivered eight nuclear power plants at a cost of around £8 billion? That is because South Korea's approach was to build eight at the same time. That might be a great way forward to reduce costs for nuclear.

Alan Brown: I thought that the member would return to the South Korea example. Clearly, it had lower labour costs, material costs and so on, and a different regime. However, if the plants are so good in South Korea, I would like an explanation of why South Korea has changed tack and dropped its nuclear strategy, because the new president says that they take too long to deliver.

I thought that we would hear from Liam Kerr that small modular reactors will save the day, despite the fact that the only operational SMRs are in Russia and China; despite the fact that SMRs are

not small and produce more waste pro rata than large-scale nuclear; and despite the fact that NuScale's SMR project in Utah collapsed once costs spiralled to nearly £7 billion for a single station. Rolls-Royce has promoted SMRs for about 10 years and, in June 2025, Ed Miliband confirmed that a final investment decision for the first unit was several years away. However, somehow, a few months later, the Labour Government placed an order for three SMRs to be built at Wylfa. It beggars belief that the process was that far advanced in three months. [*Interruption*.]

I will take—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member is already in additional time so he should not take any interventions.

Alan Brown: Okay—thank you, Presiding Officer.

Of course, it is undeniable that new nuclear will create jobs. Give me £400 billion and I could create jobs in marine energy, supply chain development, manufacturing, greater energy efficiency installation, carbon capture, pumped storage hydro and battery storage. Jobs in all those areas could be created for that sum of money.

The reality is that, if nuclear were so cheap, dependable and deliverable, there would not be the failed market system that exists in the UK. It seems ironic to me that the biggest free marketeers in the Parliament—the Tories and Reform—are the biggest cheerleaders for the billions of pounds of subsidies for nuclear and the many false dawns and promises. Our position is vindicated.

18:13

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Alan Brown says that nuclear is not clean energy. He should tell his beloved European Union that, because it has redesignated nuclear as green and clean. He tied himself up in knots over the costs. I am afraid that he is denying the reality of the most recent contracts for difference round.

Alan Brown is dismissive of what has happened at Hinkley Point C. One of the great opportunities that I had as a member of the House of Commons Business and Trade Select Committee was to visit Hinkley Point C. As I wandered round the site, I heard Scottish voices—those of young Scots with a career in nuclear energy in mind, who had left their beloved Scotland. In the past 18 months, I have sat in a committee room of this Parliament with Scottish apprentices in the nuclear industry who lamented the fact that, if they were to pursue their career in nuclear, they would have to leave their own country.

As a nationalist, Alan Brown should be ashamed to be responsible for such a luddite, anti-science approach to our country's future energy needs. Scotland should be one of the world's great leading energy nations, and Liam Kerr spelled that out in terms of renewables. We are for renewables. Alan Brown might seek to deny that, but renewables are with us today at the scale that they are because of the very subsidies that he was just attacking.

Liam Kerr also mentioned oil and gas. The SNP should take note of the result of the Aberdeen South by-election, which was a referendum on the future of oil and gas licences. For all the charade of the SNP claiming that it is for oil and gas, nearly 50 per cent of the voters of Aberdeen South voted for a retention of that sector and for new licences to be granted. That is not the SNP's position but, in my opinion, it is anti-science to oppose that.

That is not the only issue on which the SNP has taken an anti-science position. Nuclear power is one of the lowest-carbon forms of electricity generation available anywhere in the world. It provides dependable electricity regardless of the weather, it strengthens energy security and it supports highly skilled employment. Countries around the world are increasingly recognising that achieving net zero will be far harder without it. The story of Torness demonstrates exactly why that is. It has generated reliable, clean electricity for Scotland for decades. It has produced more than 300 terawatt hours of electricity, it has prevented more than 100 million tonnes of carbon emissions and it has supported hundreds of highly skilled jobs.

Alan Brown: I will go back to the point about the reliability of nuclear power. Aside from the stat that I gave earlier—that nuclear is operational only 78 per cent of the time, on average over the long term—is it not a problem that, given that nuclear power is churning out all the time, if too much nuclear power comes on, even higher constraint payments will be required to turn off turbines? Nuclear cannot be turned off or ramped down.

Stephen Kerr: Alan Brown is again finding some spurious reason to deny the reality of the reliability of nuclear power. Yes, there may be bottlenecks in the transmission system, but it is for us, as policy makers, to deal with those issues.

Most Governments would look at the achievements of Torness, for example, and ask how they could build on that success—but not the SNP Government. Its answer has been to say no—no to new nuclear, no to investment, no to jobs and no to opportunities. That is not a serious industrial strategy. The SNP would rather stick to

outdated ideological positions, trying to tie in nuclear power with nuclear weapons and spreading fear and disinformation that has no basis in science or reality, rather than showing ambition for Scotland.

England has expanded its nuclear ambitions and has attracted billions of pounds of investment. Ironically, that happened under the nuclear energy minister Andrew Bowie, who is a Scottish member of Parliament. Scotland has watched those opportunities pass by. Skilled workers have left, and expertise is migrating elsewhere. Projects that could transform local economies—as Liam Kerr pointed out, some of the areas involved have the most deprived local economies in Scotland—simply never materialise because of a simple denial of reality. Those are not abstract statistics. The apprenticeships were not created, the engineers were not employed and the scientists were not retained. Families were denied the security that comes from well-paid, highly skilled jobs.

Now we stand on the threshold of another thing that Alan Brown is happy to dismiss: small nuclear reactors. I ask him to consider France, which is an interesting case study for serious energy policy. We should consider how France has been able to weather the shock of global energy prices. Why? Because it has determined to become truly— [*Interruption*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member cannot take any further interventions.

Stephen Kerr: It is because France has determined to become truly independent in terms of energy sources, including nuclear, which is the backbone of its energy system.

The SNP may choose dogma and decline, but the people of Scotland and the Scottish Conservatives choose a future that is much brighter than that. We need our oil and gas, but we also need nuclear. A serious Government and a serious political party that believed in putting the interests of Scotland first would support all of that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind members that they must show courtesy and respect to other members at all times.

18:19

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Liam Kerr, who is a member for North East Scotland, for lodging this motion for members' business, which I was pleased to sign.

Scotland gave the world the compound steam engine, the foundations of thermodynamics and the pioneering brilliance of figures such as Sir Samuel Curran and Nobel prize winner C T R Wilson, whose invention of the cloud chamber allowed humanity to see subatomic particles for the first time, and it was at the University of Glasgow that another Nobel prize winner, Frederick Soddy, formulated the concept of isotopes, which unlocked the fundamental chemistry required for nuclear fuel. The atomic age was built in no small part due to Scottish laboratories and research, yet we stand today at a crossroads where our reputation as a global engineering powerhouse is being sabotaged by political ignorance.

For too long, the debate that surrounds our energy future has been clouded by an ideological opposition to nuclear power that ignores basic engineering principles and our own successful history. We are told that we must choose between a renewable future and a nuclear one, but I believe that to be a false dichotomy. If we are to truly become a clean energy superpower, we must recognise that wind and nuclear are not rivals but essential partners in a reliable and optimal energy system.

The figures speak for themselves. Scotland's unique environment is perfectly suited for wind and tidal power, yet wind technology is available only between 25 and 45 per cent of the time. To maintain a stable grid with firm power, we require 90 per cent firm power supply, which is exactly what nuclear energy provides. We cannot legislate for the weather, so when high-pressure systems settle over the North Sea and plunge us into a wind drought, no amount of installed turbine capacity will generate a single watt of electricity.

Furthermore, a stable electricity grid requires physical inertia—the heavy, spinning mass that traditional thermal generation provides—to maintain frequency and prevent blackouts. Without that stable, firm power, Scotland, which was once a leading exporter of secure, low-cost power, is now frequently reduced to importing electricity from English power stations on calm days just to keep the lights on.

This is not a new frontier for us; it is our heritage. Chapelcross opened in 1959 as one of the world's first civil nuclear power stations, and it provided secure, uninterrupted baseload electricity to the grid for more than four decades. The late Sir Donald Miller, the visionary electrical engineer who designed our post-war electricity system, expanded that legacy of reliability. He warned that decommissioning our nuclear generating capacity without replacement would leave us with the least reliable and most insecure electricity supply in our country for a century.

Under Sir Donald's leadership in the early 1990s, Scotland enjoyed a system where 60 per cent of our energy was generated by nuclear

power, making it one of the greenest and most cost-effective electricity systems in the world. Today, that legacy is being dismantled. By refusing to support a new generation of reactors, we are not only losing energy security but exporting highly skilled jobs and billions of pounds in potential investment. We see the consequences of that at Grangemouth—

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul Sweeney: Yes.

Michelle Campbell: I point to my entry in the register of members' interests as a serving councillor on Renfrewshire Council.

The Scottish councils committee on radioactive substances engaged fully with the cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry, which, funnily enough, the Conservatives chaired. It mentioned the importance of investing in highly skilled jobs in decommissioning of the sector, which remains to be a focus. Does the member agree that that is important?

Paul Sweeney: Absolutely. Inevitably, existing nuclear reactors will have to be decommissioned. That is an important part of the sector. However, we need to look at how to succeed in generating capacity in Scotland. The refusal to consider a small modular reactor at Grangemouth to power the complex, for example, left our petrochemical industry vulnerable to soaring energy costs.

The fallout of that extends far beyond energy-intensive industrial sectors such as Grangemouth; it hits communities in Ayrshire and East Lothian, where the high-quality, well-paid jobs provided by Hunterston and Torness are under threat. When we turn our backs on the nuclear sector, we tell our brightest science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates, engineers, physicists and technicians that their future lies not here but overseas or south of the border; we bleed the very talent that we desperately need to build the clean industries of tomorrow.

The solution does not lie in overengineered and, frankly, obsolete designs of the past. I believe in the United Kingdom's own Rolls-Royce small modular reactor technology, which is available today. Those reactors are roughly one third of the size of the current fleet and offer a revolutionary path forward to have more flexible load-following baseload capacity. We can repower the existing advanced gas-cooled reactor sites at Hunterston and Torness by capitalising on their established grid connections and vital cooling water infrastructure. Those SMRs are built in factories, modularly assembled and transported to sites, which drastically reduces the crippling construction delays that have plagued megaprojects such as Hinkley Point C.

That is not a hypothetical future. A European nuclear race is already under way, and Scotland is currently watching from the sidelines. Just this month, Rolls-Royce SMR secured a landmark multibillion contract to build three nuclear reactors in Sweden, following its selection by GB Energy as the preferred technology partner. Let us consider the huge scale of that untapped potential on our doorstep; we also have the capacity to build the heavy-pressure vessel fabrication and advanced modular assemblies that are needed for those reactors at the Rosyth and Govan shipyards.

If the Government dropped the ideological ban, there could be opportunities for export across the entire continent. Instead of merely exporting electricity, we could be supporting the engineering.

The ambition is written into our history. We can see it across Scotland. It is time to abandon the sunk-cost fallacy, which keeps the Government tethered to outdated dogma. Let us honour the legacy of electrical engineering in the country and integrate a modern nuclear baseload with our renewable wealth, which would unleash the industrial might of our shipbuilding capacity. We could secure an industrial future and provide clean, reliable power for generations to come.

18:25

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank my colleague Liam Kerr for securing the motion for debate. He has done a sterling job of representing the nuclear industry for many years. It was also nice to hear about Ibiza; he must enjoy the infamous electronic dance scene there.

I am speaking in the debate because I was introduced to nuclear many years ago for a short period. Way back in the early 2000s, I was a police officer in Caithness, which has Dounreay. I did not know much about nuclear before I went there but, when I was going around Thurso, I got to know just how important the industry is. Stephen Kerr spoke about skills—the entire economy in that area is focused on nuclear. Young people were excited to work in the sector, even though the site was being decommissioned. That is the point: there were good, skilled jobs, which allowed young people to stay in the area, so that they could have crofts and families and build houses. That is why things such as nuclear power are so important, but when there is ideological opposition—the Greens are not even in the room for the debate; they are not even willing to discuss it—it is not a good place for the Government to be.

I learned at that moment, as I am sure is the case down in Torness in the Lothians—[*Interruption*.] I am happy to give way.

Paul Sweeney: The member might want to note the heritage of Dounreay, in his part of the world. The pioneering development there is to try to create a closed-loop zero-waste solution for nuclear, which is now in the site's grasp, with molten-salt technology on the horizon. Using thorium, the current stock of nuclear waste could be recycled into new reactors, which presents an opportunity to solve the waste problem once and for all. Does Tim Eagle recognise that we should be at the frontier of those developments and not simply a laggard?

Tim Eagle: I absolutely recognise that. The member has just taken me back to a tour that I was given of Dounreay, which was an experimental site—did it have fast reactors, or something like that? I am not an expert, but the member is absolutely right that work was being done. We could have continued with it—we did not need to stop.

As Paul Sweeney mentioned a minute ago, the way in which we talk about nuclear in the political discussion often sees us thinking about the nuclear of the past, but that is not where we are any more. Small modular reactors are changing. Wales and England are embracing that; we could, too. We could have highly skilled jobs and good incomes, which are deeply important in rural communities such as Caithness and north Sutherland.

I have received an email from one of the nuclear associations, which said that an electricity margin notice was issued last night. I am sure that members will know what that means, but for anyone who does not know, it means that there was high demand for electricity. I do not know how many members had fans on or the air conditioning on in their hotel last night, because it was so warm. That was the first time since January 2025 that that has happened, but it is predicted that it will happen more often. Apparently, Torness was at full power when that happened. If it had not been there, which the SNP wants, we would be thousands of megawatts of electricity down. I do not know what to make of that, but I think that prices would surge and, potentially, we would have blackouts. That is not a world that I want to live in.

In the communities that I represent in the Highlands, people are getting fed up with having wind turbines on every hill that they come across. Nuclear is important and we need to have a grown-up discussion about it. The SNP needs to change its ideological opposition to nuclear.

18:29

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on nuclear power in Scotland, and I congratulate my friend and colleague Liam Kerr on securing it.

Like others, I recognise the immense contribution that Torness power station has made not only to East Lothian but to the wider Scottish and UK energy supply sector for almost four decades. When I visited Torness power station last October, I was impressed by the apprentices I met. However, as has been noted, many of them were already looking towards their future careers being south of the border, so we should all reflect on the human cost of switching off nuclear power in Scotland. Whatever views members may hold on the nuclear power sector, there should be broad agreement that Torness has been one of the most significant economic and industrial assets that our country has ever had.

During the election, I was pleased to meet many residents of Dunbar and East Lothian who have made their careers at Torness and who are hugely proud of the professionalism of the workforce and the plant's safety record, but there is great concern about the economic impact of ending nuclear power generation at Torness. Torness has been one of the largest employers in East Lothian for decades, with the site providing hundreds of highly skilled jobs. The impact of its closure will be felt not only at Torness but in small and large businesses across the county. Given that Torness generates about £45 million annually for the East Lothian economy, its closure will hit local contractors, hotels, restaurants, pubs, taxis and shops.

As has been said, since operations commenced in 1988, Torness has produced more than 307 terawatts of energy. We need to reflect on that. SNP members have all been sharing on social media the fact that it is Scotland's energy, but, as we heard last night, it might not be Scotland's energy—in years to come, we might be reliant on nuclear power produced south of the border.

Stephen Kerr and Paul Sweeney made important contributions to the debate. Scotland has led the world in the training and development of nuclear technicians, and we are about to throw all that away. The Nuclear Industry Association estimates that Scotland's civil nuclear industry could have supported more than 10,000 jobs if the sector had experienced the same growth as has been evident south of the border, in England. The Scottish Government must reflect on the opportunities that the country will miss out on in years to come.

Nuclear power in Scotland delivers cheaper and cleaner electricity more reliably than any other source. Sadly, the Scottish Government is not taking into consideration those key factors. Political parties can often become entrenched in arguments that are not fit for the times that we live

in and that are not appropriate for the science and policy choices that we should be taking for the long term when it comes to safety, sustainability and providing opportunities for our young people.

With the ongoing instability in the middle east and the consequent volatility of global gas prices, households and businesses are vulnerable to price shocks. New nuclear energy would put energy back in our own hands, protect us from fossil fuel price volatility and deliver much-needed energy security. As we start this new session of Parliament, we have an opportunity to reflect on the opportunities that our country can realise over the next five years. The Scottish Government must review and end its political opposition to nuclear power so that it can be part of what we should all want—a balanced energy mix that takes account of not only our country's current energy needs but its future energy needs and the future threats that it faces.

I agree with Liam Kerr, and I urge SNP Government ministers to follow the evidence, to pursue informed choices and to acknowledge the need for nuclear to be part of our future energy mix. I thought that more voters would have responded to the issue in the recent election. In five years' time, Green and SNP members will pay a heavy price for their opposition on what is a key energy issue.

18:33

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): I, too, congratulate Liam Kerr on securing the debate. As he knows, I share the concern, which has been echoed by Stephen Kerr, Paul Sweeney and Miles Briggs, that the Scottish Government's opposition to new nuclear sends a worrying message to Scotland's nuclear workforce—the message that its future somehow lies elsewhere. I will build on that point, but I want to begin by highlighting the vital importance of decommissioning and, in particular, the exceptional work that is being undertaken at Dounreay, in my constituency.

It is striking that, in many discussions about energy policy, the role of decommissioning is often overlooked. However, at Dounreay, it is not only a major industrial operation but, as Tim Eagle said, a cornerstone of the local economy and the local community. The site directly employs about 1,400 staff, 96 per cent of whom live locally, and there is a wider supply chain that supports hundreds more jobs. In total, that accounts for almost a quarter of the economy in Caithness and north Sutherland, with a local economic impact of approximately £180 million. In short, a fifth of the local economy is directly connected to Dounreay.

Dounreay is also deeply embedded in the social fabric of the community. Its funding programmes support local sports clubs, charities and individuals, providing more than £1 million annually and leveraging further match funding from other organisations.

Paul Sweeney: David Green makes an excellent point about Dounreay, but does he recognise that one of the key advantages of repowering existing sites is that they are already connected at gigawatt scale to the national grid and that that reduces massively the costs associated with new generation?

David Green: Yes, I absolutely agree with Paul Sweeney, and I will come on to talk about the connection between decommissioning and the opportunities for new nuclear energy shortly.

As I said, the contribution of the Dounreay site goes far beyond the industrial activity; it helps to sustain the very fabric of the far north. The site is also unique in Scotland for the innovation and emerging technologies required to address its complex legacy. Many of the solutions that have been developed at Dounreay have been world leading, and many more will be needed as work continues on the facilities, such as the shaft and the silo, which are among some of the most challenging decommissioning projects in all of Europe. I am therefore pleased that the energy minister recognises that, and I am grateful that I have this opportunity to put on the record my thanks to him for agreeing to visit Dounreay.

All the lessons learned at Dounreay are highly relevant to the future of nuclear energy, which is the very question that Liam Kerr has brought to the chamber. New nuclear power stations that are being designed and built today will benefit directly from the experience gained in Caithness. The knowledge developed at Dounreay will ensure that future facilities—I emphasise that I am talking about future facilities, not some of the facilities that we have heard about from SNP members—are safer, more efficient and better prepared for their full life cycle.

Liam Kerr: I am very much enjoying David Green's contribution. When I took an intervention earlier on decommissioning, which the member concerned was right to raise, it was clear that one of the things that the SNP was unaware of was that new nuclear power stations are required to fund their own decommissioning and waste management costs. I presume that David Green knows that, so perhaps he could advise the SNP.

David Green: Liam Kerr has been able to advise the SNP himself, and I absolutely agree with his point. These matters are interconnected, and I will continue with that point.

Despite all the success at Dounreay that we have heard about this evening, the Scottish Government still has an ideological opposition to new nuclear energy. I remind members that the UK Climate Change Committee, which is an expert-led body, has made it clear that nuclear energy is essential to the UK's decarbonised electricity mix. Meeting our climate obligations will require significant volumes of low-carbon generation, and nuclear energy has to be part of that mix. I have said this before, and I will say it constantly: good public policy is all about context. Whether SNP members like it or not, the UK Government has made a decision. We will have new investment in new nuclear energy. Therefore, the question is whether Scotland seizes the opportunities to create jobs and investment here at home. We will benefit from the energy, but will we benefit from the opportunity to create jobs? That is the question that I put to the Government tonight.

Let me also emphasise that the success at Dounreay depends on a highly skilled workforce of engineers, project managers, scientists and technicians. Those skills do not exist in isolation, as Paul Sweeney and Liam Kerr said. They are sustained by a thriving nuclear sector that needs to have long-term careers, investment and innovation. I pay tribute to the highly skilled workforce at Dounreay and recognise the potential of a community that is ready to seize those opportunities. As I said to the Dounreay stakeholder group only a few weeks ago, I will fight in this Parliament for their interests, and I hope that the Scottish Government is willing to think big and do likewise.

18:39

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): I put on the record my thanks to Liam Kerr for bringing this debate to the Parliament. We do not always agree, but the ability to debate and discuss—which we have heard in many of the speeches tonight—is valuable. I also thank other colleagues for their speeches.

Liam Kerr started by reflecting on the opinion polls. I reflect on what people actually vote for, and a majority of members in the Parliament agree with the Government on this particular issue.

There are big increases taking place in renewables, and thanks to the policies that this Government has put in place, Scotland is a massive exporter of electricity.

I will go through some of the speeches—there were several of them—and I will start by picking up on something that Liam Kerr said. He talked about the war in Ukraine, which is one thing that we all agree on. We all know that European energy security is vital, so why we are turning our back on the rest of Europe is beyond me.

I want to touch on other points about Ukraine. The first point is on the attacks on the Zaporizhzhia and Chernobyl nuclear plants, which I am sure that we would all wholly condemn. We all agree on that, and it is important to put that on the record. The other point relates to sanctions. Although the UK has sanctioned Rosatom's subsidiary companies, we have not sanctioned Rosatom itself, which leads me to worry about our continued strategic vulnerability in that particular area. That is something that we should all be concerned about.

Alan Brown made several good points, as we would expect. One was that nuclear power is not green. Hinkley Point C was meant to be built by 2017 but has now been delayed to 2030. The expenses that come with that, along with clean-up costs, which cost billions, and the challenges—

Stephen Kerr: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Stephen Gethins: I will not at the moment—I am just coming on to the points that were made by my good colleague Stephen Kerr, who highlighted the European Union. As he knows from being in the House of Commons at the same time as me during debates on that, different member states can have different views, and Scotland would have a lot more freedom to take a different view if it were an independent member of the European Union.

Stephen Kerr also raised a point about apprentices. Only this morning, I launched the oil and gas transition training fund, along with colleagues in the UK Government, which is backing the fund.

This speaks to David Green's point, which I will shortly address more fully, but I should have said at the start of my speech that nuclear power has been a part of Scotland's energy mix, but renewables are the future. I also put on the record my thanks to the workforce that has kept stations running. The Government values those workers, and they, too, deserve to have a just transition.

I was in Aberdeen this morning—we are a leading energy nation, and we want to continue to be a leading energy nation. I again congratulate Douglas Lumsden on his victory in Aberdeen South, and I look forward to working with him.

Liam Kerr: *rose—*

Stephen Gethins: I suspect that Douglas Lumsden would be delighted for me to bring Liam Kerr in on that point.

Liam Kerr: I am not Douglas Lumsden—perhaps regrettably—but I am very well informed about Hinkley Point C. The minister said earlier that there is a great cost to building it. He will

presumably acknowledge that the entire construction cost of Hinkley Point C is being met by EDF Energy, and that not a penny of it is being met by the UK taxpayer.

Stephen Gethins: Costs are going up as a result of nuclear power. I also point to the delay, which, as Alan Brown rightly pointed out, is a challenge.

I should have finished what I was about to say. Liam Kerr and I are both proud to be members of the Scottish Parliament for the north-east. I congratulate Douglas Lumsden, but I would love to see him do a bit more down in Westminster for the energy sector than his party has managed to do so far. I also congratulate Lara Bird on her recent victory in a north-east constituency, where she managed to get five and a half times the size of majority that I had.

Stephen Kerr made a point about dogma and decline, but I struggle to accept that from a parliamentarian who backed Liz Truss and Boris Johnson. We must look at the reality, which is that renewables are where our future lies.

I want to reach as many members' points as I possibly can. Paul Sweeney talked about the smaller plants, but they still have the same challenges with waste and cost. I point to France, which has nuclear plants that are struggling with weather constraints at the moment due to the heat. [*Interruption.*] I want to make progress, given the time, but I will try to swing back to the member later.

Tim Eagle talked about Dounreay and also the weather. I return to the challenges in France—for example, Saint-Alban on the Rhône is having challenges because of the weather.

Miles Briggs talked about parties getting entrenched. Yes, that can be the case, given that European security is such an important issue and the climate emergency is pivotal. However, I am glad that the Conservatives at least acknowledge the climate emergency. Miles Briggs comes from a party that has seen £400 billion from our oil and gas industry, but we are one of the few countries not to have a future generations fund as a result of oil and gas. Then there is the energy profits levy, and the transmission network use of system charge is also having a significant impact.

That takes me to David Green, whom I come to for two reasons. The first is the work on decommissioning at Dounreay, which he is right to highlight. I thank the workers there who are conducting that work, but the plant closed in 1994, and work is due to go on there until the 2070s—and full decontamination will take another 300 years. Therefore, there is plenty of work going on there, but maybe not for all the reasons that we want.

Secondly, just across the water, we see some issues around the west of Orkney in bringing those offshore wind farms on board, which David Green and his colleagues have highlighted. Hinkley took a long time—[*Interruption.*] I am going to conclude now. Hinkley was due to be completed in 2025, but we keep seeing that date going back.

The case is straightforward: Scotland wants to be part of the solution in relation to European energy security. Nuclear is wasteful and expensive, and given that we have so much potential in renewables, including exporting them, and there is such a massive market for our expertise and our resource, this Government continues to back that technology.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:46.

Correction

Jim Fairlie has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie):

At column 3, paragraph 3—

Original text—

I point out to the member that we are doing this in concert with the UK Government. There is a joint consultation ongoing as we speak, and I have confirmed with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ministers our agreement to do that joint consultation. Therefore, we will be working closely with the UK Government and other devolved Administrations on the delivery of the programme.

Corrected text—

I point out to the member that we will be doing this in concert with the UK Government. There is a joint consultation planned as we speak, and I have confirmed with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ministers our agreement to do that joint consultation. Therefore, we will be working closely with the UK Government and other devolved Administrations on the delivery of the programme.

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