Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

# Meeting of the Parliament

# Coinneamh na Pàrlamaid

**Tuesday 6 October 2026**

**Session 7**

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Tuesday 6 October 2026

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 6 October 2026*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business is time for reflection, which will be led by the Rev Gavin Niven from John Knox parish church.

**The Rev Gavin Niven (John Knox Parish Church):** Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

In the Scottish Government's household survey of 2024, 20 per cent of adults living in Scotland said that they had experienced feelings of loneliness in the previous week. The church, like the Scottish Parliament, is about building a better Scotland, not a Scotland of isolation and loneliness.

The New Testament has a huge amount to say about how we treat one another. In its teaching, there is an assumption that we are a community, not isolated individuals. Across its pages, we hear the call to love one another; to honour one another above ourselves; to accept one another, just as Christ accepted us; to serve one another in love; to encourage one another; to offer hospitality to one another without grumbling; and to be kind, compassionate and forgiving to one another, just as God forgave us through Christ. It provides a vision of a vibrant, thriving community. Is it just a dream? Where do we even start? Well, Jesus started with just 12, and they often did not really get it.

My congregation in Stewarton, in East Ayrshire, is part of the Church of Scotland. When we did a community audit, we identified a significant problem of isolation and loneliness among those in their 20s to 40s. Our audit highlighted that 51 per cent of local people were experiencing emotional health problems that affected their daily lives and that 71 per cent rated their mental health as either fair or poor.

We set up an initiative called thrive to provide opportunities to support the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of people in our community. This is some of the feedback that we have received from those who have come to our different groups:

"People actually care for you. It's really helping my wellbeing."

"My family has found community. We just love it here."

"The sessions were a godsend during my pregnancy, getting me out of my shell and meeting new people."

"I play a game of dominoes or 3 and enjoy a coffee. This is the only time I meet other people."

I thank you all for your personal sacrifices to build a better Scotland. I am sure that it is not easy. Those one anothers of the Bible—to love one another, to accept one another, to serve one another, to be kind to one another and to forgive one another—are very difficult, too, but please keep your vision that big. The church believes that that is Jesus's vision, too, and he started small, with just 12. Please let us all work together until the one anothers that I have mentioned from the Bible become what Scotland is known for.

# Business Motion

14:04

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S7M-01502, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to business.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for

(a) Tuesday 6 October 2026—

after

| | |
|---|---|
| *followed by* | First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members) |

delete

| | |
|---|---|
| *followed by* | Ministerial Statement: Improving Outcomes for Neurodivergent People, Autistic People and People with Learning Disabilities |

insert

| | |
|---|---|
| *followed by* | Ministerial Statement: Syngenta Grangemouth |

(b) Wednesday 7 October 2026—

after

| | |
|---|---|
| 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 |

insert

| | |
|---|---|
| *followed by* | Ministerial Statement: Improving Outcomes for Neurodivergent People, Autistic People and People with Learning Disabilities |

after

| | |
|---|---|
| *followed by* | Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Debate: Scottish Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund |

insert

| | |
|---|---|
| *followed by* | Motion on Legislative Consent: Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill - UK Legislation |
| *followed by* | Motion on Legislative Consent: Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill - UK Legislation |
| *followed by* | Motion on Legislative Consent: Armed Forces Bill - UK Legislation—[*Jamie Hepburn*.] |

*Motion agreed to.*

# General Question Time

14:04

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** The next item of business is general question time. To accommodate as many questions as possible, I ask for concise questions and answers. I really mean that, because we have a lot of supplementary questions and I want to get in as many members as possible.

### Short-term Prisoners (Early Release)

1. **Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the operation of the early release scheme for short-term prisoners. (S7O-00339)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray):** The last emergency early release of short-term prisoners took place between November 2025 and April 2026. Only short-term prisoners who were within 180 days of their release date were eligible, with statutory exemptions for life sentence prisoners, registered sex offenders and those who had post-release supervision orders or were serving sentences for domestic abuse. In addition, governors were able to exercise a veto on any prisoner whose early release would be an immediate risk to a specific individual or group.

The process supported the release of 614 prisoners and provided a relatively swift and focused intervention, helping to control the prison population in response to emergency situations. The early release scheme was a necessary and proportionate action to support the safe operation of prisons, and it protected the wellbeing of prison staff and prisoners.

**Thomas Kerr:** The response to a recent freedom of information request revealed to Reform showed that 750 foreign nationals are behind bars in Scotland. Given that this Scottish National Party Government is now releasing prisoners early and putting public safety at risk, can the cabinet secretary clarify to members why the Scottish Government does not support the deportation of foreign nationals, including the 223 strangers who carried out sexual crimes in our country?

**Neil Gray:** That is a complete mischaracterisation of the Government's position. Mr Kerr should know that the extradition of any member of society, prisoner or otherwise, is a matter for the United Kingdom Government. We routinely interact with UK ministers to ensure that any extradition process that can be forthcoming from Scottish prison estate is carried out.

**Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP):** The prison population has risen by around 14 per cent since

the beginning of 2023, with a particularly sharp rise between March and May 2024. Can the cabinet secretary set out the main causes of that rise and the challenges that it poses for the running of the prison estate?

**Neil Gray:** There is no single reason for the increase in the prison population, nor is there a single solution. The continued rise reflects actions to strengthen the justice system that have resulted in more convictions for serious and organised crime, as well as for historical and recent sexual offences.

Sentencing patterns have also shifted, with the average custodial sentence increasing by 37 per cent between 2014-15 and 2023-24, which has contributed to the growing number of long-term prisoners.

As Laura Mitchell will be aware, overcrowding has serious consequences for the safety and wellbeing of prison staff and prisoners and it limits the ability to deliver important work that supports successful rehabilitation. As we set out in our programme for government, achieving a sustainable prison population is a top priority, and we will take an approach that combines an expansion of the prison estate with the use of more robust community alternatives as well as reforms to release and parole that will enable us to take a preventative approach to crime.

### Funded Early Learning and Childcare (Expansion)

2. **Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will commit to including the expansion of 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare to all twins and other multiple-birth children from age two in its forthcoming Early Learning and Childcare Strategic Framework. (S7O-00340)

**The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Siobhian Brown):** As was set out in the programme for government in early September, we will publish and consult on a blueprint for a transformed childcare offer in 2027. I encourage anyone with an interest, including families with twins or multiple births, to participate in that process so that proposals for the future of childcare in Scotland reflect the voices of children, families and childcare providers and of partners across Scotland's childcare sector. It will be for Parliament to take decisions about future delivery.

**Monica Lennon:** Constituents have been in touch with me because they are concerned that that expansion will not be included in the forthcoming framework that I mentioned. We know from the results of the Government's own work, released in response to a freedom of information request, that around 763 additional children from multiple births could benefit, and that that has been costed by the Government. Will the minister meet me and the parents that I have mentioned to ensure that their concerns can be fairly considered?

**Siobhian Brown:** The FOI information that the member referred to was a limited internal assessment based on the policy and financial landscape at the time. A full assessment of future childcare delivery options and costs will be undertaken as part of the parliamentary and budgetary process. If Ms Lennon would like to write to my office, I would be happy to look at my diary in order to engage with her.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Con):** When I attended hustings hosted by Pregnant Then Screwed, I had the opportunity to meet a mum of twins—in fact, Willie Rennie and I had the honour of holding those beautiful babies. That mother has started the twin tax campaign and is calling on the Scottish Government to provide funded childcare to families with twins and other multiples before the end of 2027. Will the minister do that?

**Siobhian Brown:** I absolutely understand the impact that childcare costs have on families. That campaign has been very successful so far—I have had lots of inquiries about it.

Under current arrangements, all three-year-olds and four-year-olds as well as eligible two-year-olds—those whom we believe will benefit most—have a statutory entitlement of up to 1,140 hours of funded ELC. That entitlement is per child, not per household.

As I said, we will be consulting on the issue next year, and I encourage everyone to participate.

**Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a sitting member of West Lothian Council.

The Scottish National Party Government's commitment to expanding childcare will further strengthen Scotland's offer to families, with our cost of living package already providing the best support in the United Kingdom. What consideration is the Scottish Government giving to the importance of wraparound care when developing the ELC strategic framework?

**Siobhian Brown:** I understand that wraparound care is of critical importance as part of our childcare transformation. Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs can improve outcomes for children and support working parents, particularly those who are less able to afford to access those services.

Our blueprint for a future childcare system in Scotland will set out the plans for delivering our commitment to provide families with breakfast clubs across Scotland from August next year, and a new after-school and holiday childcare offer for primary school children from August 2029.

**Neonatal Intensive Care Plan (Rural Areas)**

3. **David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the changes outlined in its proposed neonatal intensive care plan on rural areas. (S7O-00341)

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd):** I want to be clear that the care provided to the vast majority of babies from rural areas will largely not change under the new model of neonatal intensive care. Many of those babies currently receive neonatal intensive care in Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Glasgow. For example, as is currently the practice in the north of Scotland, the Aberdeen neonatal unit will continue to care for babies from the Grampian, Highland and the island health boards.

The change is about saving the lives of the smallest and sickest babies and improving their outcomes. A full equality impact assessment was carried out, covering the implementation of the best start five-year forward plan for maternity and neonatal care in Scotland, and was published on 30 April 2024. That remains a live document as implementation of the best start plan continues. Health boards are also expected to undertake their own impact assessments of any local changes to meet local requirements.

**David Green:** *The Scotsman* has revealed new data showing that the neonatal unit at Raigmore hospital was closed to new admissions for 231 days—more than seven and a half months—between 2023 and 2025. The National Childbirth Trust said that those figures raised serious questions and warned that, when women lose access to their local service, their choice is reduced and their confidence can be undermined. Can the minister reassure my constituents that plans to rebalance investment and deliver on other NHS capital projects will finally result in progress being made on the redesign of our local neonatal unit at Raigmore?

**Maree Todd:** I can reassure the member that a certain level of care will continue to be provided by local neonatal units. However, babies from the Highlands and Islands have always had to travel to Aberdeen to access the very specialised care to which the reorganisation and remodelling relate. We are talking about the very sickest and smallest babies. They have always had to travel, and they will continue to do.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The Scottish Government's evidence review that led to the neonatal centralisation plan shows that only two of the 17 peer-reviewed papers even remotely supported the Government's position. Several papers highlighted serious safety concerns about transporting very pre-term babies in the days after birth. Can the minister point to any changes that have been made to minimise the danger of transporting pre-term babies and to avoid outcomes being poorer for the sickest babies as a result of its neonatal centralisation plans?

**Maree Todd:** Jackie Baillie will be aware that the plan is for the very sickest babies. It is recognised that premature labour is a very common risk in such cases. The women are stabilised and transferred to the unit at which their baby would be cared for before they give birth. Many steps have been taken to avoid the situation that Jackie Baillie has described, of tiny, premature babies having to be transferred.

I am happy to write to Jackie Baillie with details if she will allow me to do so. She will know that the system already operates in Fife and Ayrshire, and I can furnish her with details about the number of incidents of the type that she has described that have occurred since 2019. I think that she will find the data reassuring.

**Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform):** I appreciate David Green's question on this important issue. As I have discussed numerous times in the chamber, expectant mothers in Stranraer and Wigtownshire are expected to travel 75 miles or more to access full maternity care.

While we continue to wait for the outcome of the new national review of maternity services, will action be taken to help those expectant mothers, or are rural lives not important enough for this Government to justify efficient care?

**Maree Todd:** Senga Beresford will be aware that that is somewhat off topic given that the question was about neonatal care. I refer her to the independent review of maternity services, the details of which are available on the Scottish Government website. The review, which was launched this week, is particularly focused on rural care, which will satisfy her concerns about the care of her constituents.

**Diabetes Treatment (Hybrid Closed-loop Technology)**

4. **Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it plans to make of any potential impact on patients and national health service boards before determining future funding arrangements in its budget 2027-28 for the

delivery of hybrid closed-loop technology for people with type 1 diabetes. (S70-00342)

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd):** The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting access to clinically appropriate, safe and effective diabetes care, including the use of technology that aligns with clinical guidance and individual need. To support future decision making, we commissioned the national centre for sustainable delivery to develop a value case on further expansion of hybrid closed-loop systems. The findings will help to inform budget planning for 2027-28.

**Colm Merrick:** Given that the Scottish Government recognises the benefits of HCL technology in improving patient outcomes and significantly reducing the risk of costly long-term complications, what discussions has it had with NHS boards to seek assurances that the same scale and pace of HCL onboarding can and will be maintained following the baselining of centralised funding?

**Maree Todd:** We have invested significantly to expand access to hybrid closed-loop systems across Scotland. Funding to support existing users has been incorporated into NHS board baseline allocations, and NHS boards are expected to continue to provide support in line with clinical guidance and individual patient need.

Although decisions on local service delivery are a matter for NHS boards, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care has written to NHS board chief executives to make it absolutely clear that funding for hybrid closed-loop systems should be used as intended and that access for eligible patients should continue to be supported.

**Scottish Household Survey 2025 (Childcare)**

5. **Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the results of the Scottish household survey 2025 regarding childcare.

**The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Siobhian Brown):** I am encouraged that the Scottish household survey childcare report shows that, overall, 92 per cent of households receiving funded early learning and childcare were very or fairly satisfied with the quality of provision.

The latest report provides insights into both the positives that our current funded childcare offer is already delivering and the challenges that families face, in terms of affordability of childcare. That is why, next year, we will publish and consult on a blueprint for a transformed childcare offer that is focused on what matters most to families.

**Katherine Sangster:** The survey also showed that nearly one in five households thinks that childcare is unaffordable. The 1,140-hour commitment does not successfully deliver the promised flexibility that parents need, and there is too much regional variation. How will the Scottish Government ensure that lessons are learned as it expands its childcare offer?

**Siobhian Brown:** From our discussions, lessons have been learned from the roll-out and implementation of the 1,140-hour entitlement. The cross-council borders issue is one that we all face at the moment. Going forward, into next year and into the consultation, I will be engaging with childminders and all stakeholders to ensure that we get this right.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Con):** Lessons do need to be learned, but one of the main concerns raised with me by the private, voluntary and independent sectors is the disparity of pay between that sector and local authorities. What is being done to actively close that hourly rate gap? Does the minister believe that those issues need to be fixed before we look at the expansion of childcare in Scotland?

**Siobhian Brown:** Where the Scottish Government has devolved responsibility, we are prioritising investment to support our private, third and independent childminding sector providers. Scotland remains the only part of the United Kingdom to support a real living wage for workers, delivered through funding childcare through direct investment. To support that in 2026-27, we are making available a further £13.4 million. That money will enable childcare staff delivering funded hours through private and third sector providers to continue to be paid at least the real living wage, on top of the additional £25.7 million of recurring funding that we have delivered to support previous increases.

The concerns raised by the member have also been raised with me by stakeholders and we will continue to work with the industry on that.

**Highlands and Islands Patient Travel Scheme**

6. **Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will review the Highlands and Islands patient travel scheme. (S7O-00344)

**The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss):** The Scottish Government is committed to a review of the patient travel reimbursement scheme guidance. Initial work is under way to consider the scope, focus and delivery approach for the review. As that work remains at an early stage, it would be premature to provide a timetable for its completion.

**Donald MacKinnon:** In April 2023, then public health minister Jenni Minto, responding to a question from Rhoda Grant, told the Parliament that the review would be taken forward as soon as possible. Over three years on, we are no further forward. Meanwhile, my constituents, if eligible, are able to access £60 for overnight accommodation. Presiding Officer, we all know that that will not get you very far in Inverness, Glasgow, or, indeed, in Stornoway, for patients travelling from Uist and Barra.

One constituent told me that, when they spent a month in Inverness receiving radiotherapy—

**The Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Donald MacKinnon:** —their accommodation costs were £2,700, yet they were eligible to claim only £1,500. Does the minister agree that the current situation needs urgent attention?

**Alison Thewliss:** I thank the member for raising the situation of his constituents and I have a lot of sympathy for the situation that they find themselves in. We remain committed to reviewing the patient travel guidance, including the arrangements for people living in the Highlands and Islands, and in his constituency specifically. However, before commencing the review, it is important that we carefully consider the scope, objectives and terms of reference to ensure that the review addresses the issues that matter most to patients. We want to ensure that the review is informed by wider work that is under way to improve access to healthcare through better transport connectivity and service planning, which would help to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the barriers faced by patients who need to travel for care.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** I thank the minister for her update. I absolutely recognise the disruption caused for people in the Highlands and Islands when they are let down by transport services, given that I, too, live on an island. What support, beyond the Highlands and Islands patient travel scheme, is the Government able to give patients who might have to travel further for care?

**Alison Thewliss:** I thank the member for her question and I recognise the work that she has done in this area. I absolutely recognise the challenges that are faced by people living in the Highlands and Islands, where the geography and transport connectivity can make accessing healthcare more difficult. There is support available through the Highlands and Islands patient travel expenses scheme and the young patients family fund. National health service boards may also provide additional assistance where travel is necessary and forms part of a patient's treatment pathway.

As set out in the programme for government, we are taking forward wider public service reforms, and such support will be considered alongside that broader work to improve access to healthcare services.

**Andrew Baxter (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD):** I refer to my entry in the register of members' interests—I am a sitting Highland councillor.

A Highland resident who is required to stay overnight for hospital treatment is a patient, not a visitor, yet the proposed Highland visitor levy could charge them before money is passed to NHS Highland to cover the very same charge through the patient travel scheme. Instead of creating that bureaucratic merry-go-round, will the minister work with councils to ensure that overnight accommodation required to access NHS treatment is simply exempt in the first place?

**Alison Thewliss:** I thank the member for raising that very detailed point. If he writes to me, I would be happy to take up that issue on his behalf.

## Domestic Abuse Advocacy

7. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support domestic abuse advocacy services. (S7O-00345)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald):** Domestic abuse advocacy services provide vital support to victims and survivors, helping them navigate the justice system and stay safe at what can be an extremely difficult time. The Scottish Government recognises the increasing demand pressures faced by these services, and, through the victim-centred approach fund, is investing £12 million between 2025 and 2027 in specialist advocacy support for survivors of gender-based violence. We have also committed, through the programme for government, to provide additional support for organisations experiencing significant pressure and are working closely with affected services to assess demand and determine future funding requirements.

**Katy Clark:** Last year, North Ayrshire Women's Aid's council funding was frozen; East Dunbartonshire's Women's Aid had its council funding cut by 10 per cent after years of frozen budgets; Clydebank Women's Aid was forced to close; and, since January, ASSIST, the domestic abuse advocacy service, has had to refer domestic abuse victims in West Scotland to other areas. As the minister said, the Scottish Government has pledged to deliver emergency funding, so can she outline how much has been allocated and when it will be provided?

**Kirsten Oswald:** We recognise the concerns that the member raised. We are engaging directly with ASSIST to understand the issues in detail. Funding decisions must be informed by evidence of demand, cost and service sustainability, and that work is under way at pace. In the programme for government, we have committed to emergency funding to address urgent pressures, and we are working as quickly as possible to meet that commitment.

**Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform):** The Abused Men in Scotland advocacy group noted that recent Government statistics show that the proportion of domestic abuse victims who were male increased to 16 per cent of total recorded cases. Many believe that the stigma associated with men who face domestic abuse still lingers, with their issues not being taken as seriously as they should be. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that both male and female victims of domestic abuse can access support services easily and with dignity?

**Kirsten Oswald:** The member will be aware, as I am, of the proportion of women, as opposed to men, who are victims of domestic abuse, but that clearly does not mean that men are not also victims in that regard, and I assure her that, as part of the important work that we are doing, the Scottish Government's focus is on victims of domestic abuse, whether they are women or men, and on prevention of further victimhood.

**Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP):** Given that domestic abuse is an underreported and often hidden crime, how does the delivering equally safe fund both fund and support services for those suffering domestic abuse and encourage victims of those crimes to come forward and engage with support services?

**Kirsten Oswald:** Through the delivering equally safe fund, we are investing in prevention and specialist support services that help victims and survivors of domestic abuse to access the assistance that they need. Alongside the £12 million victim-centred approach fund investment in specialist justice advocacy services, our delivering equally safe fund will provide almost £46 million from 2026 to 2028 to organisations supporting women, children and young people affected by abuse. By funding trusted trauma-informed services in communities across Scotland, we help to create safe opportunities for victims to disclose abuse, access advocacy and support, and engage with the justice system when and if they choose to do so.

## Prime Minister (Labour Party Conference Speech)

8. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a speech delivered by the Prime Minister at the Labour annual conference on 29 September regarding its potential impact on the people and economy of Scotland. (S7O-00346)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn):** The Prime Minister rightly diagnosed a decade of decline caused by Brexit, but he appears to want another decade to fix it. That meant no response whatsoever to the fact that energy bills are on their way to being £1,000 higher than the Labour Party promised; it meant no response to the fact that diesel prices are in excess of £2 a litre; and it meant no response to the fact that mortgage rates are now hitting a three-year high, at 6 per cent. Scotland does not need another decade of decline with Westminster. It needs the opportunity to decide its own future.

**Clare Haughey:** The Prime Minister's speech last week focused on what may or may not happen after the next general election, and that will be financed by pensioners losing the triple lock on their pensions. As the cabinet secretary referenced, diesel now costs more than £2 a litre, energy bills are set to be £1,000 higher by January than Labour promised and food prices are again set to soar before Christmas. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the United Kingdom Government needs to focus more on the here and now and deliver the cost of living support that Scottish households need this winter?

**Stephen Flynn:** Yes, I do. I am sure that Clare Haughey's sentiments will be shared by families right across Scotland who are having to pay those prices at the fuel pump and who are looking at their energy bills realising that they cannot afford them, as well as by home owners who are trying to remortgage but know that they do not have the money to do so. The reality is that, under Westminster control, the economy is broken, and it was Brexit that broke it. The only way to a better future is for Scotland to be independent.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes general questions. I apologise to the many members who I was unable to call to ask supplementary questions.

# First Minister's Question Time

## Back-bench Members

14:30

### Poverty (Young Parents)

**Holly Bruce (Glasgow Southside) (Green):** During challenge poverty week, new research from Close the Gap and Save the Children Scotland has highlighted that 55 per cent of children with mothers under the age of 25 live in poverty, which is more than double the national average. Those young mothers face a youth penalty that forces under-25s to survive on at least £86 less a week. Does the First Minister agree that children do not cost less to feed or clothe based on the age of their parents, and will he join me in urging the Prime Minister to immediately end the youth penalty? [*Holly Bruce has corrected this contribution. See end of report.*]

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Holly Bruce raises a significant issue about the implications that the approach that has been taken with United Kingdom benefits has had on parents in our country. The Scottish Government has taken action in that respect with the implementation of the Scottish child payment, which provides weekly support to every eligible child and is a significant contributor to the fact that, as a result of the Government's interventions, 100,000 children in Scotland are being kept out of poverty. I am happy to associate myself with Holly Bruce's proposal and to press the United Kingdom Government to take a more sympathetic and supportive position with regard to younger parents of children in our society.

### Purpose-built Student Accommodation

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP):** Residents in the Woodlands area of my constituency are concerned about the impact that the proliferation of large-scale purpose-built student accommodation—commonly known as PBSA—is having on the community. The latest application for St George's Road—a 314-bed proposal—could mean 1,561 PBSA beds within a 300m radius, which would be an overconcentration that I hope that Glasgow City Council's planning committee will refuse to approve. Although I would welcome a local moratorium on further large-scale PBSA developments, will the First Minister take time to consider whether there is a need for refreshed national guidance on the impact of the large-scale overconcentration and overprovision of PBSA on communities in certain areas of Scotland?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Mr Doris raises an important issue in his constituency, but he will understand that it is not appropriate for me to comment on the merits of individual planning proposals that have been advanced.

In relation to his point on guidance, the local housing strategy guidance, which was published in March 2026, expects councils to consider student accommodation requirements and the impact of current supply and demand on the wider housing system, which addresses the issue of interaction with other housing provision. That consideration should be informed by engagement with universities and other educational institutions. It would be appropriate for Glasgow City Council to consider those issues in coming to its determination on its policy approach towards matters of such a nature.

### Emma Caldwell Inquiry (Terms of Reference)

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** The public inquiry that the Government ordered into Emma Caldwell's murder will cover only the period between May 2005 and 2015. Although terrible mistakes were made during the first investigation, it took a further nine years after 2015 to put Emma's killer in the dock. The inquiry will not cover the critical period during which detectives are accused of ignoring damning evidence against Emma's killer, which was a period in which he continued to rape and abuse women. Gerry Gallacher, a detective at the time, said:

> "Limiting the terms of reference is clearly being done on purpose in order to continue covering up the full truth, and this means Emma Caldwell's family will not get the answers that they deserve."

Why will the public inquiry into the death of Emma Caldwell cover only the period up to 2015? Can the First Minister understand why Emma's family fear another cover-up?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I have met Mrs Caldwell, and I am very sympathetic to the concerns that she has. She is an incredibly gracious lady who has with great tenacity dealt with the most unbearable suffering in the loss of her daughter.

The terms of reference to which Pauline McNeill refers were agreed back in December. Ministers are responsible for setting the inquiry's terms of reference, but questions regarding their interpretation and application are matters for the independent chair. Lord Scott's interpretation does not alter the terms of reference. Ministers have always been clear that the inquiry's terms of reference allow the chair to look at wider issues that he considers relevant to ensure an efficient and robust inquiry.

That is probably as far as I should go, because, if I went any further, I would be at risk of interfering

in the detail of the inquiry, which is expressly prohibited in the inquiries legislation.

I have seen the comments that have been made by the Caldwell family, and I hope that Mrs Caldwell and her family are assured that the inquiry led by Lord Scott will get to the truth of the matter. We have no interest other than in making sure that Mrs Caldwell gets to the truth, and that is what I believe will happen as a consequence of Lord Scott's inquiry.

### Pensions (Triple Lock)

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP):** The Prime Minister has announced plans to scrap the triple lock on pensions, which will cost Scotland's pensioners £2,000 a year by 2050. Meanwhile, the free personal care that Andy Burnham plans for England to make up for that cut is already available in Scotland, putting Scotland's pensioners at a particular disadvantage.

What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact of the decision on Scotland's pensioners? Does he agree that it shows that we have reached the limits of devolution and that Scotland's constitutional set-up is no longer fit for purpose? [*Interruption*.]

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** Thank you, members.

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Prime Minister's decision to scrap the triple lock, which was announced last week, will have a detrimental impact on pensioners in Scotland. By applying Scotland's projected share of the United Kingdom's state pension age population, the Scottish Government estimates that pensioners in Scotland could receive around £1.3 billion less per year by 2039-40, rising to around £4 billion by 2049-50, compared with the current triple lock being maintained. As Clare Haughey pointed out in her question, that is a real loss of around £2,000 per person per year if they are a pensioner.

That demonstrates an erosion of the pension settlement that was promised as a guarantee to individuals in 2014, which is exactly the point that I made at First Minister's question time on Thursday. This is a very clear example of how the union is detrimental to the interests of pensioners. Pensioners in Scotland are losing out. The future for pensioners is independence.

### Ministerial Code

**Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform):** The First Minister has made no secret of his refusal, and that of his Government, to engage fully and properly with Reform MSPs in this chamber and beyond. Does he consider that to be consistent with his obligations under the paragraph 10.3 of the ministerial code?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Yes.

### Homelessness Prevention Fund

**Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green):** Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing reminded the Parliament that the Scottish Government is shifting its approach to homelessness from crisis management to prevention and rapid rehousing, and she cited the 10-year £50 million homelessness prevention fund. Will the First Minister advise what spending plans are in place for that fund and whether he believes that the equivalent of £5 million per year will be sufficient to prevent homelessness from occurring in Scotland?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The measures that the cabinet secretary has set out will assist with our work in relation to homelessness, but, of course, the Government is taking forward a range of other interventions, not the least of which is the sustained investment in the affordable housing supply programme, which is an essential part of the work that we are advancing. There is co-ordinated work within Government to make sure that, under our person-centred approach to the delivery of public services, those who face homelessness are supported at the earliest possible stage to avoid it. A range of different interventions will be used by the Government in an effort to make sure that that is the case.

### A77 Upgrade

**Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform):** Last week, I met the A77 action group, which has campaigned for years for that vital road to be upgraded. After 20 years in power, when will the First Minister's Government finally invest in the necessary action to upgrade the A77 to a dual carriageway?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Senga Beresford will know that upgrades have been made to the A77 at different stages. If memory serves me correctly, the Maybole bypass is one of the schemes that has been taken forward. It has significantly enhanced the safety of the road and has improved the quality of life for individuals in the Maybole area. Other developments will be taken forward on a sustainable basis. The Government has a capital programme that is the subject of consideration in the budget process. It will be for the Parliament to determine the contents of the budget programme, which will have an impact on the funding that is available for road improvements in Scotland.

### Edinburgh Crisis Centre (Funding)

**Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con):** Yesterday, I visited Penumbra's Edinburgh Crisis Centre, which is just off Leith Walk, to hear concerns about the future of the 24/7, 365-day a year mental health service for people who are experiencing crisis or distress. Due to proposed cuts from the Edinburgh integration joint board, there is growing concern that the service will be significantly reduced or forced to close, which will leave some of the most vulnerable people in Edinburgh without the help and support that they need.

The First Minister will be aware that I raise the cuts to community mental health services almost annually. Will he personally investigate the Edinburgh Crisis Centre's situation? Under the Government's proposals to reform public services, will there be a new funding model for sustainable third sector delivery of vital and often life-saving services?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am sympathetic to the point that Mr Briggs raises, and I know that he has a sustained interest in questions of that nature. He is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the early intervention that such services provide in order to prevent circumstances from escalating.

In policy terms, Mr Briggs is absolutely correct. The judgment on the matter is for the Edinburgh integration joint board to determine. I am sure that Mr Briggs will be making representations to it.

I agree with Mr Briggs that the discussion about public service reform offers an opportunity. Without revealing the contents of all the discussions at this morning's Cabinet meeting, I can say that we spent some time discussing the importance of ensuring that the third sector has an ever-more significant role in the delivery of public services as a consequence of the public service reform agenda. As we committed to in the programme for government, it is important that the third sector has access to longer-term funding support in order to provide certainty.

I say to Mr Briggs that there is an offer for us to engage constructively, because I think that we both want to get to exactly the same point. We want our public services to be more populated with third sector organisations of that type, and we want them to have more stable resources at their disposal to sustain their services.

### Standards Commission for Scotland

**David Smith (West Scotland) (Reform):** Is it time to abolish the Standards Commission for Scotland, which has been branded a "disaster" by Scotland's ethics watchdog?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Standards Commission for Scotland has an important role to perform. If my memory serves me correctly—I am beginning to stray into the recesses of my recollection—the Parliament legislates for the commission, but the Government does not have any supervisory role. I am aware of the issues that have led to the points that have been made, but it is important that we have high standards of independent assessment for office-holders, and that the arrangements are in place for all to scrutinise.

### Brexit

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** Andy Burnham has said that the United Kingdom can revisit Brexit 10 years on and that, in fact, we could "go all the way" and rejoin. Does the First Minister agree that the logic of Andy Burnham's entirely reasonable decision to revisit Brexit must be extended to the future of Scotland and that, 12 years on, our right to decide must be respected?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I agree with Mr Brown and with the Prime Minister's observation, which I noticed Lisa Nandy also making in an interview, that after 10 years of experiencing the implications of Brexit, the opportunity is here to revisit those implications. Given that Scotland was taken out of the European Union against our will, and given that we are now seeing pensions being undermined and pensioners losing out, despite solemn promises by the no campaign, it is important that, after a 12-year gap, Scotland should have the right to choose our constitutional future.

We know from our exchanges last week that Stephen Kerr of the Conservatives took the view that 10 years is a generation. [*Interruption*.] I am so pleased that there is now such broad agreement among the Scottish National Party, the Labour Party and the Conservatives that 10 years on is the right moment for us to revisit those questions. I look forward to there being a referendum on Scottish independence very soon.

### Civil Partnerships (Conversion from Marriage)

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** Constituents of mine have been campaigning since 2021 for a change in regulations that would allow marriages to be converted to civil partnerships. Will the Scottish Government review the boundaries between aspects of marriage that are devolved and aspects that are reserved? Will it review the request from my constituents in relation to the conversion of marriages to civil partnerships, as is offered elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government recognises the importance that some couples place on being able to convert their marriage to a civil partnership. Although marriage and civil partnership law is devolved in Scotland, any change in that area requires careful consideration of interactions with wider United Kingdom legislation. We need to ensure that couples who would convert a marriage to a civil partnership in Scotland retain the same rights and protections across reserved areas such as pensions, taxation, wills and titles. Ministers will therefore be requesting the relevant section 104 order from the United Kingdom Government to ensure that changes are compatible with the wider legal framework and do not disadvantage Scottish citizens, and that conversion is treated as a continuation of an existing relationship, rather than the creation of a new one.

### Bluetongue (Vaccination)

**Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab):** Last week, the Scottish Government took the decision to extend the bluetongue control zone across the whole of Scotland. The decision makes practical sense as the disease spreads, but it does not come without significant risks. Vaccination of livestock is the key tool in the fight against bluetongue. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure vaccine availability and to monitor vaccine uptake across the country?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am grateful to Mr MacKinnon for raising that important question. I am glad that he has characterised the announcement that the Government made as being helpful. It was designed to be so, in order to support and safeguard the agricultural sector.

We are advised that vaccine availability is strong, and it is the subject of ongoing engagement and monitoring by the Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands. There will be engagement with the sector, and I am pleased with the sector's support for the steps that the Government has taken in that respect. We will continue to monitor the availability and the delivery of vaccines to ensure that the important protection that is needed is in place around the country.

### GFG Alliance (Scottish Government Agreements)

**Andrew Baxter (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD):** Lochaber was promised hundreds of jobs, new factories and a substantial community benefit from the GFG Alliance deal. Instead, *The Herald* now reports that investors were told that repayments did not depend on the smelter producing

"a single piece of aluminium"

or generating any power.

Did the Scottish Government know that when it put taxpayers' money behind the deal? Can the First Minister explain to my constituents why investors could apparently profit regardless of whether those promises were ever delivered?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Mr Baxter asks me detailed and specific questions about legal agreements, which he will understand that I will have to give precise answers to. Given the nature of this exchange, I will write to him on that basis.

However, I will make two points to Mr Baxter about the Government's guarantee that was offered in relation to GFG. First, the guarantee was designed to ensure that we could sustain economic activity in the Lochaber area, and that has been demonstrated to have been the case. Secondly, although the Government gave a guarantee in relation to GFG, that guarantee protected the public purse from damage or disruption as a consequence, because of the strength of the asset base that the Government was guaranteeing. That relates in particular to the hydro infrastructure that is involved.

I will write to Mr Baxter with a specific answer on the detailed legal points that he puts to me. However, in the circumstances that the Government faced, an intervention to protect employment and economic activity, and an investment that protected the public purse, were rational decisions for the Government to take.

I am very well aware of the concerns about GFG. I do not dismiss them in any way whatsoever. However, I believe that the original intervention, and the intentions behind the Government's actions, were robust and well founded.

### Bus Services (Highlands)

**David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD):** Stagecoach has announced that it is scrapping the X99 bus service in my constituency, which is the only service of its kind that can take patients directly to Raigmore hospital. Although I welcome Highland Council stepping in to protect local jobs and services, people feel not only angry at commercial operators picking and choosing routes to run, but also abandoned. Does the First Minister share my concerns about the loss of that vital service for my constituents? Will he therefore commit to a new model for regional transport that gives communities across the Highlands a meaningful say over when and where their buses run?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am sympathetic to the point that Mr Green makes. I have wrestled with the same issues in my constituency in different localities—particularly, I

might add, in relation to access to hospital services. Therefore, I know how pivotal that service is for Mr Green's constituents.

I very much welcome the approach that Highland Council has taken in relation to a variety of different routes, where it has intervened to try to protect the availability of local services. There are important lessons for us in relation to municipal leadership in the delivery of bus services in the interests of the community. We see that very vividly here in the city of Edinburgh with the strength of Lothian Buses and the strength of the connections that are available.

There is an opportunity for Mr Green to engage with the Government, and with Mr Flynn in particular, on the issues around the better buses legislation, which relates directly to the issues of control that Mr Green raises with me today.

**Delayed Discharge (Dumfries and Galloway)**

**Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** My local national health service board warned yesterday that, recently, one in four beds at Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary was occupied by patients who were medically fit for discharge, but who required social care support. As winter approaches, the impact of that acute capacity crisis is being felt right through the local NHS. Urgent action on delayed discharge is now vital to ensure that patients have the right access to care in the right place across Dumfriesshire. Does the First Minister recognise the severity of the situation? Will he ask his ministers to work with local partners to take rapid steps to support health and social care services in Dumfries and Galloway?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I recognise those challenges. The weekend before last—I am certain—the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care spoke to the leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council to try to address some of the practical implications of the points that Mr Hoy raises.

In Dumfries and Galloway that weekend—and in Grampian at Aberdeen royal infirmary and Dr Gray's hospital—the impact of delayed discharge, combined with presentations at accident and emergency, created very challenging circumstances. Obviously, a critical incident was declared in Grampian. It was not quite as severe in Dumfries and Galloway, but I do not say that to minimise the significance of the issue.

Ministers are actively engaged in trying to reduce the level of delayed discharge. We rely on partners to enable that to be the case. Of course, that all plays into the discussion that we are having about the reform of social care. Delayed discharge is a significant impediment to the operation of an efficient healthcare system that meets the needs of patients in Scotland.

**Family Protection Plan (Redress)**

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** What representations has the Scottish Government made to His Majesty's Treasury and the Financial Conduct Authority regarding redress for people in Scotland who are affected by the withdrawal of the family protection plan, many of whom are in Lanarkshire? Will he agree to meet the independent coalition of credit unions so that he can hear directly where they stand one year on and following the deaths of 56 members who were left without cover? Given that progress at Westminster has stalled, will he write to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to ask where matters stand and when affected people in Scotland can expect redress?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am aware of the issues that Mr MacGregor raises. The Minister for Business and Fair Work met the independent coalition of credit unions on 14 July to hear its concerns and to progress industry discussions. We will, in the light of Mr MacGregor's point, make further representations to the United Kingdom Government and the Financial Conduct Authority. In fact, the Minister for Business and Fair Work will meet the chief executive of the FCA this afternoon to discuss that very issue.

**Metastatic Breast Cancer Treatments (Genomic Testing)**

**Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform):** To ask the First Minister, in light of the Scottish Medicines Consortium's recent approval of new targeted treatments for metastatic breast cancer, whether he will provide a clear timetable for ensuring that NHS Scotland patients have timely access to the genomic testing required to determine whether those treatments are suitable for them, and what interim arrangements will be put in place for patients while the national genomic testing service is being developed.

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** That is an important issue, and I had the opportunity to discuss it with some of the metastatic breast cancer treatment campaigners who were at the Parliament last week.

I am aware of the Scottish Medicines Consortium's decision. On genomic sequencing, Dame Anna Dominiczak, our chief scientific adviser on health, has been leading some important work, which has led to significant progress. I therefore give Amanda Bland the assurance that our clinicians and advisers are working closely with the Scottish Medicines Consortium, as a consequence of the SMC

decision, to advance the provision of the care pathway that Amanda Bland has raised. We will report further progress to the Parliament when we are able to do so.

### Public Debt (Low-income Families)

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** Low-income families in Scotland are facing a public debt crisis. Public debt intensifies and sustains child poverty, and the systems that are currently in place to recover public debt often push families further and deeper into poverty. We need a fairer and more consistent approach. Will the First Minister join me in supporting the necessary legislative and policy changes that are required in Scotland to tackle the public debt crisis and help to end child poverty?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** That is, of course, one of the interventions that we can make, and the Government has done so for a number of years. The council tax reduction scheme that we have was abolished by the Conservative Government but maintained by the Scottish Government to ensure that many of the families who were affected by the circumstances that Carol Mochan has raised would have the protection of the Scottish Government in that respect. I am happy to explore other areas in which such action would be helpful.

The Government has engaged on other occasions: for example, on the write-off of council tax debt, and we also support advisory services to provide individual advice. However, the interventions that Carol Mochan has raised are integral to the efforts to eradicate child poverty, and we would happily engage with her on that question.

### Youth Antisocial and Criminal Behaviour

**Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform):** Last Tuesday, a gang of youths tore up the inside of the local Asda in Kirkcaldy, putting shop staff and customers at serious risk of physical harm. Such instances of antisocial behaviour have become an absolute blight across our communities. Police Scotland revealed that shoplifting that is perpetrated by children has doubled in just four years—many incidents being at the behest of criminal gangs, who, according to Police Scotland, are undeterred by our weak justice system.

The First Minister's recent attempts to downplay the scale of antisocial and criminal behaviour among our youth are simply not good enough, especially given the fact that my inbox is flooded with constituents' requests for urgent action to be taken on those issues. What will the First Minister and his Government do to ensure that those issues are dealt with fully and seriously, so that our communities can feel safe again?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Let me be crystal clear that I deplore antisocial behaviour in all its forms, so I am not in any way sure to what comments of mine Julie MacDougall is referring.

The Government has taken practical steps in our budget for this year to make additional resources available to Police Scotland to tackle retail crime, with a commitment to extending that funding for a three-year period, to ensure that it is available. We also equip the police with the powers that they require to apprehend those who are committing criminal conduct. I assure Julie MacDougall and all other members of the Government's determination to tackle antisocial behaviour and ensure that the police are equipped to do so.

### Police Welfare Checks (Mental Health)

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The First Minister will know that police officers undertake so-called welfare checks. One of my constituents had such a check recently, when they were in mental health crisis and self-harming. Six police officers—yes, six officers—turned up at my constituent's door. Things escalated—unsurprisingly, given my constituent's previous very negative experiences with the police. The officers restrained my constituent on the ground, resulting in cuts and significant bruising. As if that were not bad enough, my constituent was then arrested and charged. My constituent needed medical care for an acute mental health crisis, not to be criminalised for their mental distress. What will the Scottish Government do to ensure that we stop criminalising mental distress?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I cannot comment on the specific circumstances described by Maggie Chapman, but I am confident that officers from Police Scotland would have approached the situation with the appropriate intention of ensuring that an individual in distress was supported. I often hear from police officers, locally and nationally, about the volume of engagement that police officers have with members of the public in mental health distress.

I agree with Maggie Chapman that that was not an ideal intervention, because such an intervention may cause alarm in an individual who is facing distress. That is why the Government has committed, with some criticism of what it has done, to providing new resources to support community-based mental health services to ensure that the earliest possible intervention can be delivered. That is the best way of protecting and supporting individuals who are vulnerable as a result of mental ill health. The involvement of the police is not ideal, but, in circumstances in which the safety

of an individual is in jeopardy, it may be the most considered approach that can be taken.

**State Pension (Currency in Independent Scotland)**

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Pensioners in Scotland can be assured that, under Labour's proposals, they will receive an increase in their state pension year on year. The First Minister claims that pensions would be better in an independent Scotland. In what currency will the state pension be paid in those circumstances?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** An independent Scotland would commence using pound sterling and would convert to a Scots currency at the appropriate economic opportunity.

The very best thing about that question is that Claire Baker and the Labour Party have come on to my ground, because they are talking about independence, they are debating independence, and we are going to deliver independence.

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** Thank you, First Minister, and I thank colleagues who asked questions. To those who were unable to ask questions, my apologies; time is limited.

# Syngenta Grangemouth

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** The next item of business is a statement by Stephen Flynn on Syngenta Grangemouth. Questions will be taken at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:03

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn):** Last week's announcement by Syngenta that it was entering a formal consultation with workers regarding the closure of the manufacturing site at Grangemouth is deeply concerning. The potential loss of highly skilled jobs would be a significant blow to employees, their families and the valuable capabilities that the site supports.

On 1 October, the Scottish Government was informed by the company of its proposal. Sadly, the proposal could result in the loss of 377 highly skilled jobs, which, if realised, would have wider implications for contractors, suppliers, families and the local economy.

The company has advised that its proposal follows a review of its global manufacturing footprint and an assessment that has concluded that the Grangemouth operation is no longer commercially sustainable in its current form. Syngenta cites increased international competition, pressure from low-cost manufacturers, rising labour and energy costs, and ongoing challenges affecting the competitiveness of the site.

I want to place on record my profound disappointment at the decision to enter into consultation with the workers, which adds further urgency to cross-Government work to secure a positive future role for Grangemouth. I also recognise those individuals who now face the threat of redundancy. My thoughts are with them and their families, who now face an uncertain future.

Members will agree with me that the workforce has made a valuable contribution to Scotland's chemicals manufacturing sector. It is in that spirit that I give workers at Syngenta my assurance that this Government will do all that it can to secure a future for the site by working with the company, other businesses and key stakeholders to explore every option for continued operations over the coming months.

I know that this announcement will be disappointing news for many. Alongside the impact on employees, there may also be consequences for businesses and workers across the supply chain, which is why it is important that

every effort is made to support those affected and secure future opportunities.

I want to set out the work that the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise have undertaken alongside Syngenta to avert closure and the steps that we will take to secure a prosperous future for the site. Throughout this year, Scottish Enterprise has worked with Syngenta to identify solutions to operational and infrastructure challenges, explore investment opportunities and consider what support might help to secure the long-term future of the site.

The company sought significant public sector support for investment projects intended to sustain operations while it pursued new product opportunities for the future. Crucially, that was in addition to the £2 million grant that Scottish Enterprise provided to the company last year for the expansion of its Seedcare products. That engagement and the support offered centred on identifying measures that might support continued industrial activity, safeguard jobs and help secure a sustainable future for the site.

Ahead of the company's board deliberations in September, I wrote to it expressing support for the Grangemouth site and its future development, and I understand that similar representations were made by the United Kingdom Government. Despite those efforts, it is disappointing that neither Government received substantive feedback on our offer, nor any indication from Syngenta on the board's position prior to being informed of the proposed consultation last week.

I also want to be clear that support for affected workers is available. The Scottish Government's partnership action for continuing employment, or PACE, has been activated and stands ready to provide information, advice and practical assistance to any employees who are affected by the consultation process. PACE has a strong record of helping individuals facing redundancy and will work alongside local partners to ensure that workers receive the support they need. Although our primary objective remains protecting jobs and securing a future for the site, we also have a responsibility to ensure that workers and their families receive appropriate support throughout the consultation period.

This Government is committed to doing everything we can to support the workers and the community at Grangemouth. To that end, I have written to the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to reassert my expectation that the agency's efforts are squarely put behind our ambitions for the cluster and have asked him to ensure that no stone is left unturned in its efforts to retain operations, in at least some form, on the existing site.

However, many of the challenges identified by Syngenta lie outside devolved powers. I have therefore also written to the UK Government to urge it to take meaningful action for Grangemouth, but in particular at Syngenta. The UK Labour Government has consistently professed that it supports Grangemouth, yet not one penny of the £200 million commitment from the National Wealth Fund has been deployed. That support is needed now—to invest in the industrial cluster to ensure that it is fit for the future, that Grangemouth is viewed the world over as an attractive and exciting place to do business, and that its workforce has opportunities long into the future.

I recognise that the announcement, following similar such decisions by other operators at Grangemouth, might raise understandable concern about the long-term future of operations across the cluster. Grangemouth remains one of Scotland's most important industrial sites, with significant strengths, capabilities and opportunities for future investment. The workforce is highly skilled, the site is well located, and the Scottish Government is determined to do everything possible, within devolved powers, to support the cluster's continued evolution and secure a sustainable future for it.

I take this opportunity to renew our commitment to working with businesses, workers, unions, the community and the UK Government to create up to 500 new jobs at Grangemouth by the end of this parliamentary session.

In 2025, we committed £25 million to support Grangemouth's industrial transition, and we have already made significant money available to new and existing operators to support new employment locally and elsewhere in Scotland. To date, we have allocated more than £8 million to initiatives at Grangemouth, including the construction of MiAlgae's new bioreactor facility and the progression of the new Celtic Renewables biorefinery. Combined, those initiatives could support the creation of up to 279 jobs by the end of this decade.

We are working with a range of other developers that have expressed an interest in locating at Grangemouth, although—as I am sure members will appreciate—due to commercial sensitivities I am unable to comment publicly on the proposals in more detail. Nevertheless, I reassure members that Scottish Enterprise's efforts are focused on enabling the release of more funding and, in turn, accelerating the deployment of further such projects at Grangemouth.

That is why we must all welcome today's announcement that biotech firm MiAlgae has secured a £2.5 million investment from the Scottish National Investment Bank to support its

new commercial-scale production facility at Grangemouth. The investment is a clear vote of confidence in Grangemouth's future, and it will support innovation, attract further investment and create high-quality jobs.

Syngenta has publicly stated that it is open to exploring opportunities for the site and that a final decision has not been taken. I can only take the company at its word. I reiterate that the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise will work collaboratively with Syngenta's management to ensure that the site continues to contribute to Scotland's economy for many more years. By entering this phase as openly, collaboratively and positively as possible, we must find a solution that will ensure that the dedicated workers at Grangemouth have employment long into the future.

I reiterate my commitment that the Scottish Government will ensure that no option for a sustainable future for the site is overlooked and that workers remain at the centre of our response.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I will allow about 20 minutes for the cabinet secretary to answer questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. Questions and answers should be brief.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

Nobody—not least the 377 workers whose jobs are now at risk—wanted to receive the news in recent days from Syngenta. I associate myself with the cabinet secretary's comments. We must all pledge to work with those workers and their trade unions to secure a future for them and other people who work in Grangemouth.

I note the cabinet secretary's impatience regarding the £200 million that has been pledged. Project willow is a joint enterprise by the UK and Scottish Governments. Although the National Wealth Fund has committed to provide that £200 million, Scottish Enterprise has a critical role in identifying projects and preparing land and sites for that investment. What communication has the cabinet secretary had with Scottish Enterprise to ensure that it expedites its work so that the sum that the National Wealth Fund has pledged can be drawn down?

**Stephen Flynn:** I thank Mr Johnson for his serious response to what is a serious issue. He is, of course, right that Scottish Enterprise has an important role to play. That is why I engaged directly with its chief executive last week, and I have subsequently set out in writing my expectation that no stone be left unturned as we seek to secure a sustainable future for the site.

It is, however, important to reiterate the point that Mr Johnson raised, which is that £200 million was put on the table for Grangemouth by the UK Government about 18 months ago but not a single penny has yet been spent. I am keen to work with him and the UK Government to change that reality.

**Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform):** The news is devastating: 377 jobs might go, causing implications for the wider supply chain and supporting businesses. As was said in the statement, Syngenta has said that the Grangemouth site faces high costs and remains significantly more expensive to operate than other production sites.

I appreciate the Scottish Government's efforts to support the business and its workers, but we must start looking at the underlying reasons why such plants are not competitive. Policies such as net zero have driven up energy costs, left us vulnerable to war, caused price spikes and imposed significant costs, such as carbon taxes. All that means that we end up offshoring industrial production while importing ever more products from abroad. Will the Scottish Government seek to review the deeply underlying cause of the plant's uncompetitiveness and to report back on its findings?

**Stephen Flynn:** As I sought to lay out in my statement, and as I outlined to members during a hastily arranged call last week, I understand that a number of factors have driven Syngenta's decision to do what it has done. Those factors include energy costs, global competition, the status of Syngenta's own products and competition within the company to secure new lines for sale to the wider world. As I understand it, the compound impact of those factors has led to the current, and deeply regrettable, situation.

My focus right now is not on having the arguments about net zero that Mr Massey would like to have; it is on ensuring that we can secure sustainable future delivery at Grangemouth for all the workers who are impacted by the decision.

**Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and for the work that the Government is doing to try to protect jobs in my constituency.

As the cabinet secretary said, it is almost two years since the UK Government promised £200 million for Grangemouth. I have written to the Prime Minister and to Mr McDougall, neither of whom has given me so much as an acknowledgement. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that the Labour Government is asleep at the wheel when it comes to Grangemouth and can he provide an update on the Scottish Government's engagement with

Westminster to press for that funding to be delivered?

**Stephen Flynn:** Mr Day is absolutely right to highlight the promise made to workers in advance of the 2024 general election that the refinery would be saved, although it was not. He is also right to draw to members' attention—as I sought to do earlier and as Mr Johnson of the Labour Party did—the fact that £200 million was promised by the previous Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, but not a single penny has been spent.

I outlined my concerns about that directly to the UK minister responsible, Mr McDougall, during a call on Friday and I will reiterate those points in the future because that money must be deployed to ensure that we have new jobs and opportunities at Grangemouth.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green):** I follow the cabinet secretary in extending my thoughts, and those of my party, to those who work at the site and to their families.

The cabinet secretary referred to the Scottish Enterprise money that has been given to Syngenta to expand the business. Workers are now facing redundancy, although the company is not in financial distress. What assurances has the cabinet secretary had from the business that any further public money given to it will be used to retain jobs there for the long term and that we will not be back here again once another grant has run out?

**Stephen Flynn:** We may be getting a little ahead of ourselves. I have asked Scottish Enterprise to engage constructively, as I know it will, with Syngenta in order to look at all the available options. Once that has happened, we will be in a position to make a more rounded assessment as to whether any further money could be provided.

I reiterate to Parliament that, as I outlined in my statement, the Government put together a package for Syngenta, yet it still took the decision that it did because of the financial pressures that it believes the Grangemouth facility is under. That is a matter for the company, but we will leave no stone unturned to ensure that we are doing everything that we can to secure a viable future for the site.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Con):** My thoughts are also with workers who are impacted and their families.

We need a long-term economic plan for Grangemouth that will help to maintain skills and jobs in the area. What due diligence was carried out before Syngenta was awarded £2.2 million of public funding and could that money be redirected to support workers at Grangemouth?

**Stephen Flynn:** That is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise, but I understand that the business has outlined its willingness to repay the grant.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement and add the support of the Scottish Liberal Democrats to the workers who are directly affected, their families and the wider community.

The cabinet secretary spoke—fairly—about the strong track record of PACE, but I am conscious that a succession of announcements have been made about the Grangemouth site and, indeed, commercial activities in the wider economy. Has he given any thought to whether PACE support needs to be augmented, given the cumulative impact of the recent announcements?

**Stephen Flynn:** In relation to the previous decisions that have been made about Grangemouth and the closures, particularly at the refinery, a significant amount of work has been undertaken on job prioritisation and skills.

We are very much at the start of the consultation process, so it would be remiss of me to jump to conclusions, but I assure Mr McArthur and Parliament that we will be working through all options over the coming months as the company proceeds with its consultation.

**Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP):** MiAlgae has secured investment of £2.5 million from the Scottish National Investment Bank to help the company to scale its commercial production and bring new employment opportunities to the Grangemouth community. I appreciate that there are commercial sensitivities, which the cabinet secretary alluded to. However, can he advise what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the impact of that investment? Can he say any more about the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support investment in Grangemouth?

**Stephen Flynn:** It is important to highlight that there has been investment, and there will continue to be investment, in the Grangemouth site. Through MiAlgae and Celtic Renewables, we have seen Scottish Enterprise and, more recently, the Scottish National Investment Bank step in to provide financial support that creates new jobs and sustainable opportunities at Grangemouth.

Ultimately, the most important thing in this discussion is ensuring that Grangemouth has good, sustainable jobs, and this Government is committed to delivering that.

**Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab):** This is deeply worrying news for my constituents in Grangemouth, and my thoughts are with the workers at Syngenta and the wider community.

The cabinet secretary has talked about the support that Scottish Enterprise has offered Syngenta, not least the £2 million that was provided last year. I am interested to know when the Scottish Government first knew that the Grangemouth site was under threat and when the cabinet secretary first met management at Syngenta to discuss the situation.

**Stephen Flynn:** The company told me last week that it has started a consultation process on proposed closure. That was the first day that I, or, as I understand it, the UK Government, was advised of Syngenta's intentions in relation to closure. Of course, the Government and Scottish Enterprise were in regular dialogue with Syngenta prior to that, as I outlined in my statement.

**Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I agree with other members on the need for a long-term economic plan. With that in mind, project willow outlined clearly that Grangemouth could build jobs in sustainable aviation fuel. However, to date, the site has not received any funding from the advanced fuels fund, which sits at around £200 million. With a view to resolving that, will the cabinet secretary give an update on the engagement that he has had with the UK Government on the matter and what the Scottish Government can do in the meantime?

**Stephen Flynn:** We are all extremely keen to ensure that there is further and continued investment in Grangemouth so that we can unlock new economic opportunities. Sustainable aviation fuel is certainly one of those opportunities. It is important that the UK Government listens to members in this chamber when they undertake their deliberations in relation to the £200 million from the National Wealth Fund, which has not been spent.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform):** Last week's news about Syngenta is devastating, but the cabinet secretary is to be praised for arranging a call with MSPs and MPs. I wonder whether I could encourage him to ask Blair McDougall to do something similar, because it would be useful.

In relation to the Scottish Government's commitment to invest £25 million in the Grangemouth industrial transition, only £8 million has been allocated so far. Can the cabinet secretary tell us the timetable for the remaining funding, how he anticipates it might be spent and how many jobs will be created?

**Stephen Flynn:** I thank Mr Simpson for his very serious approach to the topic. It was good to speak with him and other members from the chamber and from Westminster following the announcement last week. He will be very keen to know that I had a further meeting with unions on Friday and, as I outlined earlier, with the UK Government. I certainly hope that Mr McDougall will take Mr Simpson's views in respect of a meeting very seriously, as I am sure that all members of this chamber would.

It is important for me that the £25 million, which had been put on the table by the Scottish Government, is spent. We need to ensure that we do that in a manner that supports viable businesses. Scottish Enterprise is very much undertaking that work, as has been outlined by the fact that, as Mr Simpson rightly said, £8 million has already been spent on support for MiAlgae and Celtic Renewables.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** It is of deep concern that 377 jobs are at risk as a result of this decision, which will impact not only the Grangemouth area but, potentially, the whole of the central belt. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with employees and unions to ensure that their voices are heard and will inform the Scottish Government's next steps?

**Stephen Flynn:** Yes, I can. I engaged proactively and immediately with trade unions on Thursday and Friday. They have an absolutely crucial role to play, not only in supporting the workforce now but in working with the Government in Scotland and the UK Government on future proposals for Grangemouth. I was very clear with them that this is the start of our work with them on this particular issue. I have no doubt that they will continue to engage with the Government constructively, as they have done up until now.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** We all agree that the most urgent priority is the interests of the workforce whose lives and livelihoods are on the line. However, this is far from the first example of a company being willing to take public money and then leave its workforce behind when times get tough. Surely the cabinet secretary can agree that we need to take a much more systematic approach to ensuring that, when the private sector wants public money, it comes with binding guarantees, both for profit sharing when there is success and for workers' protection when there is failure?

**Stephen Flynn:** That is why Scottish Enterprise puts in a number of grant conditions in many of its offers to companies. As I outlined to Meghan Gallacher, it is my understanding that the grant

that was provided to Syngenta last year would be repaid should the company ultimately reach the point of closing the site.

**Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and for his engagement with members of the Parliament. Can he say any more about what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the wider impact that this decision will have on the supply chain?

**Stephen Flynn:** We are all very conscious that 377 workers and their families are directly impacted by the decision. However, we all know that, when there is an industrial closure, it has a much wider impact on the supply chain. I am particularly conscious that, for those in Grangemouth and nearby communities, this will be of profound concern.

I can assure Alex Kerr that considerable work will be undertaken to fully quantify that in the coming weeks and months. Irrespective of where an industrial closure takes place, we cannot forget that, although we might be dealing with the direct figures, the knock-on impact on the supply chain is huge.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** That concludes the ministerial statement on Syngenta Grangemouth.

# Scotland's Future in Europe

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01448, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe. Members wishing to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:30

**The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins):** It is over 10 years since the European Union referendum, and we marked that anniversary just a few weeks ago. It was quite telling that nobody was celebrating. I marked that anniversary as a member of this Parliament, having been a member of the Westminster Parliament at the time of the EU referendum.

I am aware that this place has its detractors, but can I just reflect from a distance on what an oasis of common sense the Scottish Parliament was during those chaotic years? It was a Parliament that, on a cross-party basis, had recognised the damage that leaving the EU would do, recognised the impact that it would have on EU citizens living here, and, despite every single area in Scotland voting to remain, sought compromise with a United Kingdom Parliament and Government that had stopped listening.

I remember in the days and weeks following the referendum that it was this Parliament that—to paraphrase—kept its head while all about lost theirs. I pay tribute to former First Minister Sturgeon for her leadership during that period, but I will also say that the calibre and quality of debate was so much higher in this Parliament than it was at Westminster. I pay tribute to others such as Kezia Dugdale, as well as Willie Rennie, to be fair, along with Patrick Harvie and, of course, the current First Minister.

While I am pursuing the theme of credit where it is due, let me again, a decade on, acknowledge that the UK Prime Minister has now, at long last, recognised the damage that leaving the EU has done—damage that is costing the UK £250 million a day in lost tax revenues; has made the UK more isolated and less safe at a time when Europe is pulling together in the face of Russian aggression; has upped red tape for businesses, especially small businesses; has created a small boats crisis in the Channel due to the UK's unnecessary withdrawal from the Dublin system, and, critically, has removed rights from citizens—not least, our young people, who now have fewer rights than my generation and those before me had.

Therefore, I am grateful to the Prime Minister, who has rejected the omerta of Brexit and has set

out the options that we should consider. The options that the Prime Minister has given us are: the costly status quo; join a customs union; join the single market; or simply—and this would be my preference—rejoin and be a member like most of our neighbours. That being said, I am keen to hear members' views on the options that have been set out—not by me, but by the Prime Minister.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Stephen Gethins:** In terms of this Parliament, I am mindful that, in the near term, there is the question of the UK-EU summit, which will have a profound impact on devolved competences, just as the whole Brexit saga has done. Indeed, the great irony of Westminster seeking to "take back control" was that it was mainly at the expense of Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh. Brexit has been a disaster. Those with most to hide are those who seek to avoid this debate and it is telling that those who own the Brexit process have so little to say in its defence.

I am also keen to hear members' views on that summit. Even if it were not for the renewed debate, the summit would still be of significant consequence to this Parliament. The areas currently under discussion, including agrifood trade, youth mobility, emissions trading and energy co-operation, are all areas where closer co-operation can deliver real benefits for Scotland and impact heavily on devolved areas of competence.

**Murdo Fraser:** Will the member give way?

**Stephen Gethins:** I will give way to Mr Fraser on that point.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am grateful to Mr Gethins for giving way. I was trying to intervene on his previous point about what membership of the EU would mean.

Can he clarify the Scottish Government's current position on seeking membership of the EU? Is that full-fat EU membership, with membership of the Schengen agreement and the single currency? Or is that some sort of à la carte bespoke membership, which has yet to be identified?

**Stephen Gethins:** Mr Fraser, like his colleagues at Westminster, has not been reading his European treaties, which does not surprise me terribly.

I am not sure whether I am allowed to do this, but I encourage him to read my book—[*Interruption*.]—for which I interviewed a variety of decision makers in relation to that question. As a result, I was able to include the fact that there are a variety of ways in which you can join the European Union. Ireland is not a member of Schengen. With regard to the Nordic members, Finland is a member of the EU and the euro; Sweden is a member of—

**Murdo Fraser:** Will the member give way?

**Stephen Gethins:** No, thank you—I think that I would listen on this point about treaties, Mr Fraser. Our position is that we should have a membership of the European Union that suits Scotland and that is aligned with European treaties.

On devolved competence, the Scottish Government has consistently argued for a more constructive relationship between the UK and the EU. The Scottish Government has published detailed proposals—I encourage the member to read those, too—engaged extensively with stakeholders and worked positively with the UK Government where interests align. We published our updated position on the summit negotiations today, and I encourage members to maybe do a bit of reading.

It is right that we acknowledge where progress is being made. For example, there is the return to membership of the horizon programme and Erasmus+. We are also moving forward with an ambitious sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, which could help to reduce unnecessary burdens on exporters; a well-designed youth experience scheme that, although not the same as the scheme for members, is a bit of progress; the linking of UK and EU emissions trading systems, which could reduce costs and barriers with the EU; and greater energy co-operation, which offers opportunities to improve energy security and support investment in the transition to net zero. Those are all worthwhile objectives.

However, we should also be honest about the extraordinary limits of what is currently on offer. The UK's red lines on participation in the single market, a customs union and freedom of movement are an impediment to real progress. Some of those constraints and limits also make Scotland and the rest of the UK more vulnerable to the development of legislation that is aimed at putting EU interests first through the made in Europe agenda. We will continue to work in good faith with the UK Government on its renegotiation in the short term, but it is right that we highlight the shortcomings and our preferences, as the UK Prime Minister has invited us to do.

That brings us to a vision of our future. The debate has always been about differing visions of our future. Scotland is a European nation, and Scotland prospers when we work closely with European partners. That is true economically, socially and culturally, and it is true in the face of shared challenges in relation to energy security at a time of geopolitical uncertainty, climate change,

which is having a generational impact, and economic competitiveness.

Scotland has paid a particularly high price for leaving the EU. Modelling suggests that Scotland was the hardest hit of the devolved nations, with economic output up to 9 per cent lower in 2023 than it would have been had we remained in the European Union. That came at a time when barriers were erected across some of our most important export sectors, from food and drink to energy, chemicals and professional services. Our agrifood sector has been particularly badly hit, leading to a sustained loss in the sector, with analysis showing that Scotland may have lost up to £2.8 billion-worth of output.

However, the issue is about more than that. It is about the kind of society we want to build and how we see our place in the world. The Prime Minister talked about solidarity, and I agree, but why is solidarity restricted to an island, when the rest of Europe moves closer together? Solidarity is not restricted for this single island but rather across democratic Europe. Solidarity means that we pull together on issues such as energy security and food and drink—areas where Europe needs Scotland and we are part of the solution. Solidarity does not mean turning our backs on European partners during the worst crisis since the second world war. Solidarity does not mean taking a country out of the EU against its will and failing to even engage with compromises. Solidarity does not mean refusing a nation its right to self-determination and imposing laws and governance against its will. Solidarity is built into the European treaties that respect the independence and sovereignty of its members—nations that can leave the EU when they want, that sit as equals and that have a court and agreements that ensure that the biggest members cannot simply overrule the other constituent parts.

Ask someone in Dublin, Warsaw, Helsinki or Ljubljana—the capitals of states for which independence was hard won—whether they lost their independence when they joined the EU and you will get a stern rebuke that EU membership strengthens their independence. It is a 21st century model of union that stands in stark contrast to the outdated 18th century model of union that is way past its sell-by date and that would not be tolerated by any of our neighbours.

Over the past decade, we have paid a heavy price for British exceptionalism. I am simply asking members to return to a European norm.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the best future for Scotland lies within the European Union (EU) and that EU membership should be sought as swiftly as possible.

15:40

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome this debate, and I will tell members why: it is because Andy Burnham's speech in Liverpool last week started a vital national conversation on our long-term future with Europe. The current European Union is different from the one that we left, and I hope that it will not destabilise further if Le Pen wins in France or Alternative für Deutschland gains more ground in Germany.

Europe is too important an issue for any party to grandstand on. Although I could agree with a fair amount of the minister's speech, I regret to say that we have already heard some grandstanding from him. However, that is hardly surprising, because we know that the Scottish National Party loves a headline over a headache and does its best to rewrite history. This is the same SNP that actively opposed the UK joining the EU in 1973, that famously spent more on a camper van than on campaigning against Brexit, and whose MPs, including the minister himself, failed to vote for membership of the customs union during the 2019 indicative votes in the House of Commons.

**Stephen Gethins:** Those were indicative votes, and I respected the will of the Scottish Parliament. When it came to meaningful and legislative votes, I voted for the customs union—the Labour Party voted against.

**Neil Bibby:** That is not the SNP's only piece of chequered history on Europe. The SNP's former Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture described the Lisbon treaty, one of the foundational legal pillars of the European Union, as "a travesty" and "unacceptable".

We could all spend this afternoon attacking each other's positions on Europe. However, let us instead try to reach some common ground and achieve some unity. Let us look forward and work together in the interests of Scottish businesses, workers, young people and all our citizens.

However, doing so will take far more serious thought and hard work than lodging an ambiguous two-line motion does. The motion states that the SNP wants Scotland to join the EU "as swiftly as possible", but it fails to specify how and on what terms. The motion does not seek membership on a defined basis, it provides zero detail on any red lines and it sets out absolutely no plan to protect Scotland's interests.

Neither the motion nor the minister's opening speech acknowledged some basic truths, let alone answered the most fundamental questions. The reality is that Scotland's current structural budget deficit makes us ineligible for EU membership. Today, we have been given no detail about which public services would be cut to meet the strict entry criteria set out by Brussels, nor has the Scottish

Government even bothered to address the massive question of currency compatibility.

If we are here in the Parliament to argue what is genuinely in the best interests of Scotland, let us look at the hard facts. It makes little economic sense to break up one union only to join another. It makes even less sense when we consider the undeniable fact that the rest of the UK is Scotland's largest trading partner, which, according to the Scottish Government's own statistics, accounts for 60 per cent of all our exports, which is three times the size of our trade with the entire European Union. In fact, we export more to non-EU international markets than we do to the EU itself. The SNP's position is simply not in Scotland's interests. Brexit was a disaster, but Scexit would not repair it; it would square it.

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** In Neil Bibby's amendment, which he has just mentioned, he says that

"the interests of Scotland are best served by … being negotiated"

by the UK. However, there was an absolute farce when the UK was in charge of the Brexit negotiations. It reversed its previous position, which was to safeguard Scotland's place in the EU, and it then forced Scotland out of Europe even though in every local authority area we voted to stay in. Why would we be best served by the UK negotiating for us?

**Neil Bibby:** It is for the very reasons that I have just outlined. The Scottish Government's statistics show that 60 per cent of our exports go to the rest of the UK—three times the amount exported to the European Union.

I agree with Andy Burnham that Brexit has done more harm than good, that we need to examine every option for closer integration and that we must build a consensus on the best way forward. I fear that the SNP is not interested in the latter two points, but the minister and I can agree on the first. Brexit was wrong. It was a mistake made by David Cameron, who called a referendum that he was not prepared for.

**Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Neil Bibby:** I need to make some progress.

David Cameron did that in the narrow interests of his party rather than in the interests of the country. It stands as a salutary lesson that referendums should be called not to recklessly gamble with a nation's fate but to reaffirm a clear national will.

Brexit has been profoundly damaging. The Office for Budget Responsibility and the Bank of England estimate that the UK's economy is 4 to 8 per cent smaller than it would have been had we remained in the EU. We have seen the loss of between £100 billion and £200 billion of potential economic activity, alongside hits to business investment and non-tariff barriers.

Despite that uphill battle, it is welcome that, since 2024, the UK economy has been growing at a higher rate than the economies of other European G7 nations, but that does not erase the massive loss of economic potential that we have suffered. That is exactly why I have welcomed the UK Labour Government, since it took office, working to reset our relationship with the European Union and actively seeking co-operation where it matters most—on trade, security and defence. We should all welcome the UK-EU security and defence partnership that was signed in May 2025.

I welcome the fact that the UK will officially rejoin the Erasmus+ programme. That will come at a cost of £570 million, but it will directly support Scottish universities and reopen doors for our young people, with an expanded programme that covers youth work and technical apprenticeships.

I also welcome—even if John Swinney refused to do so at the time—the vital work that is being done to progress a comprehensive veterinary agreement to boost agrifood trade. Supermarkets have said that that will reduce the cost of people's weekly shop—and I am sure that I am not the only one who recalls that the Scottish Government said that it was going to do that. Aston University has estimated that that could increase agrifood exports from the UK to the EU by 22.5 per cent. It is no wonder that Salmon Scotland, the Food and Drink Federation and many others have welcomed that progress.

It is right that the UK settles its long-term relationship with Europe, and the UK Labour Government will effectively and responsibly lay out the options and the necessary trade-offs. I urge the Scottish Government, if it is genuinely serious about closer European integration, to engage meaningfully and constructively with the UK Government and with parties in this Parliament. Let us listen to the voices of Scottish industry and civil society and respected organisations such as the Scottish advisory forum on Europe.

We must have a team Scotland approach as part of a team UK approach. If the minister and the Scottish Government are genuinely serious about repairing our relationship with the European Union, they will choose to work with our Prime Minister and not against him. As the minister mentioned, the UK-EU summit later this year will provide an opportunity to strike deals that will boost our economy, slash red tape, help our businesses to grow, and give young people

opportunities that they have been denied since Brexit, including here in Scotland. The Prime Minister believes that those steps should be the floor and not the ceiling of our ambition, and I believe that, too.

I move amendment S7M-01448.3, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the Prime Minister's recent commitment to comprehensively review the UK's relationship with the European Union (EU), including examining options for closer integration; believes that Brexit has caused profound economic harm and that a close relationship with Europe is fundamental to Scotland and the rest of the UK's prosperity and security; recognises that the interests of Scotland are best served by any return to European frameworks being negotiated on a UK wide basis to protect Scotland's trade with the rest of the UK, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to work constructively with the UK Government regarding its approach to the upcoming EU-UK summit and to find a consensus on a long term relationship with the EU that people in Scotland and the rest of the UK can unite around."

15:49

**Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green):** I, too, welcome the Government bringing this debate to the chamber. Even though I may not—yet—have my own book to plug, I am happy that we are finally discussing Europe.

I was 13 years old when we decided to leave the European Union and 17 when we actually left it. I horrified people by revealing those facts on the BBC's "Politics Live" last week, but I found that they struck more of a chord when we talked about the relationship with the EU. Many constituents have reached out to me and discussed how much has changed since then.

By almost any metric, 2016 was a long time ago and things were different then. We have since had 10 years, six prime ministers and countless missed opportunities. We would be foolish not to at least admit how much has changed. The cost of living was admittedly high then, but it was not quite where it is now. The international rules-based order was starting to show cracks more openly, but was yet to fully give way. Although the first-order effects of the Conservative-Liberal austerity measures had been felt by working people, we had yet to fully reckon with the economic vandalism that had been unleashed. The context within which the UK made its choice was based on a world that has not existed for quite some time.

If I am entirely honest, if I remember correctly, at the time, I was too preoccupied with repeatedly listening to Beyoncé's album "Lemonade" on my way to school, and with the upcoming release of Pokémon Go, to consider the geopolitics of it all. Like many people my age, I felt a profound sadness and, having always considered myself to be European, I was slightly confused as to what would spur on the decision to leave. In retrospect and as now seems painfully clear, perhaps allowing the architects of austerity to sell us its solution, even if it was painted on the side of a big red bus, was a foolish mistake. Like millions more people, I am not surprised that the £350 million more a week for the national health service never materialised, and perhaps that is a lesson that the words of Nigel Farage are not to be trusted.

That is not to say that the European project is perfect. In my view, there are many legitimate criticisms to be made, including of the ongoing democratic deficit that left many, including many remainers, feeling so far away from the continent that they call home. That is without even considering the tight fiscal constraints, which many fear will get worse in the new era of destabilisation.

I cannot imagine how we can argue about fixing those problems if we are committed to simply ignoring the problem that we have left behind. We have to be honest: for many people my age, the European Union provided more than just a bureaucratic political settlement. It meant opportunities to study in another country, travel, experience new cultures, work and build a life elsewhere if you wished to, or to stay here knowing that you had a continent behind you. There is something particularly unfair about the fact that my generation and those who are younger than me will continue to have to live with the consequences of leaving our neighbours behind, despite having had no say in the decision. A recent study showed that 83 per cent of those aged 16 to 24 would vote to return to the EU. Colleagues, I am sure that our experiences across many different portfolios have shown that getting 83 per cent of any group of people to agree on something is quite hard.

We cannot leave that in the air. However, we cannot just talk about prosperity, either. We must remember that it was never just about individual opportunity, but also about the collective good. Looking past the symbolic casualties of leaving the European Union, can we say that any of it has been a success, that we are proud of our untimely exit or that the economic reawakening we were promised has happened? The businesses that were promised that they would benefit from Brexit have found themselves drowning in red tape and in a regulatory framework that they no longer have a say in. Seventy-three per cent of chief operating officers say that their business confidence has fallen since Brexit and a further third of businesses want the customs procedures to be slashed. The idea of a land of milk and honey, where we left the EU and immediately slashed regulations, which then somehow benefited everyone, was never going to exist. Despite any ideological obstructions, the average consumer never wanted products that were worse and the average

business never wanted to make them. Together, we committed an act of economic harm and, although we were not to know, it happened at the point at which the 21st century hit its tipping point. As we look to the horizon, we need to ask ourselves whether this is the world that we want and what kind of future we want the next generation of Scots to inherit.

In closing, I will make a salient point that must underpin our considerations in the chamber. As members know, debates have recently exploded about leaving the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, which would be a further act of leaving Europe behind and would strip us of the international protections that we put in place to prevent the horrors of the second world war from recurring. The same individuals who tore us from our continent now choose to tear us from our rights of family, freedom and privacy and from many more. It is a purposeful trend of isolationism to make our citizens vulnerable, to take advantage of legitimate grievances, and to take more and more from us. The age of war, economic strife and state change has returned. We are surrounded by allies, enemies and those in between. To sacrifice our safety on our continent for a project of deregulation is yet another act of warfare upon the working-class people in this land.

Although we cannot undo the past 10 years, we have the power to decide what we do in the next 10 years and to ensure that the next generation of Scots inherits a country that is open, hopeful and connected to Europe. We can have a future that is defined not by the choices or the mistakes of the past but by the possibilities and opportunities that are ahead of us. It can be a future where not only our businesses are protected but our rights, too. Scotland can be a place where every Scot, no matter their background, feels that their potential is not held back, where their voice can be heard in a modern Europe, and where the chaos of the world can be held back by the strength and solidarity of our European neighbours.

I was only 13 when our previous choice was made. My generation did not have a say in what happened then, but we are hoping to have a say in what happens now.

I move amendment S7M-01448.2, to insert at end:

"; recognises that Brexit has been a disaster for the economy and for individuals, and looks forward to the restoration of the benefits of EU membership."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I call Murdo Fraser to speak to and move amendment S7M-01448.4, for up to six minutes.

15:55

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to the debate to discuss Scotland's future in Europe. I want to start by making the obvious point that Europe is more than just the EU. There are countries in Europe that are not in the EU, and we should not forget that,

Also, for the avoidance of doubt, I absolutely reject the premise of the SNP motion that

"EU membership should be sought as swiftly as possible."

Indeed, listening to the minister, I got the sense that he was not really that enthusiastic about his own motion, because he was given an allocation of 12 minutes to speak and he sat down after nine—he ran out of things to say in support of his own motion. Perhaps that should not surprise us, because, having listened carefully to his speech, I am still none the wiser as to what exactly the SNP wants from EU membership. Is it signing up to the Schengen agreement? Is it signing up to the single currency? Is it some other arrangement with the EU? It would be good to get some clarity on those matters before we go much further. I intervened on the minister to ask those questions, but he was unable to give me an answer. I will happily give way to him now if he wants to tell me what the SNP's position is on the single currency and Schengen.

**Stephen Gethins:** On the issue of time, I say to Mr Fraser that less is more. That might be a lesson that he wants to take on board from time to time.

Our position is very straightforward, and we have set it out in the past. We want to be a member of the European Union. One need not join Schengen. One need not join a single currency. Fundamentally, those are not matters for me. If we are independent, for once in our history those will be matters for the people of Scotland.

**Murdo Fraser:** Despite that, Presiding Officer, he still could not give me an answer. We do not know what the SNP's position is. Does it want to join Schengen? Does it want to join the single currency? We have no idea.

I took the minister's advice to have a quick look at his book. It is still available on Amazon, at the current bestseller rank of 1,264,928. [*Laughter*.] I am sure that more popular volumes are available.

**Stephen Gethins:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** If the minister wants to intervene again, I am happy to give way.

**Stephen Gethins:** I thank Mr Fraser for the plug. As always, I am sure that that mention will tick things up by—well, we shall see. The book is a few years out of date as well.

On his point, it is a matter for the people of Scotland, just as it is a matter for the people of Ireland. I have set out where we are on Schengen and the single currency. Fundamentally, Scotland will get a Government that votes for the European treaties, meaning that we can negotiate for what we want, as well.

**Murdo Fraser:** What the minister just said to us is that the Scottish National Party—the party of the Scottish Government—has no policy on the Schengen agreement or on joining the single currency. I have tried my best; now I will move on.

I want to talk about my amendment.

**Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** Yes—why not?

**Victor Currie:** Is it Murdo Fraser's understanding, as it is mine, that any new member of the European Union is obliged to join the single currency, the euro? Admittedly, that is without a specific timeline, but it is to happen when the economic realities allow and, unlike in the case of Denmark's current opt-out, there will be no option to opt out for any new acceding states—is that his understanding?

**Murdo Fraser:** I think that Mr Currie has correctly stated the current legal position. If that is not the case, I am sure that Mr Gethins can deal with that in his wind-up speech.

I want to talk about my amendment, because it notes the very important fact that we had a referendum in 2016 on whether the UK should remain part of the EU, and in that referendum people voted that they wanted to leave. I should stress that that was not my position. I did not support Brexit.

**Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** I have taken three interventions already. I want to make some progress. I might come back to the member in a moment.

I did not support Brexit, nor did most of my Scottish Conservative colleagues. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** Heather Anderson, could you sit down, please? The member has indicated his position.

**Murdo Fraser:** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

However, it is my firm view that, when a referendum is held, we should respect the result of that referendum. That means that the decision that was taken to leave the EU should be respected. Although I disagreed with it at the time, we should respect that view, just as we should respect the decision that was taken overwhelmingly by the Scottish people in 2014 to remain part of the United Kingdom.

I know that the current Prime Minister is talking about potentially revisiting our relationship with the EU and is perhaps even considering rejoining, and I would counsel against that. However, if he is to go down that route, we would have to have another referendum to confirm that and, frankly, I do not want to see another divisive referendum in my lifetime. Referendums consume huge amounts of political energy, they cause division in society, and they are a distraction from the real issues that matter to people.

I opposed us leaving the EU for some reasons that are similar to those that cause me to oppose Scotland leaving the UK. I understood the arguments about sovereignty, taking back control and taking decisions closer to home. The difficulty is that, in both cases, those choices would come at considerable economic cost.

Prior to the 2016 referendum, there were lots of predictions as to the negative impact that Brexit would have on the UK economy. If we look at the detail of those predictions, we see that many of them were premised on the assumption that Brexit would mean a reduction in inward migration to the UK. We now know, however, that that was not the case. In reality, the opposite happened. Far from immigration to the UK reducing as a result of Brexit, it more than doubled—albeit that the nature of it changed, with fewer new migrants from EU countries and more migrants from other parts of the world. The whole premise on which those calculations were made thus turned out to be false.

Even now, when we hear estimates of the cost of Brexit to the economy—such as what we heard from the minister earlier—we have to take them with a pinch of salt. Trade with the EU has undoubtedly become more cumbersome with Brexit. However, in assessing its overall long-term impact, we have to consider the counterfactual, and whether it would be in our interests to be tied to an increasingly sclerotic EU economy as part of the UK.

**Alex Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** In a second.

Brexit has given us the opportunity to make different choices. It has given us the right to make our own trade deals with, for example, India, which is an enormous opportunity for Scottish exports and which would not have been possible had we remained part of the EU.

**Alex Kerr:** I understand the counterfactual that Murdo Fraser is talking about. If only we had an example of a nation in the UK that had remained in the single market, we could track the difference

that it makes. If we were to track the difference in GDP growth of—oh, I do not know—Northern Ireland from 2015 to 2023, we would see that it had 16.5 per cent growth compared to UK growth of 11 per cent. Likewise, there has been a 25 per cent drop in financial services output across the other three countries of the UK, and an increase of 50 per cent in Northern Ireland.

**Murdo Fraser:** I am sure that Mr Kerr understands that Northern Ireland is a very special case in the United Kingdom, given its particular history. We have to be very careful about drawing parallels between the situation in Scotland and the situation in Northern Ireland.

One thing that we know is that the SNP wants to take us out of the UK so that we can then join the EU. That would give us an entirely different trading regime in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK, with a hard border at Berwick and Carlisle, and potentially a different currency entirely. That is not in Scotland's interests, because the statistics tell us that we trade three times as much in goods and services with the rest of the UK as we do with the EU single market. Leaving the UK domestic market to join the EU internal single market would be cutting off our nose to spite our face. It would be devastating for the Scottish economy and deeply damaging for business.

That is why we should absolutely resist the SNP's proposition that Scotland should become an EU member. Given the choice between the UK and the EU, it is overwhelmingly in our interests to stick with the UK. That is the point that I make in my amendment.

I am pleased to move amendment S7M-01448.4, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"notes that in a referendum in 2016 the people of the UK voted to leave the EU; believes that the result of referendums should be respected; notes that trade between Scotland and the rest of the UK is three times the level of trade between Scotland and the EU; believes that in exiting the UK and joining the EU, Scotland would create a hard border and potentially currency divergence with our largest trading partner, which would be deeply damaging to Scotland's economic interests, and accordingly commits to a future within an unrestricted UK domestic market for goods and services."

16:05

**David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD):** I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I also welcome the shared determination of many members—albeit not all—who wish to rebuild our relationship with Europe and undo the damage that Brexit has caused.

Although there are many issues on which the minister and I will disagree, our shared commitment on Europe is not one of those. I hope that we as a Parliament can find such unity this afternoon, because people deserve a Parliament that can put party interests aside and come together on the serious issues, not treat them as a political football.

Liberal Democrats have never wavered in our belief, even when it was not popular, that we are stronger when we work closely with our European friends and neighbours. That is part of our DNA. That is why I genuinely welcome the Prime Minister responding to that pressure and opening the door to EU membership. I hope that that will not be little more than a soundbite, and I look forward to working with Labour colleagues on it.

Today's debate is about not simply naming our ultimate destination but setting out a credible plan to get there. That is the purpose of my amendment. I will return to that amendment in a moment. However, first, it is important that we put the debate in context.

The verdict from the Office for Budget Responsibility is that Brexit will leave the UK economy 4 per cent less productive, with imports and exports around 15 per cent lower than if we had remained in the European Union. That is because too many businesses—including in the Highlands, part of which I represent—now face higher costs and more bureaucracy when reaching their European customers.

Seafood is an example. In the year to March, Scotland's fish and shellfish exports to the EU fell by 22 per cent. That was the single biggest contributor to the overall fall in our exports to Europe.

**Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform):** Does David Green recognise that the Scottish fishing trade, much of which he has just cited, has been decimated by European trawlers in our waters?

**David Green:** I do not think that the member can talk about the fishing industry, which his party has entirely abandoned.

Brexit has also made it harder for people from Europe—those who fill vital jobs, support our public services and strengthen our communities—to make their lives in the Highlands.

For my constituents, Europe is not an abstract argument. It means getting Highland produce to market, filling vital jobs and keeping our communities thriving.

My friend Charles Kennedy understood that deeply. I had the privilege of working with Charles, whose internationalism went hand in hand with his love for home. He said:

"I find no contradiction between being a Highlander, a Scot, a citizen of the UK and a citizen of the European

Union at one and the same time."

Having known Charles, I know how deeply he felt that. He was immensely proud of where he came from. He was deeply rooted in the communities that he represented. However, that never meant looking inwards; it was quite the opposite. Charles understood that the confidence in where we come from should give us the confidence to engage with the wider world.

That matters now more than ever. If we are serious about that, we must remove the barriers with Europe. That means returning to the single market and establishing a new customs union. For businesses, that means better access to the European market and fewer obstacles between them and their customers. For our universities and researchers, it means deeper European co-operation. For our young people, it means a greater opportunity to live, work and study across Europe.

We should deepen co-operation with our European allies, too, because the same principle applies to our security as it does to our economy, which is that we are stronger when we work together. That is why my amendment talks about making the UK "richer, safer and stronger"—richer by removing barriers to trade; safer through deeper co-operation with our European allies; and stronger because we achieve more with our European partners than we can do alone.

Surely, though, all of us who believe in that European project can agree on something fundamental—that Europe is stronger when more countries and more people can share in the opportunities that come from working together and being part of a wider community with shared markets, shared opportunities and shared interests. That has always been at the heart of the European project—bringing countries together, deepening opportunity and building a Europe in which more people can participate and prosper. I want that for Scotland, and I believe that this Parliament should also want it for people throughout the United Kingdom.

I finish by returning to the words of Charles Kennedy:

"Britain is a European power. We cannot change our geography. Our involvement in the politics of European co-operation is one of necessity. Our wealth and our security depend upon it."

Charles was right, which is why I urge Parliament to support my amendment.

I move amendment S7M-01448.1, to insert at end:

", and therefore believes that the first essential steps must be for the UK to join the single market as a member of the European Free Trade Area and European Economic Area, form a new UK-EU customs union and reach a new defence pact, in order to fully remove trade barriers to Europe, reverse years of economic damage that has been caused by the Brexit deal negotiated by the Conservative UK administration, and make the UK richer, safer and stronger."

16:10

**Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform):** I find it hard to justify this debate, given the priorities that Scotland faces. Every Reform member would rather be discussing the real problems that the people we represent face. We asked for the debate to be changed in order to discuss the 1,133 lives lost to drugs last year and how we can stop families going through the pain of losing a loved one. The indy establishment blocked us, so here we are.

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Jamie Hepburn):** Will the member give way?

**Senga Beresford:** No, thank you.

International relations, including relations with the European Union, are reserved to Westminster under schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** The minister is well aware that he must allow the member to continue.

**Senga Beresford:** NHS funding, mental health support, social care and rehabilitation services are all devolved.

The SNP, the Greens and, I believe, even the Lib Dems, whose politics seem to be built on sitting on the fence, all want to join the European Union.

**David Green:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Senga Beresford:** EU rules expect member states to keep deficits under 3 per cent, and new members must commit to joining the euro. Scotland's net fiscal balance is currently minus 10.9 per cent of gross domestic product. [*Interruption*.]

**Senga Beresford:** I can hardly hear myself. Can members be quiet?

The SNP talks often about the damage of austerity, but I wonder—I can hardly hear myself—how extreme the austerity measures would need to be to achieve EU membership conditions.

It also shocks me that John Swinney is so eager to sit at the European table alongside Giorgia Meloni and—if the polls in France and Germany are right—Marine Le Pen and Alice Weidel, as many European countries are waking up to the left-wing suicidal empathy that has destroyed so many economies and borders. Our growth rate is not

great, but it is better than those of the three largest EU economies.

Was Brexit worth it? Absolutely. It returned control of our money, our borders and our trade policy to the UK. We still have trade deals, with the same terms, with more than 70 countries, but we have opened ourselves up to more markets and countries. Through the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnerships, the UK has its first free trade relationship with Malaysia, where tariffs of around 80 per cent on Scotch whisky are being phased out. The Government estimates that CPTPP will add £2 billion a year to UK GDP in the long run.

Outside the EU, our fishermen get more. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimates that the UK has around 84,000 tonnes more quota this year—worth around £131 million—than it would have had as an EU member. Last year, 72 per cent of that extra quota went to Scotland. In 2025, salmon exports reached £828 million, up from £445 million in 2016. Sixty per cent of Scottish exports stay in the UK, and 18 per cent go to the EU. The EU bought £384 billion of UK exports in 2025—41 per cent of the total.

Since Brexit, we have new trade deals with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and India, and we have the economic prosperity deal with America. The UK is now making its own deals, and we demanded a higher standard with New Zealand and America, all done without Brussels. I will not pretend that everything is wonderful, but that shows we can achieve deals without paying the £9 billion to £11 billion a year to be part of the EU. [*Interruption*.]

I will lend Mr Hepburn that book to read later. It is selling well.

Europe wants to deal with us and we want to deal with Europe. A return, if even possible, would need unanimous European Council approval, European Parliament consent and an accession treaty ratified by every member state. Our old opt-outs would not be guaranteed, and we would have to commit to adopting the euro. I cannot see that going down well with the people of Scotland.

Can we do more? Absolutely. Prime Minister after Prime Minister dragged their heels on a democratic vote that they and the First Minister have struggled to accept.

Scottish universities made nearly 6,000 offers to EU applicants last year. The only difference is that the Scottish taxpayer does not have to foot the bill.

That brings me to Scottish Government waste. The Scottish Government has five international offices in Europe: in Paris, Berlin, Dublin, Brussels and Copenhagen. Last year, their budget was almost £4 million. I am not opposed to Scotland having strong international relationships, and Scottish businesses would work well with European partners, but taxpayers are entitled to ask what they are getting for their money. This is where it gets interesting.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Oh?

**Senga Beresford:** Listen closely. We asked for the performance targets for the international office network, and this was the Scottish Government's response:

"While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance the Scottish Government does not have current performance indicators or targets set for the network."

I have the FOI response if members would like to see it.

**Jamie Hepburn:** That was a bit less interesting than you thought it would be.

**Senga Beresford:** A bit like your personality.

**Members:** Oh!

**Senga Beresford:** That should concern every member of this Parliament, whatever their views on independence or Brexit.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** Senga Beresford, please sit down.

I remind all members that they must extend courtesy to each other at all times. I also remind members that if a member indicates that she does not want to take an intervention, the member—

**Senga Beresford:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I remind Ms Beresford that she should not interrupt the chair while the chair is speaking. I also remind Ms Beresford, as she may not be aware of this, that she has to sit down while the chair is speaking.

If a member indicates that they do not want to take an intervention, the member should sit down. Also, if any member is speaking and the chair speaks, they should sit down. I appreciate that there are many new members and they might not be aware of the conventions.

**Senga Beresford:** Thank you. I am about to finish up anyway.

When Reform UK's Nigel Farage and the National Rally president, Jordan Bardella, signed a memorandum of understanding on illegal immigration, that was exactly what working together looks like. I will finish there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** We move to the open debate.

16:18

**Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Follow that.

**Alex Kerr:** It will be extremely difficult to follow that speech.

I am grateful to Stephen Gethins for bringing the debate to the Parliament. His depth of belief in the European project and Scotland's place at the heart of that project is one that I share. I was one of six SNP candidates in Scotland's last European Parliament election, in 2019, and I campaigned the length and breadth of our nation, putting forward the case for Scotland remaining part of that European family of nations. Whether it was in the east end of Glasgow, where I was brought up, in Linlithgow, where I did hustings, or in Dundee, the message came through loud and clear: communities in Scotland knew that Westminster's Brexit obsession did not work for us. They had already made their feelings clear in the 2016 Brexit referendum, when every single council area in Scotland voted to remain.

In the 2019 EU elections, the SNP returned its best ever result, winning three out of the six seats available across the country. Interestingly, three of those candidates are now MSPs—me, Heather Anderson and Alyn Smith, who has completed his tour of all the Parliaments, landing here, in Scotland's national Parliament, and following in the footsteps of Madame Écosse.

In spite of those democratic mandates, Scotland was dragged completely out of the European Union and has suffered the economic and cultural damage that came with it. In spite of multiple attempts by the Scottish Government to design a bespoke way to keep Scotland in the European single market, those attempts were ignored. Such disregard for Scottish democracy is incredibly common, but it did not need to happen.

As I mentioned earlier, we have an example of when Westminster bent and buckled: Northern Ireland remains a part of the EU single market for goods and a part of the UK. What has been the outcome? The north of Ireland is far and away the fastest-growing part of the UK. Between 2015 and 2023, it had growth of 16.5 per cent, whereas growth in the UK was 11 per cent. For those who claim that that was nothing to do with Brexit, I point out that, over the same period, financial services output—a crucial part of the Scottish economy—dropped by 24 per cent across the UK, whereas there was a massive increase of 50 per cent in Northern Ireland, due to its proximity to Dublin, part of an independent nation in Europe of about 5.5 million people.

Retail is also thriving in Northern Ireland. Reuters notes that analysts say that, as a result of the pound sterling having depreciated permanently, many consumers from the Republic of Ireland make frequent shopping trips to the north for a bargain.

I mentioned another nation of 5.5 million people, like Scotland: the independent Republic of Ireland. The Republic of Ireland provides an incredibly timely comparison in relation to what independence in Europe could mean for Scotland. Like Scotland, it is undergoing its budget process, but, unlike Scotland, it is not part of broken Brexit Britain. It does not have to wait for Westminster to determine how much it can spend, nor does it have to contend with a massive deficit as a result of successive failures of Westminster governance. Instead, it is running a €6 billion surplus this year and a €9 billion surplus in 2027.

Thanks to the broad shoulders of the United Kingdom, Scotland will be protected from an equivalent increase in the state pension that those living in Ireland will receive as a result of their €10 increase as part of the budget, bringing their pension to €13,654 a year—£1,107 more than the current United Kingdom pension. Instead, Scottish pensioners will find that they receive less as the UK Government scraps the triple lock on pensions to pay for social care in England—maybe, eventually, a couple of years down the line. Thank goodness for the broad shoulders of the UK.

Thankfully, the era of Westminster dominance is drawing to a close, which presents Scotland with an opportunity to become an independent nation and to build a fairer and wealthier future at the heart of Europe. Independence offers Scotland the clearest path back into the European Union, with the benefits that membership brings. If Scotland is to rejoin the EU and regain access to the opportunities, freedoms and economic advantages that it provides, independence is the only sure-fire route available.

**Victor Currie:** Does Alex Kerr recognise that, if he got his dream and we rejoined the EU, unlike the liberty that we have, under the Westminster system, to administer our budget—admittedly, that is being done quite badly at the moment—we would be subject to a 3 per cent deficit ceiling and a 60 per cent debt ratio every year?

**Alex Kerr:** There are quite a few points to address in that intervention. Not all EU members meet that deficit ratio. Fundamentally, we are not looking for the liberty to be handed pocket money from Westminster, which has totally mishandled the Scottish economy and the wider UK economy; we are looking for the liberty that the Republic of Ireland has. It is another country of 5.5 million people that, thanks to being independent and

being able to decide its own future, is now running a budget surplus of €6 billion. Imagine that. MSPs would not have to take the tough decisions that we are going to have to take. Instead, we could increase our pensions and our budgets.

**Victor Currie:** I thank Alex Kerr for taking an additional intervention. He championed the figures that Ireland is exhibiting, but does he recognise that that is because Ireland is subject to a 3 per cent deficit ceiling and a 60 per cent debt ratio? Does he understand what would have to happen to our public services and infrastructure in Scotland for us to meet those stringent conditions that are imposed by the EU?

**Alex Kerr:** The member can look this up. As I just pointed out, the Irish are increasing social benefits and pensions because they are running a £6 billion surplus. I will leave it at that.

Make no mistake: this debate is not just academic. Had Scotland's economic growth matched the EU average since 2014, gross domestic product per head could have been around £5,100 higher. We could spend hours discussing the broken promises of successive UK Governments, but I am drawing to a close. Perhaps the biggest broken promise of all was the claim that voting to remain in the UK was the only way to protect Scotland's place in Europe. Instead, we have endured Brexit, years of austerity, a cost of living crisis, rising inflation and fewer opportunities for young people to live, work and study abroad.

We were returned as the largest party in this Parliament with a clear commitment to Scotland rejoining the European Union, and that ambition is not simply about reversing the damage of Brexit but is about the kind of country that we want Scotland to be: prosperous, outward looking and able to take its place alongside other successful independent nations of our size. Scotland's future lies in the European family of nations as an independent country in control of our own destiny. Ultimately, decisions made about Scotland should be made in Scotland by the people who live here and have a greatest stake in our success.

16:26

**Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a serving member of Dundee City Council. I am also a former Member of the European Parliament and, on 30 January 2020, I addressed that Parliament in my maiden speech, using the following words:

"My plea today is for you to remember Scotland … Just imagine how difficult it is for a country, like Scotland, which has pledged its allegiance to the European Union … to be taken out against our will and without our consent. We do not live in a United Kingdom; we live in a disunited Kingdom and Brexit is not the settled will of the Scottish people."

Those words are even more true today than they were six years ago. Of those who voted in Scotland, 62 per cent voted to remain in the European Union. After Alyn Smith was elected to Westminster, despite everything that the UK Government did to stop me getting to the European Parliament, I was there to ensure that Scotland's democratic right to vote against the withdrawal agreement was honoured, as it was, with all three SNP MEPs voting against the withdrawal agreement.

As Burns would say, it is important to

"see oursels as ithers see us".

In Europe, Scots were recognised as innovators, collaborators, leaders and reliable allies. We shared Europe's core values of democracy, human dignity, equality and the rule of law, and our forced departure was emotional and moving. David Sassoli, the late former president of the European Parliament, broke with tradition to allow "Auld Lang Syne" to be sung in the chamber. It was quite something to hear members from 28 states singing Burns and we were bagpiped out of the building. On that day, Europe recognised Scotland's unique position, just as it does today.

In my party, when you believe in something you believe in it. We have never changed our commitment to independence or to Europe and we have been proven right. YouGov polling from June this year tells us that 75 per cent of people in Scotland now think that the decision to leave the EU was wrong, and that 70 per cent would vote to rejoin, if given the opportunity. It also tells us that, 10 years on from the Brexit referendum, 77 per cent of people in Scotland think that Brexit has been a failure.

What a total failure it has been. The wheels have certainly come off the lying Brexit bus. Our defence and national security have been weakened. We are all now much poorer economically, academically, culturally and societally. Scotland's public revenues are £3.3 billion lower than they would have been if we had remained in Europe, and that is costing us £9 million every day.

I must express some frustration with the Labour Party saying that it knows that we made a bad decision but that we are just going to have to wait for it to get around to rectifying that. The Office for Budget Responsibility tells us that long-term productivity is down, that exports and imports are 15 per cent lower and that net migration has, of course, increased. Scotland has always believed in trade—Adam Smith is one of our own—so we simply could not comprehend why we were being dragged out of the world's largest free trade bloc.

The UK has the rare distinction of being the first country to impose economic sanctions on itself.

The UK Independence Party rebranded as the Brexit Party and, of course, has now rebranded as Reform UK. Back then, the party claimed that housing shortages and NHS waiting lists were caused by "faceless European bureaucrats", who were responsible for regulating everything from the volume of a pint to the straightness of a banana. Do you remember all that nonsense, Presiding Officer?

Now, Reform blames housing shortages and NHS waiting lists on immigrants, asylum seekers and women in burqas. It is all dangerous scapegoating and there is no sunny upland in sight.

The second UK-EU summit is scheduled for November, and although we welcome the change of heart at Downing Street or Number 10 North England, we are still frustrated that we cannot represent Scotland's interests directly because we are not at the table. As Mark Carney so rightly said,

"if we're not at the table, we're on the menu."

Scotland's scientific prowess, fisheries and energy are always on the menu. Unfortunately, we must again hope that the UK delegation listens to and fight for Scotland's interests, although it does not have a very strong track record in doing so.

I am very relieved that Andy Burnham, the Prime Minister, and Lisa Nandy both agree with Stephen Kerr, who in this chamber last week agreed that 10 years was, indeed, a generation. Lisa Nandy very eloquently said:

"the question of Europe was never settled … We decided to leave, we left, and now it's 10 years on."

Guess what? The question of Scottish independence is certainly not settled and we are 12 years on. Our referendum is technically overdue. Iris Duane might have been too young to vote in the Brexit referendum. We now know that a million people were not old enough to vote in the independence referendum and they must have their say now.

Back in January 2020, in the European Parliament, I closed my speech by saying:

"We have shared a long history with you in Europe, both before our current union with England and hopefully in the future … We know our best future is with you, and when the people of Scotland have to choose between two unions, they are deciding to choose the European Union."

As Andy Burnham says, Brexit has done more harm than good. However, we can no longer wait for Burnham to persuade his party to come back to its senses. I am flattered that Labour are mimicking many of our policies, but we really do not have much more time to waste. Alyn Smith, my fellow former MEP, famously asked Europe

"to leave a light on"

for Scotland to enable us to

"find our way home."

Let us become that independent Scotland and go home to the heart of Europe where we truly belong.

16:33

**Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform):** Just a few weeks ago, I stood in this chamber and congratulated Gillian Mackay on what I thought was the most pointless, excruciating waste of time in this session of Parliament. Little did I know that the Scottish Government would take that as a challenge, yet here we are.

Not all is lost for Ms Mackay and her extremist pals; she has not been undone. Her party still wins in relation to holding the most smoke-and-mirrors debate to hide the sinister side of antisemitism, but I am afraid that the SNP has won when it comes to pointless debates, because that is exactly what this ridiculous waste of time is.

Less than two weeks ago in this chamber, members heard a pathetic, half-hearted ministerial statement on Scotland's drug deaths shame that lasted only 30 minutes. Today, we are spending two hours on the EU.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Presumably, the member will welcome the fact that there will be a business motion tomorrow that will schedule a debate on drugs and alcohol deaths in the first week back after recess.

**Thomas Kerr:** I absolutely will, but how long has it taken the Government to get to that stage? Two weeks ago, we heard about record levels of drug deaths. You are taking recess off to go and enjoy your holiday, and then you are coming back to talk about it, but you have scheduled an EU debate. Shame on you.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**Thomas Kerr:** No, I will not. Sit down.

This Parliament is supposed to be a serious legislature, yet, since my election, my colleagues and I have seen no evidence that that is the case. Where is the debate on drug deaths? It is coming soon, apparently, but I will wait to see that happen.

What about child poverty or housing? Where is the scrutiny of the thousands wasted on VIP world cup tickets or British Airways flight upgrades? Where is the accountability in relation to ministers spending millions on foreign aid to Palestine or free bus passes for strangers who have invaded

our nation? Where is the sacking of a failing drugs minister whose policies are killing working-class Scots, or of a former justice minister who lied to this chamber about grooming gangs? Is it any wonder that 2 million Scots did not vote in May and have given up on this place? The Holyrood establishment is making a mockery of devolution and, as a result, Scotland is scunnered with its national Parliament. We on the Reform benches say that enough is enough.

Unlike the SNP—

**Stephen Gethins:** Will the member give way?

**Thomas Kerr:** Yes, I will.

**Stephen Gethins:** I am really surprised that Thomas Kerr wants to talk about oil and gas consenting, which is quasi-judicial and reserved; immigration, which is quasi-judicial and reserved; and what women wear, which we certainly should not be debating in here; but does not want to debate the issue on which Nigel Farage built his career. Can he tell us why that is?

**Thomas Kerr:** If the minister is seriously arguing that we should not discuss oil and gas when the North Sea is a massive issue, or that immigration and local connection are not serious, that says a lot about him.

**Stephen Gethins:** I am not saying that. Will the member give way?

**Thomas Kerr:** No, minister, I am speaking. Sit down.

My motion this week is about banning face coverings, which SNP members were in favour of but are now apparently against, so they had better make up their minds about where they sit on it.

Unlike the SNP, we want to make life work for real Scots, those ordinary people up and down the country who expect this Parliament to be focused on poverty, social mobility, taxation, housing, health and education. They want a Parliament that is focused on them and policies that are created to better their lives, not the lives of strangers who come here illegally.

**Heather Anderson:** Does Mr Kerr accept that his movement for Brexit and making us leave the European Union has made us all poorer? Today, we have repeated the statistics that show how much the economy has lost and how much poorer everybody in Scotland is as a result of the policies that he supports.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson):** Thomas Kerr, please come to a conclusion.

**Thomas Kerr:** First, the member is ignoring the almost 1 million Scots who voted to leave—apparently they do not matter. As for how much Brexit matters in terms of economics, it is nothing compared to what independence would do to this country, so the member should sit down and listen.

I will say one thing about Europe before I finish. I hope that the SNP's love for our European neighbours continues well into 2027 and beyond, because it will not be long until we have President Le Pen, Prime Minister Bardella and Chancellor Weidel. The one thing that Scotland can learn from our European friends is how to reject the woke, overbloated and out-of-touch establishment in favour of national sovereignty and renewal. So, let me reiterate: entering a country is not a right, it is an honour. In this country, it is an honour that you get from the UK Home Office.

If this lot take anything away from today, it should be this: reject open borders, deport all illegals and put our own citizens first. That is the collective message from Europe, and it is certainly the current message from the people of Scotland. You should listen up and wake up.

16:37

**Zen Ghani (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP):** I declare an interest as an elected member of Glasgow City Council. I am grateful to Stephen Gethins for lodging this much-needed motion.

In 2014, the people of Scotland were asked to make a choice about our future. One of the biggest arguments that was made against independence was that voting no was the safe option. It would protect our economy, it would protect our pensions and it would protect Scotland's place in the European Union—that was the promise. Less than two years later, 62 per cent of Scots voted to remain in the European Union, yet we left anyway. We should all be honest about that. Whatever side people took in 2014, Scots were told that remaining in the UK was the best way to protect our place in Europe. Instead, it was our membership of the UK that took us out.

Brexit has not just been some constitutional argument that only politicians care about; it has had real consequences. It has made it harder for Scottish businesses to trade with our nearest neighbours. It has taken away freedom of movement from a generation of young Scots, and it has taken us out of the world's largest single market. The long-term economic impact is significant. The OBR estimates that the post-Brexit trading relationship will leave UK productivity around 4 per cent lower in the long run than if we had remained in the EU. The Scottish Government has estimated that, for Scotland, that means that around £3 billion a year is lost in public revenues. That figure is not insignificant. That money could be going into our NHS, into our schools, into our local services and into people's lives.

Brexit has answered a bigger question for us. It has shown us what happens when decisions about Scotland's future are made somewhere else, even when the people of Scotland vote the other way. Therefore, this is not just some argument about Europe; it is an argument about power—about who gets to make the decisions that shape our economy, our opportunities, and our place in the world. I believe that those decisions should be made here in Scotland, by the people of Scotland. I and many others know that independence in the EU would not be simple. It would mean negotiation; it would mean hard choices about our economy and our trading relationships, including with the rest of the UK; and it would mean being honest with people about that. However, Scotland would not be starting from scratch. We were a member of the EU for nearly 50 years. Our laws, our institutions and our businesses were shaped by that membership. We know how it works and we know what Scotland has to offer. I have every confidence that a modern, outward-looking Scotland can make its way in Europe once again.

That brings us to the bigger question. We speak a lot about looking towards the continent, but we also have to ask what the continent sees when it looks back towards us. It sees a union which is divided and unprepared to rejoin the EU, led by a revolving door of Prime Ministers who are out of touch with reality, and a UK Government plagued by instability and scandal.

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

**Zen Ghani:** No, thank you.

When I look at Scotland, I see a country that has remained European in its outlook, even after being taken out of the EU. That matters, because this is not just about institutions in Brussels. It is about businesses being able to trade; it is about our universities working with partners across Europe; it is about young people having opportunities that previous generations took for granted; and it is about having a say in the decisions that affect us.

The Scottish people had their say earlier this year, in May, by returning the pro-EU SNP as the largest party in this Parliament, so I do not think that our job now is just to spend the next five years talking about everything that Brexit has got wrong. We also need to talk about what comes next. I want Scotland to be an independent country in the EU, not because the EU is perfect—it is not—and not because EU membership will suddenly solve every problem that we have. It certainly will not. It is because I would rather that Scotland was involved in shaping the decisions that affect our future than watching those decisions being made somewhere else.

Brexit was not Scotland's choice, but we have had to live with the consequences of it. Scotland can be a global player on the world stage because we as a country, we as a people, have so much to contribute. In an ever-changing world, where countries are looking to Europe for support and hope, it is vital that Scotland has the chance to play its part. The next choice about Scotland's future should be ours and, when that choice comes, I know where I want Scotland to be—back in Europe, with a seat at the table and making decisions for ourselves.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson):** We move to the final speaker in the open debate, Keith Brown. You have six minutes, please.

16:43

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** It is worth stating the fact that Scotland is a European nation—geographically, culturally and economically. It is also a country that has the right to self-determination; it has the right to decide. That is agreed by everybody in the Parliament, apart from the two symbiotic right-wing parties to my left. I know that one of the definitions of symbiosis is a host being attached to a parasite. I do not know which one is the parasite and which one is the host any more. When Reform members walked out the chamber the other week—and I have noticed that they oppose virtually half of the debates that we have in this Parliament—I thought that that was them putting in place their policy to reduce the number of MSPs by voluntarily leaving.

If that is not the case, perhaps they ought to deduct wages from themselves when they refuse to attend debates. At the root of that is a fundamental intolerance. They cannot stand to hear somebody else's opinion. They do not want to hear somebody else's debate. It has to be on their terms. It is time that they grew up in relation to that.

As Zen Ghani has just said, this debate should not be simply about looking back at what Scotland has lost through Brexit; it should be about looking forward to the kind of country that we want Scotland to become, 10 years on from the Brexit referendum.

**Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform):** Does the member agree that schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998 reserves—[*Interruption*.] If members do not mind my finishing the question, that would be great. Schedule 5 reserves discussion on the EU to Westminster, so does the member agree that, unless he can point to something in the motion that says otherwise, this whole thing this afternoon is absolutely pointless?

**Keith Brown:** I know that the member is new here, but I point her to the number of debates that this Parliament has held on Europe, Brexit and various other issues. She also heard the Presiding Officer's ruling that it is perfectly legitimate for the Parliament to discuss any issue that it wants to discuss, so, no, I do not agree with her interpretation.

We have also heard that recent research co-authored by Professor Nick Bloom has shown that Brexit has left the UK's economy around 6 to 8 per cent smaller than it would otherwise have been. That means £3,000 for every person, every year, through reduced trade, increased red tape, lost investment and years of economic uncertainty. Let us think about what £3,000 would mean to a family or individual struggling with Labour's high energy costs and the cost of living crisis—£3,000 would make a huge difference to them. Other estimates put the hit to the economy at around £250 million every day. At a time when families across Scotland are struggling with the cost of living and Governments are struggling with the pressure on public services, that is an extraordinary economic price to pay, and Scotland did not vote for any of it.

We have not heard this from any of the other parties but, in 2016, 62 per cent of people in Scotland voted to remain in the European Union—I know that that is an uncomfortable fact for some, but it is a fact nonetheless—and yet Scotland was taken out of the EU regardless. That brings me to Andy Burnham's recent comments, which expose a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the constitutional debate. He has acknowledged that Brexit has done more harm than good and said that the UK should consider the full range of options for its future relationship with Europe, including the customs union and even rejoining the European Union. I welcome that, because if circumstances change, the evidence changes and people decide that a decision that was taken 10 years ago is no longer serving their interests, surely a democracy must be capable of reconsidering that.

Remember the words of Ruth Davidson, who said that the only way for Scotland to safeguard its position in the EU was to vote no in the independence referendum. It would be good if, when summing up, the Conservatives would apologise, because that was a lie. It was a fundamental falsehood that led to people making decisions on the basis of what they thought was a genuine concern for Scotland's place in the EU. Why does the principle of constitutional change apply to Brexit and not Scotland? The EU referendum was in 2016; Scotland's independence referendum was two years earlier, and yet we are constantly told that Scotland's decision was somehow a once-in-a-generation event. The Tories like to use that phrase a lot, as though it were an actual argument. I refer them to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on that, because Adam Tomkins, who, as well as being a professor of constitutional law, is a former Tory MSP, told the committee that that was "political rhetoric" that has no constitutional basis whatsoever, but to listen to the Labour Party, one would think that it was an actual constitutional argument.

We also now have the Stephen Kerr doctrine, under which a generation is 10 years, so we are obviously too late to have a referendum—it should have been held two years ago. There is an even greater irony in the fact that, at around the same time as people in Scotland were warned that voting yes in the independence referendum would put our membership of the EU at risk, we were being told that Boris Johnson would never be Prime Minister of the UK and that none of the other things that have happened since would happen. A fundamental part of the Conservatives' argument was that remaining in the UK was a safer way of protecting Scotland's place in Europe, and yet, two years later, Scotland, which voted to remain in the European Union, was taken out of it. The very thing that people were warned might happen if they voted for independence happened because Scotland remained in the United Kingdom. Surely that is the definition of a fundamental change in circumstances.

As I said, I do not criticise Andy Burnham for reconsidering his position—quite the opposite. Politics should respond when circumstances change, but that principle cannot apply only when Westminster finds it convenient. Our European future is about much more than undoing the damage of Brexit; it is about access to the single market, freedom of movement, opportunities for our young people, collaboration in research and renewable energy, and allowing Scottish businesses, like those that we have heard about in Northern Ireland, to trade freely. We hear all the stuff about borders and customs posts, but remember that the Conservatives wished those away for the island of Ireland. They said, "Oh we can deal with that through information technology—there's not an issue", but, when it comes to the Conservatives, a different argument always applies to Scotland. Of course there should be a debate about Scotland's future and about the choices that an independent Scotland would face.

We heard somebody refer to a counterfactual. How about this counterfactual? Had Scotland stayed in the EU, as it voted to do, do we think that all the banks and financial institutions that left the city of London and moved to Europe—to Frankfurt and Paris—would not have come to the English-

speaking part of the UK that was still in the EU? That is where they would have come if we had stayed in the EU, and it would have been a massive boost to the Scottish economy.

What cannot be justified is saying that the people of Scotland are simply not allowed to make that choice. If politicians elsewhere in the UK can argue that our relationship with Europe should be reconsidered because circumstances have changed, the same democratic principle must apply to Scotland.

Democracy cannot operate on a one-way ratchet, and Scotland's future should be decided by the people who live here. I believe that that future is as an independent country that takes our own decisions and, once again, takes our place alongside our friends and neighbours in the European Union. I support the Government's motion.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson):** We move to closing speeches. I call David Green for a generous two minutes.

16:50

**David Green:** We are defining two minutes as "generous"—I like that.

This has been an interesting debate with lots of perspectives from all sides. The minister's book got a few mentions. I heard him say it is a bit dated; I do not know whether that was a suggestion that he will bring out a second version of it.

**Stephen Gethins:** I have no time.

**David Green:** I hear him say that he has no time.

Neil Bibby's speech on behalf of the Labour Party raised some important points that we need to address. I agree with him that breaking up a union is hard to do. When we consider the damage of breaking up a union of 40 years, we also need to address the prospect of doing that for a 300-year union. The prospect of Scotland being alone—outside the United Kingdom and the European Union—should be taken seriously. I am sure that the minister will try to address those points in his summing-up speech, because they need to be addressed, although we will disagree.

I also recognise the point that was made about the Scottish Government and the Parliament being constructive with the UK Government on the proposition that was set out by the Prime Minister—I certainly hope that we are.

Iris Duane made a good speech. I was terrified to hear how young the member is; it makes me and my grey hair feel old. The member is absolutely right that, if someone finds themselves in an argument alongside Nigel Farage, they will probably always be in the wrong. It was right to ask what successes there have been from leaving the European Union, and I have not heard a great deal about those in this debate from members who believe in Brexit.

Murdo Fraser made a light-hearted but helpful and constructive speech, given that he did not vote for Brexit. Although the member is right to ask questions of the Government and its policy platform, it was his party that delivered Brexit without answering any of the questions that the public put to it, so a bit of contrition and recognition of that point would probably be helpful.

I was disappointed not to be able to intervene on my committee colleague Senga Beresford, because I think that we could have greater engagement across the Parliament. The member raised several points. On fishing, as I said in my opening speech, Scotland's fish and shellfish exports to the EU fell by 22 per cent in the year to March. We know from statistics that Brexit is costing the UK about £90 billion a year.

**Victor Currie:** *rose—*

**David Green:** I do not have time to take an intervention.

I heard a lot of speeches from members of the Government back benches. I appreciate how frustrating it is that Scotland and the UK are no longer in the European Union, and I recognise their belief in independence. However, as I said in my opening speech, the prospect of Europe and those shared ideals are things that we should try to celebrate and pitch right across the United Kingdom, regardless of where we are from. We should celebrate the idea that we can be richer and safer, that we can achieve more together and that we can be in a wider community with shared markets and opportunities. I did not hear that case from those members, which was disappointing. If this issue is debated again, I look forward to hearing speeches in which we make that case, and do not just gripe about independence.

16:53

**Murdo Fraser:** I fear that this debate has generated more heat than light. I tried as best I could to get some more detail from the members who propose that we join the EU as to what that would mean. I tried several times to get such detail from the minister. He will be winding up the debate, so perhaps he can finally answer my questions about what exactly the Scottish Government proposes with regard to rejoining the EU. My questions are very simple. Do we want to be part of the Schengen agreement? Do we want to be part of the single currency? What will be on the

table? I did not hear that from any of the other SNP speakers in this debate, either.

If we are going to have serious discussions about what rejoining the EU means, it would be helpful to have clarity from somebody in the Scottish Government about what its intention is.

I would apply the same principle to Labour and Neil Bibby. I listened with great interest to Neil Bibby talking about what the Prime Minister has said in opening up the possibility of rejoining or having a new relationship with the EU. Again, however, we have no detail. We do not know exactly what the Prime Minister is proposing. What is the model for the new relationship with the EU? Will it involve rejoining? Will it involve Schengen? Will it involve a single currency?

**Neil Bibby:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** Perhaps Neil Bibby can tell us the answers to those questions.

**Neil Bibby:** Andy Burnham said three things last week. He said that Brexit has done more harm than good, and he is right about that. He said that he wants to examine all the options for the UK's future relationship with Europe. He also said that he wants to look at all the necessary costs and benefits and trade-offs in terms of our future relationship with Europe. That is a welcome move. We need to seriously consider our long-term future relationship with Europe, and we need to settle that for the long term.

**Murdo Fraser:** What Neil Bibby has just confirmed is that the Labour Party is in exactly the same place as the Scottish Government on the issue. They are both talking in very broad terms with absolutely no detail.

I agree with Neil Bibby on one point that he made, which is similar to a point in our amendment. Our trade to the rest of the UK is worth three times our trade to the EU. He also made the point that our international trade to non-EU countries is now larger than our trade to the EU. It would be absolute foolishness for us to disrupt our trade with the rest of the UK in order to join the EU, and a hard border with the rest of the UK or indeed a different currency would be very damaging.

Senga Beresford made some important points about trade deals. I declare my registered interest in relation to the Scotch whisky industry. That industry is incredibly excited about the trade deal with India, which is a massive market of 1 billion consumers for whom whisky is a premium product. The EU would never have done a trade deal with India in the terms that the UK has signed up to. It is a tremendous boost for an industry in Scotland that is currently under a lot of pressure, and we should definitely celebrate it. There is also an opportunity to go even further.

Senga Beresford also made an important point about what is happening in the EU right now. We are seeing it swing to the extreme right with the rise of the AfD in Germany and the Front National in France. Those who talk in such warm terms about European brotherhood and partnership need to realise that the EU of tomorrow will not necessarily be the EU of 2016, because its character is changing considerably.

Alex Kerr talked about the Republic of Ireland as a model of economic growth, but there are two key facts that he did not mention in his speech. First, Ireland's economic model was built on savage tax cuts to attract economic investment from abroad. I remember the former SNP First Minister Alex Salmond saying that Scotland could go down the same route and cut taxes to attract investment. That seems a generation ago. Now, all that we hear from SNP ministers is how, when they get powers over taxes, they want to put them up. They have stopped using the language of tax cuts. The very measures that delivered success for Ireland have been forgotten about. Perhaps Mr Kerr should reflect on that.

Secondly, public spending in the Republic of Ireland accounts for just 23.5 per cent of GDP. In Scotland today, thanks to the Barnett formula and the block grant, public spending is 50.9 per cent of GDP. We can be like Ireland, but it would mean cutting in half the amount that we spend on the health service, education, benefits and all the other things.

My final point is simply that we had a referendum in 2016 and we voted to leave. We should respect that vote in that referendum, just as we should respect the votes in all the referendums that we hold. I did not support Brexit, but let us stop going down the route of talking about rejoining. Instead, let us focus on the opportunities of opening Scotland up to the world of international trade that Brexit gives us.

16:59

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green):** I had many things on my bingo card for the debate, and some of them absolutely came true; however, the cabinet secretary's plug for his book was not on it, nor was the fact that Murdo Fraser would try to find the book and read it during the debate.

Politics is getting younger. It is incredible that we have MSPs such as Iris Duane and Zen Ghani, who are so young, even though it makes the rest of us feel incredibly old. I was the future once. [*Laughter.*] Their testimony on what they have missed out on should be listened to and, crucially,

acted on. The cabinet secretary said that we should not be the political generation to hand on a Scotland that is in a worse place. I believe that, if we do not get back into the EU, that is what we will be doing. We will work with the Scottish Government and anyone else who is willing to push towards rejoining the EU.

Neil Bibby was correct to say that the EU is a different place from what it was when we left it. Many issues have moved on and progressed without us, which should be a source of regret for us all. We are in a different political time. Many across the chamber referenced the rise of the far right across Europe, which should concern us.

David Green noted that being outward looking can make Scotland better. The more countries that are in the EU, the more prosperity can be shared. I believe that most of us across the chamber share that sentiment about the EU.

Heather Anderson was correct to say that Stephen Kerr has never been more popular than when he agreed that a generation is 10 years. Murdo Fraser seems to have followed his example by referencing which First Ministers represented the previous generation.

Zen Ghani made a good point about what Europe sees when it looks as us, which should push us to do better in Scotland, especially if we want to rejoin. We have diverged from some EU regulations, and we will have to catch up if we want rejoining the EU more easily to be a reality.

**Jackie Dunbar:** I cannot believe that Ms Mackay has said that Stephen Kerr is the most popular at the moment. She is talking about Scotland rejoining the EU. Does she believe that we should be independent before we do that, or should we rejoin the EU before we become independent? Does she agree with the popular, sensible Mr Stephen Kerr that a generation is 10 years?

**Gillian Mackay:** I said that Stephen Kerr has never been more popular, but, on the axis of Stephen Kerr's popularity, that may not be a high bar for the rest of us to try to reach. There is an awful lot of debate in the chamber about what constitutes a generation, but we should be able to have our say again, whether that is on Brexit or Scottish independence. I think that we should be an independent nation that is back in the EU, as Keith Brown, Alex Kerr and many others have said.

Most members can agree that Brexit has been a disaster for our people and for the economy. There is not an area of life that has not been impacted by it. Universities have less access to research grants, which means that they have less money and are under increased financial pressure. We experienced further damage to our education system through the loss of the Erasmus scheme. Although I appreciate that we will be back in that scheme, we cannot estimate the damage that has already been done to our institutions, let alone the individuals who missed out on the chance to use it in recent years. Restrictions on free movement have made it harder for Scots—especially young Scots—to experience the wider world through studying or with a summer job and to experience culture and make friends. Scottish companies face mountains of red tape when they take up contracts in Europe, and they have to account for every nut and bolt that they take to use in projects.

There is no argument that we are worse off financially, but our departure from the EU has also damaged efforts to tackle the climate emergency. Funding for innovation in energy has reduced for wave and tidal projects, which have been the biggest losers at a time when we need more of those types of energy devices. That is without the democratic deficit that Scotland finds itself in, having voted overwhelmingly to stay in the EU but having been taken out of it against our will. If we are a so-called equal partner in the union, that should have been respected.

The UK's Prime Minister has hinted that a possible Labour manifesto might promise another referendum on EU membership. At the moment, the proposal is more discussion than action. What the Prime Minister means by closer alignment is also vague. No timelines are attached and there is no certainty. People across Scotland are worse off because of Brexit. They do not need vague promises of jam tomorrow or pie in the sky; they need us to rejoin the family of European nations. If the UK Government is serious about that and will set out a clear plan and timeline, we are willing to work with it.

Ultimately, I believe that we cannot be the political generation that allows the next generation to be worse off. Today's young people do not have the freedoms that so many of us were given when we were young—freedoms that benefited us in so many ways. We need more ambition rather than another conversation, and we need an independent Scotland that is back where we belong, in the EU.

17:05

**Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform):** I reiterate a point that my colleagues to my left and my colleague Max Bannerman made last week: we do not feel that the subject of today's debate is a topic that we should be prioritising. A significant number of more urgent matters that are within the gift and agency of Parliament would have been much more important to debate—none more so than the recent, damning statistics on drugs deaths, which have nearly doubled in the Scottish

Borders and have risen by 21 per cent in Dumfries and Galloway. I think that we all can and should agree that that is truly a stain on our nation that needs addressing urgently.

As for the content of this debate—such an important debate, as we can see from the packed benches across the chamber—the constitutional future of Scotland has clearly been decided and settled. Scotland voted decisively to remain part of the United Kingdom, and then the United Kingdom, including more than a million Scots, voted to leave the European Union. The people of Scotland, who have all sent us here, would be much better off if we stopped wasting time on those settled matters and focused on the issues of the day.

In this debate—quelle surprise—we have not learned much new about any party's position on Europe and the constitution. We could have all probably guessed what was going to be said in the chamber in advance and saved ourselves a bit of time, but there we are. [*Interruption*.]

We have been reminded that the SNP did not accept either referendum result—a third time might be the charm—and we have also had a reminder of its slightly bizarre position that my constituents in the Scottish Borders have more common interests with people in Bucharest than they do with people in Berwick, or that they want closer links with Nicosia than they do with Newcastle. Either way, it is a bizarre position, just as it is a bizarre desire to have Schengen border posts at Gretna to cut us off from our friends, family and loved ones in the rest of the United Kingdom.

**Alex Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie Langan:** I would be delighted to.

**Alex Kerr:** Are there Schengen border posts at Northern Ireland's border with the Republic of Ireland?

**Jamie Langan:** Well, it is an interesting policy of the SNP to want to recreate the settlement and dynamics of Northern Ireland here in Scotland. I know that the SNP is a master of division, but that is an odd line to take.

The Greens, of course, have taken on a similar view and obsession with foreign policy matters, although, in fairness, they are normally talking about the middle east, so an afternoon talking about Europe, on this occasion, is getting slightly closer to home—it could be Scotland the next time. They have a buzzword that they quite like, which is "disinformation". I believe that Iris Duane was talking about NHS spending, so I would like to point out that spending on the NHS across the United Kingdom has increased by far more than £350 million a week since 2016.

As for the Liberal Democrats, Mr Green has illustrated the very awkward position that his party finds itself in—no to one referendum rerun, yes to another. The embrace and love of Brussels is an interesting position for a party that likes to champion itself as a party of localism. Just last week, I was on a panel with a Liberal Democrat MSP who said that decisions should be made close to home whenever possible, yet the Lib Dems would like large swathes of important areas of our law to be surrendered to unaccountable bureaucrats for a bloc of more than 450 million people. Perhaps Mr Green would like to correct the record.

**David Green:** Jamie Langan is not doing himself any favours. In 2014, a number of us stood up and said that the best way for all of us to co-operate was by pooling and sharing resources. I believe in subsidiarity, which is the idea that decisions should be made at the best possible level. I am very happy for that to happen when it comes to security, trade, making our businesses stronger and ensuring that we have more tax revenue.

Incidentally, I said to the member that £90 billion a year in tax revenue is lost because of Brexit. I would be very happy to co-operate with the rest of Europe.

**Jamie Langan:** I thank Mr Green for his intervention on my remarks, but I am not sure that he clarified that the very real point of localism, which his party likes to talk about and often focuses on, would be completely undermined by rejoining the European Union even via the back door.

Murdo Fraser, to his credit, does seem to have respect for the will of the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom, although I wonder whether a few members of his party would be less comfortable standing up to champion the benefits of Brexit.

As for Labour, who knows what to believe from Labour members these days when it comes to referendums. One moment it was a party that accepted the result of both referendums, but now maybe it does not accept the result of one of them—maybe it does not accept the result of either of them. That is awfully concerning, but there we are.

Mr Bibby may have pushed back on his leader in Scotland, or Andy Burnham. However, the truth of the matter is that Labour does not have Scotland's, or Britain's, best interests at heart; it has only Labour's best interests at heart. Labour would sell the constitutional future of the country down the river for a quick polling boost.

We often hear from members on the Government benches about the need for more decision making to be done in Holyrood. I have to ask them: which enhanced post-Brexit powers are SNP members unhappy about having? Are they unhappy about having more power over agricultural policy, fisheries policy, environmental policy or animal health and welfare policy? [*Interruption*.]

Mr Brown is welcome to make an intervention if he can tell us which of those policies he does not think that the Government is very good at.

**Keith Brown:** I was talking about what we would gain from acceding to the EU. We would gain access, on proper terms, to a market of 500 million people. That would be quite a big win.

**Jamie Langan:** I appreciate the member not answering my question. I will plod on anyway.

Thankfully, none of us will see this event in our lifetimes. However, in the event that a proposed independent Scotland rejoins the EU, it would be interesting to know which of the following powers SNP members would want to sign away. Is it monetary policy that they are very happy to give to Brussels? Is it trade policy? Is it control of their external borders? It hardly sounds like independence to me.

**David Green:** Earlier on, I criticised the Government back benchers—or gave them some friendly advice, perhaps—and said that we should be making the case for Europe.

Jamie Langan has been speaking for almost six minutes and I have not heard anything whatsoever about how Brexit has benefited any of our constituents; nor, indeed, has he addressed the point that I made earlier about the £90 billion a year that it costs us in tax revenue to be outside the European Union.

**Jamie Langan:** Well, I have been recapping the points that have been made in the debate. However, the United Kingdom has got back from the European Union a plethora, a great range, of freedoms and powers—[*Interruption*.] We have freedom over the vast majority of our—[*Interruption*.] We can have that debate outside of this, but I still have places to go on this. We have the freedom to make our laws on every area of the economy, on law and order, and on regulation.

SNP members often moan that they feel that Scotland is not heard across the United Kingdom when it comes to influence and decision making. We heard no end of that in the debate last Thursday. How, therefore, can they make the assertion, with a straight face, that Scotland would have significantly more influence and representation in a union of more than 450 million residents that lacks an accountable executive branch?

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

**Heather Anderson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie Langan:** Absolutely. I will take one. I will get the time back.

**Heather Anderson:** We have the right of veto—[*Interruption*.]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson):** There is no time for an intervention. Mr Langan must conclude.

**Jamie Langan:** I was very keen to hear from an experienced member of the European Parliament; perhaps I will be able to in the next debate.

We know that the SNP wants to surrender powers back to Brussels, because, clearly, it knows that if it is judged on the very real powers that we have here—on issues such as drugs deaths—it will be seen as a resounding failure.

17:13

**Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab):** I will take Stephen Gethins's advice that less is more, and so I apologise if I do not take up my full seven minutes.

The Labour movement has always been rooted in solidarity and co-operation in the belief that, when we work together, we can achieve more than we ever could alone. That is why I was devastated by the result of the 2016 EU referendum, and why I was also deeply disappointed that, despite vote after vote in the House of Commons, and despite the best efforts of many of my Labour colleagues, ultimately, we crashed out of the European Union.

I thank Heather Anderson for bringing to life the sadness that she and her colleagues felt in having to leave the European Parliament. That was certainly reflected in the Labour movement as well, although we have continued to work with our socialist parties across Europe.

We have spoken about the damage that the hard Brexit did to the country: to our economy, our young people, our universities and researchers, and the opportunities that people across Scotland should have had to live, study and work alongside our European neighbours. I thank Iris Duane for eloquently expressing the loss of our younger generations.

In an increasingly insecure world, a close relationship with Europe is fundamental to our prosperity and security. I agree with a lot of what has been said today. I believe that Scotland is

stronger when we are closer to Europe, that we can move forward as a country, and that we must continue to be defined by values of solidarity and co-operation—a stronger Scotland in a changing UK, moving ever closer to our European neighbours.

That is why, if the SNP's proposition is to leave the United Kingdom and then seek to rejoin the European Union, I cannot support it. I believe that Brexit was a mistake, but I do not believe that the answer is to compound that mistake by leaving our largest trading partner and beginning another long and complicated process of separation. I disagree with Alex Kerr's saying that that is only way to rejoin the EU, and I also disagree with Heather Anderson that we have to choose between unions. We do not. There is another way. The direction of travel is becoming increasingly clear. The UK Government has made clear its intention to move towards greater alignment with the European Union.

**Alex Kerr:** Does Katherine Sangster agree that the question of Europe was

"never settled forever",

as is the case with independence? It

"has not worked for us. A lot of the public, I think, have come to that view as well."

Those are my words but also Lisa Nandy's words about the European referendum.

**Katherine Sangster:** I agree that there is a movement in the country against Brexit, because the evidence is clear that it is not working. I do not believe that there is evidence of a need for another referendum on independence, but I will come to that.

**Stephen Gethins:** I will talk about Katherine Sangster's comments in a moment but, to be clear, the point that we have put together is about rejoining the EU, rather than about Scotland's constitutional position, because I know that she disagrees with me on that, as does David Green. I am not asking her to endorse independence at this moment, just membership of the EU.

**Katherine Sangster:** I thank the minister. I was speaking to Alex Kerr's point, but I take his clarification.

I welcome Stephen Gethins's comments at the start of the debate. However, if the Scottish Government is serious about getting Scotland closer to Europe, the answer surely has to be to work with the UK Government to make that happen. We do not need to choose between Europe and the United Kingdom. We can have a stronger relationship with Europe while maintaining the strength of the union. There is no need for an all-or-nothing approach. That is an important point. With Brexit, we saw what happens when politics becomes all or nothing, and we all have had to live with the consequences.

It would be naive to pretend that reopening the constitutional question would not bring further division and uncertainty. Even if independence was achieved, we would face another enormous set of questions and challenges before we could even start to negotiate entry into the EU. That route is not simple or free of risk, and it does not put the interests of the people of Scotland first. As my colleague Neil Bibby set out, the sincerity of the Scottish Government on the issue must be questioned.

Alignment with the EU can be successfully achieved by the Government, and has been attempted by other Governments. We need to look at the Welsh Labour Government and what it achieved with Taith, which sits in addition to the UK's Turing scheme. Even if the Scottish Government chooses not to pursue that opportunity, Wales proved that it could do it. Entry to Erasmus+ is now on the horizon, thanks to co-operation with the UK.

I will make a point of thanking David Green for offering co-operation. We will take that on board.

We should not pretend that the Scottish Government has no ability to build relationships with Europe, nor that the UK Government is simply determined to keep Scotland out of Europe. Neither of those things is true, and that kind of politics serves nobody—certainly not our young people, our economy or Scotland.

The Government's motion takes everything that the Parliament could agree on—closer alignment, better opportunities for our young people and a stronger relationship with Europe—and turns it into a narrow constitutional choice. I do not think that Scotland needs that. I make a plea to the Parliament to focus today on what we agree on. One thing that we agree on is that Nigel Farage cannot be trusted—thank you for that, Iris Duane.

I am not sure that the Government can seriously say that it disagrees with any of the Labour amendment, so I encourage it to focus on the thing that brings us together, because there is an opportunity in that. We can be proudly Scottish and proudly European, and we can work across the United Kingdom to draw a line under the division of the past decade, and finally move forward from Brexit.

That is why you should support my colleague Neil Bibby's amendment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson):** I remind all colleagues to speak through the chair. I call the minister, Stephen

Gethins, to respond to the debate and take us to decision time at 5.30, please.

17:19

**Stephen Gethins:** I thank colleagues for their contributions to what has been a helpful discussion, albeit one that does not come to an end today.

A couple of helpful points were made by Neil Bibby and Katherine Sangster. Andy Burnham has set out questions for us and it is for us to respond. It is almost 10 years since the Scottish Parliament responded to the Brexit referendum, and what I want today is a clear view on where we take things next and what our view is. On Neil Bibby and Katherine Sangster's point about working with the UK, I encourage members to look at a publication that I mentioned earlier, which is the Scottish Government's priorities for a second UK-EU summit, and engage with me on that. I look forward to our conversations about that in anticipation of the summit.

However, that is in the near term. We have to look at the challenge beyond that, and the questions that the Prime Minister has opened up to this Parliament. We should look not only at the issues that have been raised but at the issues that we would want to raise with the UK Government. Mr Bibby asked us to engage meaningfully and I am happy to do that. I have written to Hamish Falconer and I look forward to meeting him next week. That will be an ongoing discussion.

In the short term, there is a huge range of areas relating to the summit. I do not think that there is one area of discussion that does not touch on devolved competence. I know that that will be of interest to Mr Bibby and other colleagues around the chamber, as well as my ministerial colleagues. Mr Bibby was right to point out the economic disaster that leaving the EU has been and continues to be. It is important that we send out a clear and unambiguous message about where we stand on that.

I come to the Greens. Gillian Mackay talked about her bingo card. I will give her that because I did not have Beyoncé in a debate about the European Union on my bingo card. Gillian Mackay and Iris Duane made some important points, for example about the impact on future generations. Every single political generation should leave more opportunities than it enjoyed. Because of the ongoing damage of being outside the EU—and it could get worse—our political generation will not be able to say that it has done that. Iris Duane was right to raise the jeopardy of leaving the European convention on human rights. When we leave one multilateral organisation, it is a slippery slope to leaving another multilateral organisation.

I thank Murdo Fraser for his speech. A colleague called it "light hearted"—we will take that as a compliment, although it might have been meant otherwise. I am sure that Mr Fraser agrees with me that democracy does not stand still. Indeed, it is the case that democracy must never stand still. At one point Mr Fraser campaigned on independence for the Scottish Conservatives. Democracy may have moved on for Mr Fraser in that regard, as it has done in the debates that he has had.

I thank David Green for his constructive approach. I share his commitment to the European Union and agree with his comments about Charles Kennedy's outward-looking internationalism. As well as Mr Kennedy, I often think about another great European, Neil MacCormick, and his talks about the interchangeability of our sovereignty in a European context. Neil MacCormick and I may have had one view on the future of the UK, and Mr Green and Mr Kennedy may have a different view, but we share a passion for the future of Europe, which we can demonstrate by voting for the motion.

I am about to talk about Reform, so I will take an intervention on that.

**Victor Currie:** I restate that the EU would impose a 3 per cent deficit ceiling and a 60 per cent debt ratio on Scotland's budget. Unlike most EU states, our population tax base is spread across a vast relative area, including remote and island communities, meaning that our public infrastructure will not bear those fiscal conditions. If we are having an honest debate about a future independent Scotland in the EU, will the cabinet secretary define how many nurses we would lose, how many schools would close, how many ferries would not sail and how many police we would cut, all to satisfy the demands of a benevolent EU superstate?

**Stephen Gethins:** I will make an intervention on my own speech: Mr Currie has not touched on the fact that we are losing £250 million a day—several members have quoted that. The Liberal Democrats sourced that from the House of Commons library, which is the gold standard. That is £90 billion a year that we are losing from Brexit. The best way to grow the economy and give people a better quality of life is to rejoin the European Union.

Let me touch on Reform. I notice that Reform likes to talk about reserved issues and issues that come under schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998, but on its signature issue—an issue on which it has a track record—it does not like to talk. I wonder why it does not—it is because it has been catastrophic.

We can disagree on the constitutional future and a range of other issues, but I am sure that we can

all agree on that catastrophic decision supported by Reform—a hard Brexit that is costing us all dear. Nigel Farage said that as soon as we left the European Union, everybody else would follow—Denmark, Poland, the Netherlands, you name it. In fact, Nigel Farage even told us that within a decade, the EU would not exist, but what is happening in the EU? It is growing. Everybody who has ever joined the EU got richer; the one country that left got poorer. Reform has a poor track record, and it is one that has made us all the poorer.

The one partnership that Reform members want is the new twinning arrangement with the National Rally. That is something that they do talk about. They also talk about Alternative für Deutschland, which backs the Kremlin in its war in Ukraine. Those are not twinning arrangements that anybody in this chamber should be having anything to do with whatsoever.

My colleague Alex Kerr rightly highlighted Scots democracy, and Heather Anderson, who has a great deal more experience of these things, spoke about public opinion and the fact that Reform owns that decision. Zen Ghani rightly pointed out that it is not just a constitutional argument in a dry debate when decisions that have human impact are made. Keith Brown has talked about that £3,000 for individuals and the safeguards that we had on our place in Europe.

I come back to the amendments. I am afraid that I can accept some of Mr Green's arguments, but I cannot accept his amendment. I see where it is coming from, but it throws up additional barriers. I know that others have advocated that position in relation to the European Free Trade Association and the EU, but our position needs to be much more straightforward than that.

Mr Langan talked about unelected bureaucrats. He should look at who is sitting right behind him. There are no unelected bureaucrats in this Parliament, whereas the majority of parliamentarians at Westminster are unelected and are there for life.

The Prime Minister has set out a clear set of choices: rejoin the EU and overturn that disastrous decision, rejoin the single market or remain as we are. I want this Parliament to send an unambiguous message that we want to rejoin the EU.

David Davis, the former Brexit secretary, said that a democracy ceases to be a democracy when it loses the ability to change its mind. We have never changed our mind, but I hope that others might do so, given the legacy of Brexit.

Our vision remains straightforward. Solidarity does not stop at the white cliffs of Dover or the Irish Sea. Solidarity in areas such as energy and food and drink delivers economic opportunity for us.

I note that the EU is a club for independent states—the UK is not. The EU treaties allow you to leave when you want to—the UK does not. The EU is a partnership of equals where you can sit around together—the UK is not. It is no wonder that public opinion is with us.

The Prime Minister has set out a choice. Do we want to join the democratically elected institutions in the EU? Does this democratic institution believe in rejoining the EU? I believe that it does. I want this Parliament to send a clear and unambiguous message, just as it did 10 years ago. It was right then, and I hope that it is right again now.

# Decision Time

17:30

**The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I advise members that, if the amendment in the name of Neil Bibby is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser will fall and that, if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in the name of David Green will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-01448.3, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01448, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe, 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.

17:30

*Meeting suspended.*

17:33

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the vote on amendment S7M-01448.3, in the name of Neil Bibby. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not access the voting app. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. Your vote has been recorded.

**For**

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)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

**Abstentions**

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S7M-01448.3, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 16, Against 93, Abstentions 9.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S7M-01448.2, in the name of Gillian Mackay, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01448, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Gillian Martin:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Your vote has been recorded.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
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)
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)
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)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

**Against**

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, 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)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S7M-01448.2, in the name of Gillian Mackay, is: For 77, Against 25, Abstentions 16.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S7M-01448.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01448, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Gillian Martin:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Your vote has been recorded.

**For**

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

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
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)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
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)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
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)
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)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

**Abstentions**

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S7M-01448.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 25, Against 66, Abstentions 26.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S7M-01448.1, in the name of David Green, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01448, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Gillian Martin:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Your vote has been recorded.

**For**

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

**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)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S7M-01448.1, in the name of David Green, is: For 10, Against 94, Abstentions 15.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S7M-01488, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not vote. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Your vote has been recorded.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Your vote has been recorded.

**Gillian Martin:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Your vote has been recorded.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
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)
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)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

**Against**

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, 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)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S7M-01448, in the name of Stephen Gethins, on Scotland's prosperity and future in Europe, as amended, is: For 78, Against 25, Abstentions 16.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to*,

"That the Parliament believes that the best future for Scotland lies within the European Union (EU) and that EU membership should be sought as swiftly as possible; recognises that Brexit has been a disaster for the economy and for individuals, and looks forward to the restoration of the benefits of EU membership."

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

# Blantyre in Malawi (150th Anniversary)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S7M-00862, in the name of Clare Haughey, on the 150th anniversary of the founding of Blantyre in Malawi. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates Blantyre, in Malawi, on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, to be celebrated in October 2026; understands that the city was founded on 23 October 1876 by Scottish missionaries, and was named after Blantyre in Scotland, the birthplace of the explorer David Livingstone; recognises that Scotland and Malawi share a deep historical friendship dating back to Livingstone's explorations in the region; highlights the publication of the book by Jonathan Waters, Blantyre: Urban Evolution – A Photographic History, which chronicles the city's people, places and transformation since 1876, and pays tribute to the many individuals, businesses, third sector organisations, including the Scotland Malawi Partnership and Rutherglen-based Classrooms for Malawi, schools and universities and governments that have maintained the links between the two countries over the past century and a half.

17:43

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP):** I am grateful to colleagues for signing my motion, which marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of Blantyre in Malawi, in order to bring the debate to the chamber. I welcome Stuart Brown and Chad Morse from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, who have joined us in the public gallery.

The anniversary provides an opportunity to celebrate the depth and diversity of the relationship between Scotland and Malawi, while considering what an equal and effective partnership can look like in the years to come. It gives me great pleasure, therefore, to have been able to secure the debate.

I thank Scotland's International Development Alliance for sending members an informative briefing ahead of the debate, as well as a copy of the Scotland Malawi Partnership's document, "Scotland's Civil Society links with Malawi—Constituency Mapping: Holyrood". The Scotland Malawi Partnership helps to support, connect and represent over 1,000 organisations and key individuals linked with Malawi across Scotland, including in my constituency of Rutherglen and Cambuslang. The mapping document provides details of individuals and organisations with links to Malawi in each of the Scottish Parliament's constituencies, which clearly illustrates the breadth and depth of the ties between the two countries.

I know that many MSPs across the chamber have, over the years, been strong advocates of those ties, and their origins sit within my constituency, which is home to Scotland's town of Blantyre. To be frank, the shared name can occasionally lead to some amusing search results, in particular on weather applications. When I was writing my speech, I saw that both Blantyres were set to enjoy sunny intervals this afternoon, albeit with a 13°C difference in temperature.

Blantyre in Malawi was founded in October 1876 by Scottish missionaries, and named after the birthplace of David Livingstone. He was born in 1813, in a small tenement flat in Shuttle Row in Blantyre, which housed workers from a cotton factory on the banks of the Clyde. Today, the building is home to the David Livingstone Birthplace museum, which is a much-loved local landmark. In 2021, I attended the museum's reopening after its multimillion-pound regeneration project.

The updated museum now hosts a new range of collections, which, as well as telling Livingstone's story, tell the stories of the African men and women in his exploration crews, and highlight his ongoing legacy. It is a fabulous resource, not least because there are moments from his story that link directly to numerous current cultural issues. Those resources can be and are used, including by many school groups, as a jumping-off point to discuss issues such as racism, climate change, black history and women's history. Every Malawian President has visited Scotland at least once, and has been sure to include a visit to the museum.

In August, at the David Livingstone Birthplace museum, I attended the launch of a new book—"Blantyre: Urban Evolution—A Photographic History". It was a real pleasure to meet the author, Jonathan Waters, and Stuart and Chad from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, plus many others who share in maintaining and strengthening the ties between our two countries.

For more than 20 years, the Scotland Malawi Partnership has helped Scottish and Malawian people and organisations to work together as equal partners. It is thanks to the partnership's dedication that those links and relationships that blossomed a century and a half ago have endured and flourished. In 2015, the then chair of the partnership, the Rev Professor Kenneth Ross, said that the partnership that had developed between the two nations over the past 150 years was

"the living legacy of … Livingstone",

and described it as

"a friendship defined and underpinned by mutual understanding and mutual respect, by solidarity and support."

Today, an estimated 46 per cent of Scots personally know someone with a link to Malawi. Each year, more than 109,000 Scots are involved with a civic link to Malawi, and more than 208,000 Malawians are actively involved in links with Scotland. Those relationships encompass communities, schools and universities, businesses and civil society organisations in both countries, having grown far beyond their historical origins—a living legacy indeed. However, those civic links are only one part of the jigsaw.

In 2005, the Scottish Government formalised its partnership working with the Malawian Government, focusing on areas including health, education, gender equality and climate change. More recently, the Government has sought to expand the relationship by encouraging trade, investment and co-operation in relation to renewable energy work. Scotland-Malawi links have created opportunities for two-way learning in areas including sustainable agriculture, community-led development, education, health and climate resilience. Those strong connections are increasingly important in a changing global context. Climate breakdown, rising debt burdens, conflict and weakening international co-operation are placing growing pressures on lower-income countries.

One of the most pressing challenges that the Malawian Government faces is building the best possible education system for Malawi's children and young people. Malawi has one of the youngest age structures in the world, with around two thirds of the population under 25. I am proud to be the MSP for the constituency in which the Classrooms for Malawi charity is based. Classrooms for Malawi works out of Rutherglen, and its main focus is on building and improving school facilities in the country to help tackle overcrowding. Due to a lack of classroom space, pupil-to-teacher ratios in Malawi are almost unimaginably high. The Malawian Government target is 60 learners per teacher; however, the usual ratio is 124:1. In standard 1, which is equivalent to our primary 1, the average ratio is 130:1.

Classrooms for Malawi works side by side with Malawian communities and local authorities to identify schools that are in urgent need of infrastructure improvements. In consultation with community leaders, parents, teachers and local authorities, the charity employs local tradesmen, working with locally sourced materials, to construct classrooms. Through its work and its partnerships, the charity has now completed 207 school builds and renovations to date. That is an incredible achievement.

I look forward to hearing from other members about the Scotland-Malawi links in their constituencies. While those links are founded in

friendship, however, today they are operating against an international backdrop of rising right-wing populism and declining political support for international development from some of the world's most powerful nations. The 150th anniversary of Blantyre is an opportunity to celebrate the remarkable relationship between our two countries. It is also an opportunity to pause and reflect, and recommit to that relationship, and to tackle together the challenges that our nations face.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** The time limit for all speeches in the open debate is four minutes, but time will be added for interventions.

17:51

**Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I commend Clare Haughey for securing this important debate on the 150th anniversary of Blantyre in Malawi.

When I was preparing my speech on Scotland's relationship with Malawi, I wondered, while thinking that it was all very interesting, how I could find an angle to include my constituency of Uddingston and Bellshill. As it happens, there is a bridge connecting the towns of Blantyre and Bothwell in my constituency that is named after the very man who connects the two countries: David Livingstone. One end of that bridge opens into the town of Bothwell, and the other into the David Livingstone visitor centre in Low Blantyre, so perhaps the connection is not quite as tenuous as I first thought.

However, the more I looked into the Scotland-Malawi relationship, the more I realised that the important connection is not really the geographical one—it is the human connection. Every Scottish constituency has people-to-people links with Malawi, and that includes Uddingston and Bellshill. North Lanarkshire is represented by organisations such as Noble primary school in Bellshill, where pupils have met Malawian coffee farmers and learned about fair trade and its impact on communities. Just down the road, Bothwell parish church has been developing a relationship with a congregation in Malawi, with the aim of learning from each other as well as sharing experiences and expertise.

Those might sound like small examples, but they are important. When we talk about international relationships, it is easy to picture Governments, ministers and people in suits and official delegations, but relationships do not work like that. They are built by people, and the connections run in both directions. One wonderful example is the MV Ilala—I hope that I have pronounced that right—which is the ferry that has served communities around Lake Malawi for 75 years. It was built by Yarrow Shipbuilders in Scotstoun and then transported to Malawi in pieces and reassembled there. A ship that was built on the Clyde became part of everyday life for people around Lake Malawi.

There is a modern political dimension, too. As a Scottish National Party MSP, I am particularly pleased to see the work that is supported through the SNP's Westminster Foundation for Democracy programme with Malawi's parliamentary women's caucus. That work has included supporting women parliamentarians on gender-responsive budgeting, political participation and electoral integrity. It shows what a modern international relationship can look like, and it is not about Scotland simply giving something to Malawi—it is about sharing our experiences, strengthening our institutions and learning from one another.

That matters when we think about climate change in particular. Malawi has contributed relatively little to the causes of the climate crisis, yet its people are dealing with some of the most serious consequences of that crisis, in particular because agriculture is so important to the country's economy and extreme weather can have devastating impacts. That gives us a reason not simply to offer support, but to listen and learn and ensure that we work together.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** Is the member aware of the work that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee did last year in relation to Malawi? We looked at the relatively small amounts that were given to Malawi that helped it to map wells in the country and found that the mapping was vital during the floods, because it meant that the country was able to highlight which communities were in danger. That is an example of why we do international work and why it is so important for countries.

**Steven Bonnar:** Ms Adamson has put on the record just how important these connections between our local communities are. The work of that previous committee was vastly important, and I hope that it will continue with the new committee. She is right that small sums of money can make a difference. Scotland is a wealthy country and we can offer small sums that make big differences.

Perhaps that is why the debate matters even to someone who represents Uddingston and Bellshill. Internationalism does not mean that every Scottish community needs to have a direct connection with every country in the world; it means recognising that our communities are connected in ways that we do not always see in our day-to-day lives. A school partnership can change the outlook of a child; a community link can

become a friendship; a friendship can become a project; and a project can change lives, just as Ms Adamson said. That is how an international relationship becomes a local relationship.

So, what does Malawi have to do with Uddingston and Bellshill? Nothing, if we think of international relations as something that happens between Governments and distant capitals—or quite a lot, if we understand those links as relationships between people.

17:56

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Clare Haughey for bringing the debate to the chamber. I was recently asked to join the cross-party group on Malawi, so I have already been looking at the relationship between Scotland and Malawi. As Clare Haughey pointed out in her contribution, it is a long-term, wonderful and interesting relationship—the word that she used was "remarkable". It started with the unique Scotland-Malawi friendship, rooted in the 1859 journey of explorer David Livingstone—as other members have mentioned—and, as the motion highlights, the founding of Blantyre in Malawi. The friendship dates back to the explorer's travels across Malawi in 1859. That was followed by decades of church, educational and community links and, as others have mentioned, civic relationships.

The origins of the modern relationship are easily recalled to the mind of anyone who was interested in the Scottish Parliament from its early years. As an outsider to the Parliament at that time, I remember that the former First Minister Jack McConnell established the official intergovernmental co-operation agreement between Scotland and Malawi in 2005. I think that it is fair to say that he understood that the agreement's civic roots were key to its success. As other members have said, it was not simply about the intergovernmental links; it was important to build on the deep historical ties that we had with Malawi, rather than just signing a formal agreement between Governments.

I am glad that the relationship was renewed and updated in 2018. At that point, we were looking at things that mattered to people such as co-operation on health, education and skills, sustainable economic development and renewables and energy—the things that we talk about in the Parliament every day—and the links between people, communities, schools, universities, churches and charities. My understanding, from speaking to many people once I knew that I would be joining the cross-party group, is that the agreement provides for wonderful co-operation between the two countries and sees them operating on an equal level. That may be unique in terms of the ways that other international development funds work.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership, as Clare Haughey mentioned, has sent members a briefing, which has included, for me, a wonderful report about the projects in my region. For example, it highlights that, 15 years ago, the St Andrews Charitable Trust built a school, which has grown from 96 children to more than 1,000. It has five school buildings, along with teachers' houses and solar panels, and the trust provides things such as mosquito nets, food, school books and equipment. There is a close relationship that is tangible in what it provides. I was also interested to read about the Fair Trade Electives medical elective partnership work. It looks like an amazing partnership, in which both groups gain so much from working together.

I want to highlight some of the work that is done to support women and girls. Scotland and Malawi have worked together on a number of initiatives that are focused on improving outcomes for women and girls in key areas such as education, including access to education, reproductive health, empowering women and leadership. Those are all important elements.

I also pay tribute in particular to the work that has been done by Susan Dalgety, who was an adviser to Jack McConnell at the time of the original Scotland-Malawi agreement. It shows how important that agreement was to the Scottish Parliament that someone who was working at that stage still shows such a commitment to the project, and in particular to women and girls. That work has certainly sparked my interest—I have read many articles and followed what is happening on social media. In fact, I noticed from social media today that Susan Dalgety is on her way to Malawi, so I will be interested in hearing about the exciting work that may come from that visit.

If the Presiding Officer will give me a moment, I will just add one point, given that I have been speaking about women. I have been doing some work about the humanitarian situation in Cuba, in particular around women. We know that the embargo is causing problems with electricity and the supply of flour and bread, and the impact on women in Cuba has been enormous. As this debate is about international collaboration, I wonder whether members might also take a look at some of the humanitarian needs in Cuba.

However, given the time, Presiding Officer, I will stop now. I simply say that I really appreciate the debate coming to the chamber, and I hope that our friendship with Malawi continues well into the future.

18:01

**Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform):** I thank Clare Haughey for lodging the motion—I was happy to support it and to have this debate in the chamber today.

As someone who has spent a reasonable amount of time in South Africa and travelled more broadly around southern Africa, I can attest, although I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting Malawi, that the Malawians whom I have had the pleasure of meeting to date have all been incredibly kind, warm and welcoming people, and I think that that is reflected in the friendship and links between our two countries.

The motion focuses on Blantyre's founding by Scottish missionaries in 1876. That role in founding what is now Malawi's financial and commercial capital set the tone of Scottish and British influence in Malawi in the 19th and 20th centuries. Scottish and British cultural influence was instrumental in making the state that we now recognise as Malawi. Schools and educational institutions such as the Henry Henderson Institute in Blantyre, the Overtoun Institution in Livingstonia, the Kondowe teacher training institution, Livingstonia secondary school and Livingstonia theological training, the Loudon Embangweni school, the Bandawe school, the Ekwendeni school and St Andrews school in Blantyre were all found by Scots or based on Scottish theological and educational principles.

Hospitals such as the Blantyre, Mulanje, Ekwendeni and Loudon mission hospitals and Bandawe medical station, among many others, were founded with the input of Scots and Scottish civil and religious bodies. It was Britain, including many Scots, that ended the barbaric practice of the slave trade in and around Lake Malawi in the 1890s as the country became a British protectorate—long before that, Scottish missionaries had long campaigned against the barbaric practice in the region. Of course, that feat was replicated across many other countries in Africa to put an end to that heinous and barbaric practice.

Indeed, Scottish religious and cultural influence in Malawi runs so deep that Malawi's first post-independence Prime Minister and then President, Hastings Banda, who ruled the country from 1964 until 1994, was a practising member of the Church of Scotland. To this day, between 14 and 18 per cent of the population of Malawi are members of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian congregation.

Scottish and British positive influence on what is now Malawi also extended to the realms of infrastructure and commerce. Key commercial enterprises that powered the economy of what was then the British Central Africa Protectorate from 1891 to 1907, and then Nyasaland until 1964, before the independence of what we now know as Malawi, were driven by the principles and influence of commercially minded Scots. The African Lakes Corporation was founded in 1877 by Scottish businessmen to co-ordinate commercial interests with Presbyterian missionaries. That business did not cease trading until 2007, which highlights the bridging of our modern links to Malawi with the traditional links that go back right back to the 19th century.

That period also saw the development of key infrastructure and transport links in what is now Malawi that shaped that modern nation. The Shire Highlands railway, the central Africa railway, the Blantyre-Salima railway extension and the telegraph, postal and telephone networks that helped to shape the country were developed in that period. Scotland and Britain should be enormously proud of our history and our links in Malawi, and our links with countries like Malawi around the world.

Of course, as the motion mentions, there are still significant links between Scotland and Malawi to this day. I commend the work of voluntary groups and their efforts in Malawi, but I must also caution against the use of taxpayers' money to fill in for the work of foreign Governments that are not delivering for their citizens. After all, empire did not end to be replaced by a humanitarian empire.

To conclude, the motion is right to celebrate the very real, important—

**Clare Haughey:** Will the member give way?

**Jamie Langan:** I am about to come to a conclusion, but I will be delighted to.

**Clare Haughey:** I hear what the member is saying about international development, but we heard from Clare Adamson and Steven Bonnar about the importance of even small amounts of money to countries such as Malawi, as they can make a huge difference to the lives of the people there. Does he not accept that, although his party might have an ethos of not wishing to give money to overseas Governments, that money can actually save lives and make a huge difference to the quality of life of people in countries that are poorer than the United Kingdom?

**Jamie Langan:** Again, I am happy to commend the work of voluntary organisations. I think that Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom have a proud record of voluntary organisations working in other countries. However, my concern relates to our system of government having to step in and take the place of foreign Governments that are not delivering for their own people.

This Parliament should endeavour to maintain and foster the friendship that we have with the people of Malawi, and we should also endeavour to foster and maintain that pride in and recognition of the positive role of Scots, and of Britain as a whole, in countries such as Malawi. We should never be apologetic for our role in the world. Malawi is a fantastic example of the role that we can play.

18:06

**Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green):** Prior to being elected in May, I spent much of my career working in international development. Most of that involved working with communities in the Arab world and, for a little bit, in east Africa, but never, sadly, in Malawi. Therefore, I am really excited to learn more about and learn from work that is happening in Malawi, to hear more about the people of Blantyre, which sounds like an incredible city, and to engage with the Malawian diaspora here in Scotland.

As the Scottish Green Party spokesperson on international development, I believe strongly in centring feminist, anti-racist and decolonial approaches in international and domestic affairs. In particular, I believe in thinking about power sharing in our partnerships and moving away from the more traditional top-down notions of capacity building. I am really interested in what can be learned from the relationship between Scotland and Malawi about building partnerships that are rooted in equality, respect and mutual learning.

At the Scottish International Development Alliance's conference last week, it was great to hear international development expert Mikaela Gavas talking about the distinctive civic partnership that underlies Scotland's support for Malawi—a partnership of reciprocity, which does not involve parachute-in pilot schemes.

I love the fact that Scotland and Malawi are together pioneering really progressive models of international development through the climate justice fund, taking a rights-based and participatory approach with local ownership at its core, where communities actively design, implement and monitor interventions rather than being passive recipients of aid, and where climate justice and climate resilience strategies are thought about in terms of how they can also advance gender and disability justice and vice versa.

I am pleased to see that the Scottish Government is committing to increasing both its international development fund and the climate justice fund, but we need to ensure that those increases are front-loaded in year one and are inflation-proof. Scotland cannot offset the devastating cuts coming from the UK, the US and elsewhere, particularly to places such as Malawi, but we can do things differently and honour our commitments and our partnerships. Further, as Clare Haughey says, a small amount can make a great difference.

Scotland's partnership with Malawi also has huge potential in terms of other ways of thinking about aid, international solidarity and shifting power away from the global minority. The climate justice fund is a loss-and-damage fund, which recognises that those who are least responsible for climate change often suffer its worst impacts. The climate justice fund was described by Nicola Sturgeon not as an act of charity, but as an act of reparation, which was, in my opinion, a really inspiring direction of travel.

Building on that, we should also be thinking about how Scotland can support international calls for reparations for the harms that have been caused by slavery and colonialism, including backing the Caribbean Community—CARICOM—reparations framework and learning from Malawi's domestic national compensation tribunal and Malawians' efforts in the past decade to seek reparations for when peaceful protesters were massacred by British colonial forces in Nyasaland. We should also think about how Scotland can interrogate its own colonial legacy in Malawi.

Debt cancellation serves as a core mechanism of reparatory justice and a significant thing that we could be doing in Scotland is pushing for global debt justice and working with our partners in Malawi to ensure that Malawi's voice is heard in conversations around global debt, finance and tax justice. Malawi has an unsustainable debt burden and, last year, the International Monetary Fund described Malawi as being in debt distress. As Scotland's International Development Alliance notes, that debt is limiting Malawi's available resources for sustainable development to fund health, education and climate resilience.

That issue was also acknowledged by the Scottish Government during the Commonwealth games in a statement that was agreed alongside representatives of the Government of Malawi. I urge the Scottish Government to continue working in partnership with Malawi on the issue, to support the global call for debt reduction, to promote debt justice internationally, to back fairer global tax rules and stronger representation of countries such as Malawi in international financial decision making, and to perhaps offer Scotland as a seat of arbitration for foreign debt.

It has been a privilege to take part in this debate, and I look forward to continuing these conversations, learning from our partners and the Malawian diaspora here in Scotland and helping to

strengthen a relationship that feels like it is built on solidarity, mutual respect and a shared hope for the future.

18:11

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I start by congratulating Clare Haughey on securing this debate. I should declare an interest as a member of the Scotland Malawi Partnership.

Clare Haughey took us through a list of links that places across Scotland have with Malawi. I have a long list from my region, but I will restrict myself to the one closest to my home, which is the fact that the Rotary Club of Perth Kinnoull contributes to the cost of polytunnels and solar pumps to help farmers in Malawi. I know that many other similar groups are doing likewise across the country.

I had the privilege of visiting Blantyre some years ago on a parliamentary trip. It was fascinating to see that bustling city, which is now the capital of commerce in Malawi and is, as Clare Haughey states, 150 years old this year. Clare Haughey quite rightly identifies Blantyre as being named after the birthplace of David Livingstone, the great Scottish missionary explorer. It speaks volumes that, such is the affection in Malawi for the memory of David Livingstone, Blantyre retains its original Scottish name when many other African countries have cast off their colonial identity.

As we know, Livingstone was the first white man to see the Victoria Falls on the River Zambezi, and a statue still stands today in recognition of that feat. However, his primary interest in travelling to Africa was not exploration, at least not at first. He was motivated by the ambition to spread the Christian message. He was trained as a medical missionary and was sent out by the London Missionary Society in 1840. It has to be said that he was not, in his lifetime, a great success as a missionary, winning perhaps as few as two converts to the faith over the many years that he spent in Africa. However, the legacy of his work, and that of subsequent Scottish missionaries, is evident today in Malawi, which is one of the strongest Christian countries in the world. The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian is closely aligned to the Church of Scotland, and there continue to be many close links between Scottish church congregations here and projects in Malawi as a result.

Livingstone had a second ambition, and that was the extinction of the slave trade. Britain had abolished the slave trade in the early 19th century, and, from that time, much of the resources of the empire, including the Royal Navy, were devoted to stamping out the horrific trade in human beings across the Atlantic.

**Simita Kumar (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP):** I thank Mr Fraser and Mr Langan for their contributions, but does the member acknowledge that, despite the fact that slavery was abolished, it was replaced by a colonial system that was equally as devastating and had huge impacts across Africa and other parts of Asia?

**Murdo Fraser:** Well, I am going to come on and talk about the Scottish influence in Africa, as I think that is really important to mention when I am talking specifically about David Livingstone's role.

Even the crushing of the Atlantic slave trade did not stop what was the far greater evil of the Arab slave trade that operated throughout the east of Africa, which funnelled men, women and children through Zanzibar to the ports of Arabia. When we hear today calls for European nations to pay reparations for slavery, we should never forget that the Arab slave trade lasted far longer and was far more damaging to Africa than anything that was done in Europe. Livingstone and his compatriots knew that African chiefs were complicit in that dreadful trade, capturing members of neighbouring tribes or even selling members of their own tribes to the Arab slave traders.

We know that, on 1 June 1840, Livingstone attended a meeting in Exeter hall in the Strand in London, which was mounted by the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilisation of Africa. At that meeting it was proposed that Africa could be saved from the slave trade only if it could be opened up to the prospect of commerce—if African chiefs could be persuaded that they could trade with their own produce rather than human beings, the slave trade could be brought to an end. It was not Christianity alone that would save Africa, but Christianity coupled with commerce. It was that dual ambition that drove Livingstone throughout his career. All his endeavours in Africa to open up the centre to new trade routes were driven by that ambition to extend commerce.

Livingstone would not see success in that regard in his lifetime, but, one month after his death in 1873, an agreement was finally reached between Britain and the Sultan of Zanzibar to end the slave trade, and the horrendous traffic in human beings was finally extinguished.

After his death, Livingstone's body was taken by his loyal supporters to be buried in Westminster abbey, but his greatest monument was the end of the African slave trade. That is why his legacy remains preserved today, with his birthplace in Blantyre being recognised in that city in Malawi 150 years later.

I hope that, in this debate and going forward, we can build on the links between Scotland and

Malawi and reflect on our shared history and on what our two countries have done for each other.

18:17

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I, too, thank Clare Haughey, my fellow co-convener of the cross-party group on Malawi, for securing what has been an excellent debate. There has been a lot of agreement but, as is the case in all good debates, some challenging perspectives have also been raised—we have heard some from Murdo Fraser, and I congratulate him on his speech.

I have been a member of the Malawi cross-party group since first being elected in 2007. My interest in the country was piqued by the late Reverend Andrew Ross. I got to know the Reverend Ross—or the Doc, as we knew him—in Edinburgh University Association Football Club during my time at university. He talked to me about his experience as a minister in Malawi—one who had been expelled by President Hastings Banda back in the day. I was pleased to see, on a subsequent visit to Malawi, that the Doc had the last laugh, as his grave is in the missionary cemetery in Blantyre.

I also thank the Scotland Malawi Partnership, not just for its support of the cross-party group, but for the wider work that it and its sister partnership in Malawi do in supporting those relationships. The report that it produced demonstrates those ties across every constituency in the country, speaking to the depth and diversity that Clare Haughey referred to, but also to the people-to-people, community-to-community nature of the relationship, which is what provides the foundations for the political links. Jack McConnell, the former First Minister, deserves enormous credit for the step that he took in establishing the co-operation agreement in 2005, and for the ongoing and enduring support that he provides to that relationship. It is one that successive Scottish National Party Governments have picked up and run with.

Earlier, Kate Nevens quoted Mikaela Gavas from the Center for Global Development, who also said:

"Scotland's international development fund is small by global standards, but it has built a reputation for being principled, predictable and partner-led at a moment when much larger donors are becoming transactional and unpredictable. That reputational capital is worth protecting."

That is an important point, and there are questions about how we sustain funded projects after the funding stops. The Parliament also has questions to answer about our relationship with the National Assembly, which to me appears to have receded over recent years. There may be good reasons for that, but we need to keep revisiting that to see where we can lend support, and we should draw confidence from those ongoing and enduring civic ties.

In Orkney, as is the case everywhere else, there is a strong local story to tell, with connections between the presbyteries in Orkney and Thyolo being well established. I pay tribute to my good friend Kester Chiwalo, who was a great friend of Orkney and who has sadly passed away since I last participated in a debate of this kind. Nicky Thompson, on the island of Sanday, was a driving force behind the twinning between the school in Sanday that I went to and the one in Minga outside Lilongwe. That arrangement was established at the time of the co-operation agreement in 2005 and has delivered huge benefits to staff and pupils in both those schools. There is also ongoing work to support Mary's Meals, which has a huge and beneficial presence across Malawi.

I also pay tribute to Glenys Hughes, the force behind the Malawi Music Fund, which has helped to deliver Umodzi house, a hostel for vulnerable girls in Malawi that was built and opened in 2023 and partners with local Malawian teachers to deliver educational opportunities in music and art. In the past year alone, the Malawi Music Fund has supported nine youngsters through secondary school and two students through university courses in special needs education, and has enabled four youngsters to undertake vocational courses in plumbing, fitting, community development and agriculture and one to begin a diploma course in pharmacy.

That is not a one-way street; it is a relationship from which both countries have extracted huge benefit. That happens at a human level, between people and communities, and at Parliament to Parliament and Government to Government level. That political and civic work is symbiotic. As Mikaela Gavas observed, it is:

"civic depth sitting alongside sustained government funding, each lending the other credibility. That pairing is the model worth Scotland protecting".

I again thank Clare Haughey for securing an excellent debate and I offer, "Zikomo," to our friends in the warm heart of Africa.

18:22

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I am grateful to Clare Haughey for securing this debate to mark not only 150 years of Blantyre in Malawi but the longstanding relationship between Scotland and Malawi.

As someone with deep and life-long personal connections to Southern Africa—though a little bit further south than Blantyre—I know that relationships between Scotland and African countries are not simply stories of Scottish people

going abroad. They are stories of people, communities and countries shaping one another, sometimes through solidarity, sometimes through struggle and sometimes through profoundly unequal and unjust power relationships. I recognise the anniversary, while also being honest about its history. Blantyre was, as we have heard, founded 150 years ago by Scottish missionaries and named after David Livingstone's birthplace, but that was not the moment of discovery that colonial histories would so often have us believe. People already lived there, had their own histories, cultures and political systems and were the protagonists of their own stories.

Nor should we airbrush Scotland's role in colonialism. Scotland was part of the British imperial project, and Scottish institutions and businesses benefited from multiple systems of exploitation and racial hierarchy. The Scotland Malawi Partnership is right to encourage us to have a critical understanding of that history, including the resistance to colonialism led by Malawians such as John Chilembwe. That honesty does not diminish friendship. I would argue that it makes genuine friendship possible, because what I value most about the relationship between Scotland and Malawi today is that it is increasingly about partnership, solidarity and support, rather than pity, charity or paternalism.

We see that clearly in the work of organisations across our country. I was delighted to meet members of Famine Relief for Orphans in Malawi—FROM Scotland—in Inverurie earlier this year. Since 2005, that remarkable Aberdeenshire organisation has raised almost £800,000 through the generosity and hard work of local people. That money has supported communities in Malawi with early years development, hundreds of meals every day for children, nursery schools, teacher training, health centres, maternity facilities, clean water, sanitation and much more. It has helped to provide safe accommodation for girls pursuing secondary education and has supported young people into university.

That support comes from that deep-rooted sense of connection. It is not an abstract international development policy—it is people in Aberdeenshire standing alongside and with people in Malawi. They are also part of something much bigger. The Scotland Malawi Partnership connects more than 1,300 Scottish organisations and individuals with partners in Malawi. Alongside its sister organisation, the Malawi Scotland Partnership, it helps sustain thousands of relationships between communities, schools, universities, health organisations and charities. We should protect that infrastructure.

At the recent conference of Scotland's International Development Alliance, as we have already heard from Kate Nevens and Liam McArthur, Mikaela Gavas described the combination of Scotland's civic links and sustained Government support for Malawi as a "model worth … protecting". At a time when international development is under enormous pressure, including the devastating UK Government cuts to aid for Malawi and many other countries, we must not retreat into isolation. We should protect the Scotland Malawi Partnership, support the Malawi Scotland Partnership, and value the work of Scotland's International Development Alliance and Scottish Fair Trade.

I am grateful to all those who will continue the work of the Holyrood cross-party group on Malawi, so that this Parliament continues to be part of that relationship. I am only sorry that I cannot commit to formal membership.

Presiding Officer, 150 years after the founding of Blantyre, let us not simply celebrate a shared past; we have the opportunity—and, I would argue, the responsibility—to build a shared future based on genuine equality, justice, anti-colonial solidarity and mutual respect.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark):** I call the minister to respond to the debate.

18:26

**The Minister for Equalities and International Development (Simita Kumar):** I thank Clare Haughey for bringing the debate to the Parliament and for giving all of us the opportunity to mark this significant milestone. I also want to thank colleagues across the chamber for their contributions. The strength of feeling from members who have spoken today reflects the Scotland-Malawi relationship, the Scotland Malawi Partnership and the Malawi Scotland Partnership, and the value that people across both of these countries continue to place on that relationship.

We have heard powerful examples this evening of many of the connections that bind Scotland and Malawi. Again, I thank Clare Haughey for giving us a glimpse of that historical significance, especially around the work and legacy of David Livingstone, which Steven Bonnar and Carol Mochan have mentioned as well.

I found Liam McArthur's contribution really insightful and hugely helpful about that two-way relationship and mutual benefit as well.

I completely agree with Maggie Chapman's remarks about being honest as a society and community about the impact of both the slave trade and colonialism. Two wrongs do not make a right, and I genuinely hope that we can acknowledge the impact of the empire beyond.

The First Minister saw the strength of those connections for himself during his visit to Malawi last year, which was the first visit by any First Minister since 2005. He spoke of the warmth of the welcome that he received and of seeing first-hand the impact of partnerships in health, education, gender-equality promotion and climate resilience. In Blantyre, he met Malawi's first cohort of home-grown dentists and saw how that long-standing collaboration between Scottish and Malawian institutions continues to create opportunities and improve lives.

**Liam McArthur:** The minister is absolutely right to point to the First Minister's visit, which was very warmly welcomed. Huge progress has been made in health, education and sustainable development in a range of areas.

She talked about dentistry projects; in a cross-party group discussion the towards the end of the previous parliamentary session, a problem was identified in that dentists would be trained but there was not necessarily a pathway for them to enter into practice. That picks up the point that I made in my speech about the ability of projects to make a difference—once the funding ends, what happens to the objectives that we all want to see happen?

**Simita Kumar:** I will capture Mr McArthur's comments on funding later in one of my remarks, but he makes a really important point about international development and continued funding to ensure that the work continues.

To return to the First Minister's visit, the programme that he observed takes us back to Mr Fraser's contribution and the point about civil society. The First Minister met with civil society leaders and visited St Michael and All Angels church, highlighting the enduring role that faith communities, local organisations and citizen-led partnerships continue to play in the relationship between our two countries. These experiences demonstrate that the Scotland-Malawi relationship is not simply one between Governments but one rooted in friendship and people-to-people connections.

Last week, at the Scotland's International Development Alliance conference, I had the opportunity to hear directly from organisations working with partners in Malawi and other partner countries. Those discussions highlighted the importance of having a long-term partnership and ensuring that local voices and priorities shape our approach. I really welcome the publication of Jonathan Waters's book, "Blantyre: Urban Evolution—A Photographic History", and I look forward to the opportunity to learn more about the city's story, including from members' contributions in the chamber. This evening's speeches demonstrate the breadth of that relationship, and Parliament has played an important role in supporting those connections.

Since our international development programme began in 2005—I thank Carol Mochan for her contribution on this—our work has been shaped by that partnership and by solidarity and a commitment to working alongside communities and our partner countries. As I said, we also recognise the complex historical context in which international development operates, including the legacy of colonialism. That understanding has strengthened our commitment to partner country-led development, amplifying local voices and ensuring that we take a rights-based approach. Through Scotland's international development fund and climate justice fund, Malawian organisations and communities are working with partners in Scotland and internationally to improve health and expand educational opportunities.

**Clare Adamson:** To pick up on Mr McArthur's points, does the minister support the work of the University of the West of Scotland and other colleges and universities that have been involved in training midwives in Malawi, for example. That can be done remotely using new technology. In the modern world, it is possible to reach out to help and support people in Malawi in that way.

**Simita Kumar:** I wholeheartedly support Ms Adamson's point, which goes back to the point about this being a two-way partnership, with mutual respect and understanding.

On the challenges, we cannot ignore the increasingly challenging international context in which this work takes place, which takes me to Mr McArthur's intervention. Significant reductions in the UK Government's overseas development assistance are having a profound impact on many countries, including Malawi. I am really sad that Mr Langan actually applauded the fact that there has been a cut to that assistance, because the reductions represent a 90 per cent bilateral funding cut by the UK Government. I go back to Mr McArthur's point about how we sustain these important partnerships and programmes. The truth is that I am worried that some of the legacy of the work that we have done, which was all those years in the making, is now in danger because of the funding reductions.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank the minister for being generous and taking a second intervention. I certainly agree with the concerns that have been expressed across the chamber—or rather by a number of colleagues—in relation to the reduction, not just as a result of the reduced UK overseas aid contribution but the decisions that have been taken by the US at the same time. However, actually, the issue of the sustainability of some of the projects that have been supported in Malawi

predate those decisions and were a reflection of the difficulties of sustaining projects beyond the end of the funding. I accept that, when the funding squeeze tightens, those problems are probably exacerbated and widened, but this issue has not arisen only since the decision to cut the UK aid budget.

**Simita Kumar:** It is important to recognise that Scotland is a very small partner on the global stage. If there is anything that we can do within that space, I would be more than happy to speak to Mr McArthur about it. These are important issues, on which he and I can work together to ensure that work can continue.

At the same time, I encourage all colleagues across different parties to urge the UK Government to reconsider the reductions in aid. The decisions taken today will have a lasting consequence on some of the world's poorest communities, and on our shared ambition to tackle poverty, inequality and climate vulnerability, given the super-El Niño impacts that we might experience.

Despite the challenges, Scotland remains committed to playing its part as a good global citizen. The Scotland-Malawi relationship demonstrates what can be achieved through long-term partnership, mutual respect and a shared commitment to addressing those common challenges.

As Blantyre celebrates its important anniversary, we honour a shared history that truly spans generations. Just as importantly, we celebrate the friendships, collaboration and spirit of solidarity that continue to define the relationship between Scotland and Malawi today. The debate has shown that those connections remain strong, and that gives me every confidence that the relationship between Scotland and Malawi will continue to flourish in the years ahead.

I once again thank Clare Haughey for her motion and all members for their contributions. On behalf of the Scottish Government, I offer my warmest congratulations to the people of Blantyre on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, and I wish them every success for the celebrations ahead.

As they say in the Chewa language, zikomo kwambiri.

*Meeting closed at 18:37.*

## Correction

Holly Bruce has identified an error in her contribution and provided the following correction.

**Holly Bruce (Glasgow Southside) (Green):**

*At column 15, paragraph 1, line 8—*

*Original text—*

These young mothers face a youth penalty, which forces under-25s to survive on at least £86 less a week.

*Corrected text—*

These young mothers face a youth penalty, which forces under-25s to survive on at least £86 less a month.

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The deadline for corrections to this edition is 20 working days after the date of publication.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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