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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 27 October 2026

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Good afternoon and welcome back. The first item of business is time for reflection, which will be led by John Dalton, a member of the Crisis Scotland lived experience campaigns group.

John Dalton (Crisis Scotland): Thank you for this opportunity. I represent the lived experience group at Crisis Scotland, the national homelessness charity, so I bring reflections from many others.

We, as a group, meet in the Crisis skylight centre just metres away on the Royal Mile, yet we sometimes feel that this place is miles away. When we needed help, Crisis was there for us. The insights we bring are key to understanding the complexity of homelessness. It is usually the end point of missed opportunities and services that do not join up. We share our reflections so that those in power may listen.

A famous story—“Million Dollar Murray”—that captures this was first told in *The New Yorker*. Murray was a homeless veteran who spent a decade on the streets struggling with alcohol and trauma. Time after time, the police picked him up and, time after time, he ended up in hospital, detox, a cell and back on the street. One day, somebody added up the cost of ambulances, emergency admissions, treatment and police time. One officer summed it up: “It cost us \$1 million not to do something about Murray.” Let me say that again—it cost \$1 million not to do something. At every point, people were trying to help—police, paramedics, doctors and detox workers. Each one held a piece of Murray’s life, but no one held the whole of it. Nobody stepped in early to simply offer him a home first and build the support around him.

Many of us know what it is to be in that position—to be seen only in crisis and never before it. That is why ending homelessness is everybody’s business. No single service can do it alone; we can only end it together. Proper prevention does work; it gives people threatened with homelessness room to think and time to breathe in the midst of uncertainty, and it can avert disaster. A door opened sooner can change a whole life.

We leave you with a question that we have asked ourselves, too. Do you truly believe that homelessness can be ended? Many in this chamber have said that it can be, and we believe that, too. What matters is whether that belief shapes the choices made here.

Please remember that, just metres from here, there are people wishing that this place felt a little closer.

General Question Time

14:02

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.

Pumped Hydro Storage

1. **Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the economic and energy security opportunities presented by the development of pumped storage hydro across Scotland. (S7O-00377)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): Pumped hydro storage will play a crucial role in ensuring secure and resilient energy systems for Scotland. Projects in the current pipeline are estimated to deliver significant economic benefits, including billions of pounds of investment, high-quality jobs, and an infrastructure legacy for decades to come. The Scottish Government is committed to engaging closely with projects in Scotland, including those within Ofgem’s cap and floor scheme shortlist.

Matters relating to security of supply are reserved to the United Kingdom Government, and delivery is the responsibility of the National Energy System Operator.

Gary Bouse: Scotland has some of the best natural resources in the world for renewable energy, but making the most of them requires us to store electricity when it is plentiful for use at times of high demand. Pumped storage hydro allows us to do exactly that, providing the flexible and long-term storage that is needed to support energy security and make better use of the renewable energy that we generate.

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Given the scale of the opportunity, does the minister agree that decisions affecting investment in pumped storage hydro must recognise its wider importance to Scotland's energy system and economy and take a long-term view of the benefits that those projects can deliver?

Stephen Gethins: Mr Bouse is absolutely right to highlight the impact of our long-term, long-duration electricity storage capacity, including pumped hydro. That is vital to the energy transition.

Earlier this year, I visited Cruachan power station, which demonstrates the technology's long heritage in Scotland. It is a remarkable site that continues to play a significant role in Scotland's energy system, delivering resilience and jobs in the region and beyond. The Scottish Government will continue to support investment in pumped hydro storage, which will be vital to creating a flexible, sustainable energy system for the whole of Scotland.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The programme for government contains the novel proposal to accelerate "off grid" pumped storage hydro. Was that a drafting error or is the minister really putting that forward as a serious proposal?

Stephen Gethins: Scotland has huge potential. Obviously, we want to take forward the whole of that potential, including with pumped hydro storage, which has massive potential.

David Smith (West Scotland) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had—

The Presiding Officer: Sorry, Mr Smith, but this is a supplementary to question 1. I will take the supplementary from your colleague Helen McDade.

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Does the minister agree that pumped storage hydro would cover energy only for a few days in the event of a power cut and that it is extremely expensive to build new facilities? Can he give us the figures for the proposed new ones?

Stephen Gethins: I just referred to the pumped hydro storage at Cruachan, not far from Ms McDade's constituency, which has been providing electricity since the 1960s. A large number of projects are proposed, of which 10 are located in the Highlands. Six of those alone could support 14,800 jobs and generate almost £6 billion in economic activity by 2035. Given the potential, that is something that we should embrace.

City of Glasgow College (Health and Safety)

2. Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with City of Glasgow College regarding reported concerns about exposure to carcinogenic welding fumes and the measures in place to ensure a safe environment for lecturers and students. (S7O-00378)

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): Responsibility for health and safety management rests with individual colleges, with regulation and enforcement undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive. The Government expects all colleges to comply with their legal duties and maintain safe working and learning environments for staff and students.

There were concerns regarding exposure to welding fumes in the City of Glasgow College's welding and fabrication area. The Health and Safety Executive identified a number of corrective actions for the college to take. The college accepted those findings and implemented the required actions, which resulted in the closure of the HSE's intervention. Ministers have written to the college and trade union representatives to reiterate expectations around health and safety, fair work and constructive engagement.

Monica Lennon: I am sure that the minister will agree that seven months is already too long for those safety concerns to remain unresolved. Will he work with me to bring the Educational Institute of Scotland and college management together, including through a joint visit to the college while the strike action is ongoing, to establish what needs to happen to resolve the issue—because it is not resolved—and to make sure that the students and lecturers have confidence about their safety and health?

Alyn Smith: I am grateful for the offer of intervention—if Monica Lennon is looking to be a mediator, I will happily work with her on that basis. Seven years—forgive me, I am not thinking that far ahead; seven months is too long for this to be happening.

The Health and Safety Executive did investigate and propose remediations, and those remediations were undertaken, so we are talking about a retrospective dispute. The member is correct that it has gone on too long, and I would support any efforts to make progress on that.

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Some lecturers who work at the City of Glasgow College live in my constituency. As has been discussed, they have grave concerns about the current situation. If the history of asbestos conditions tells us anything, it is that we cannot take any risks when it comes to health and safety

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in workplaces. Can the minister reiterate his concern and double his efforts to ensure that engagement takes place between the relevant parties? We cannot take any risks with health and safety.

Alyn Smith: We are in strong agreement, as I would expect to be with my friend and colleague Mr McMillan. The Health and Safety Executive has investigated the issue and proposed remediation, which was undertaken. There is a need for more dialogue and it needs to be intensified. I want to see an end to the dispute.

BBC Scotland (Proposed Closure)

3. Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the BBC Scotland television channel is to be closed. (S7O-00379)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): The proposal to close the BBC Scotland television channel is wholly unacceptable, and the Scottish Government opposes it in the strongest possible terms. It represents a significant blow to Scotland's media landscape and raises serious questions about the BBC's commitment to Scottish audiences and its obligation to serve all parts of the United Kingdom fairly and equitably.

It is worth noting that the decision comes against a backdrop of wider funding inequalities, with BBC expenditure in Scotland being well below that which is raised from the licence fee in Scotland. Separately, there is an entirely unjustifiable gap in funding from both the UK Government and the BBC for Welsh-language and Gaelic-language broadcasting. I have raised my concerns directly with the BBC Scotland director and with Ofcom.

Colm Merrick: Let us be clear: the BBC's decision is a disgrace, particularly for those who rely most on traditional television for news and information, such as the elderly and the digitally excluded. At a time when Scotland's constitutional future is once again a pressing issue, the need for balanced and informed debate and distinctly Scottish broadcasting has never been greater. Therefore, does the cabinet secretary agree that the BBC's decision strengthens the case for devolving broadcasting powers to the Scottish Parliament? Given the Prime Minister's oft-repeated promises of further devolution, will the Scottish Government press for broadcasting powers to be included in any such discussions, so that decisions about Scotland's broadcasting future are made here, in Scotland, and are not imposed from Westminster?

Màiri McAllan: The Scottish Government is firmly of the view that responsibility for broadcasting ought to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and we will continue to make that case. Recently, as part of our engagement on the BBC charter review, I set out directly to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport our view on the need for devolution, as well as for essential developments in greater accountability, stronger representation of Scotland's interests and, as Mr Merrick said, decision making closer to Scottish audiences.

Since becoming culture secretary, I have had cause on more than one occasion to reiterate to the BBC and Ofcom that Scotland is a nation—not a region—whose people should be able, when they turn on their radios and televisions, to see their lives authentically reflected back at them, so the BBC's decision presents another blow.

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): Local journalism is vital to the health of local democracy. The BBC's announcement, which follows the axing of STV North last year, is part of a growing trend of cuts in national and regional media. Many of our local papers in the south of Scotland are already hanging by a thread. It is those papers that inform the public and hold us, as politicians, to account when we do not deliver. What is the Scottish Government doing to support local journalism in rural areas such as the south of Scotland?

The Presiding Officer: That question was slightly off the topic, but I call the cabinet secretary.

Màiri McAllan: I am happy to answer that question. I am in firm agreement on the point about the value of public service broadcasting and journalism, including local journalism. We have been working to develop local journalism through the establishment of a group. I will be pleased to write to Mr Dunlop to further update him on that. Progress of late has involved formulating the group, for which the Scottish Government provides a secretariat. I understand the call for support, and the Government intends to keep providing it in the way that we can.

Dundee and Angus College (Transform Programme)

4. Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any discussions it has had with the senior leadership of Dundee and Angus College regarding the college's transform programme. (S7O-00380)

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The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): I thank Heather Anderson for being a great advocate for the University of Dundee and all the other educational institutions in Dundee.

The Deputy First Minister discussed the college's transformation plans with its senior leadership when she visited the college on 12 August. We recognise the contribution that the college's proposal could make to skills provision, economic development and place-based regeneration. I am glad to announce that, in March 2026, the Scottish Government provided an additional £2 million of funding, enabling the Scottish Funding Council to designate Dundee and Angus College as a first-wave college, with the funding supporting the development of an outline business case. The college has now submitted its outline business case to the Funding Council for review, and the Government is being kept updated on progress.

Heather Anderson: Dundee and Angus College's transform programme has the potential to be revolutionary for Dundee and Tayside. The Biggar Economics report that was published last year found that the plans could bring an estimated £1.8 billion-worth of wider benefits to the Tayside area. The proposals to expand the Gardyne campus, the new purpose-built science, technology, engineering and mathematics facility and the green skills innovation hub will ensure that local people will be well equipped to work in the industries of the future.

With the budget on the horizon, is the minister willing to meet the leadership of Dundee and Angus College to ensure that he is fully familiarised with the stages of funding required and the aims of the transform programme?

Alyn Smith: Yes, and attending such a meeting is already on my list. As the University of Dundee has turned a corner with its new principal—who is, to my mind, really impressive—there is scope for partnership between the university, the college, Abertay University and the senior phase school, because the geography lends itself to that. That could be transformative for the whole region and for the public purse, so I am keen to be kept involved and I thank the member for her advocacy.

Hydro Schemes (Rateability)

5. Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what its understanding is of the term “penstock” in class 1(g) of the schedule to the Valuation for Rating (Plant and Machinery) (Scotland) Regulations 2000, including whether that includes the penstock of a hydro-electric scheme, and if so, whether it is exempt from rateability under that provision. (S7O-00381)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): Mr Leask is right in understanding that penstock is listed in the regulations that he refers to. However, that is subject to litigation, so I hope that he will appreciate that I cannot comment on matters relating to live rating appeals.

The valuation of non-domestic property is a matter for independent Scottish assessors, who follow applicable statutory provisions and case law in making their decisions.

Kristopher Leask: I acknowledge the restrictions placed on the minister due to the legal process that is under way.

More broadly, will the minister agree to meet me to discuss how we can support small-scale and community hydro developments that are facing such challenges, and others?

Stephen Gethins: I thank the member for his understanding. I am really happy to engage with him, particularly given the importance of such projects in his constituency, which I know he is a valuable and determined advocate for.

Andrew Baxter (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD): When rural estates face increasing rates liabilities for hydro schemes, that often leaves them less money for habitat and peatland restoration, woodland creation and other environmental projects. Why is the Scottish Government allowing enlightened landowners to be penalised, and why is it diverting money away from the very environmental improvements that ministers claim to champion?

Stephen Gethins: Mr Baxter will be aware that hydro schemes with a rateable value of not more than £5 million may be eligible for 60 per cent relief. I am very happy to engage with him regarding the specific issues that he raised.

Royal Navy Surface Fleet

6. David Smith (West Scotland) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding calls for additional Royal Navy surface fleet assets to be based in Scotland. (S7O-00382)

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The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): We, of course, engage regularly with the UK Government on the serious and important matter of defence. It feels incredibly important to do so right now, particularly given a report from the UK Parliament's Defence Select Committee that outlines the existing glaring gaps in the UK's ability to properly defend itself.

David Smith: Faslane naval base is the operating base for the entire UK submarine fleet. It also operates Sandown-class minehunter vessels and Archer-class fast patrol boats. In addition to that, in Scotland, Royal Air Force Lossiemouth has the Typhoon fast attack response and Poseidon anti-submarine operations.

The Scottish National Party's claim that Scotland has been left undefended is simply not correct and is dangerous. What specific additional ships is the Scottish Government calling for, and what operational roles does the Government envisage those ships undertaking?

Stephen Flynn: I am not sure whether Mr Smith was listening to my initial answer, in which I referred not to SNP remarks but to those made by the UK Parliament Defence Select Committee, which has outlined glaring gaps in the UK's ability to defend itself, particularly in the high north, where we know there is a threat from Russia.

Perhaps Mr Smith does not want to talk about that because I would have to remind him that, when Mr Putin launched his illegal invasion of Ukraine, Mr Smith's party leader sought to blame the European Union and NATO for the actions of that tyrant. Shame on him.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The Labour UK Government is now investing significantly in defence and in His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde at Faslane. However, the Scottish Government does not have an industrial strategy to speak of, and certainly not one that focuses on growing the defence sector. As we face increasing global threats, as the cabinet secretary rightly said, will the Scottish Government produce an industrial strategy as a matter of urgency, so that the Scottish economy benefits from the need for better defence?

The Presiding Officer: Again, that question is not quite on the nose, but you can answer it, cabinet secretary, if you want to.

Stephen Flynn: I am more than happy to do so. As Jackie Baillie will know, we outlined our intentions on a defence programme in the programme for government, and I intend to take that forward at pace.

I would encourage Ms Baillie, if she can, to engage proactively with our colleagues in the UK Government and show them the Defence Committee report that highlights those glaring gaps. Of course, it was only earlier this year when the UK Government had to rely on Germany to fulfil its NATO commitments because its warships were unavailable.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming the five type 31 frigates that the Royal Navy is building in Rosyth, which is a vote of confidence in Scotland and in the union? However, does he accept that we are not gaining the full economic benefit of that due to ongoing skills shortages in Scotland's defence industry, with Babcock being forced to hire 300 welders from the Philippines? What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that we expand access to high-quality apprenticeships in Scotland's vital defence industry?

Stephen Flynn: Of course I welcome and support the incredible work that has been done by employees at Babcock on the type 31 frigates and, indeed, by those at BAE Systems on the Clyde on the type 26 frigates. Indeed, our Scottish workforce is so successful that the small sovereign independent nation of Norway will be buying those frigates. That shows exactly what small independent nations can achieve.

On the skills point, it is helpful that Mr Hoy has asked this question, because it allows me to tell members in the chamber that this Government is working in partnership with the UK Government through a £10 million commitment to ensure that we have those skills coming through colleges. I know from a direct conversation that I had with one of the principals last night just how much the college sector welcomes that investment.

Fly-tipping and Littering

7. Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to local authorities, including in Dundee and Angus, to address fly-tipping and littering. (S7O-00383)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): Local authorities play a crucial role in tackling littering and fly-tipping. The Scottish Government has strengthened the enforcement tools that are available to local authorities, by increasing the fly-tipping fixed-penalty notice to £500 in 2024 and also through the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024. The powers in the 2024 act will give local authorities more tools to take action on litter and fly-tipping and will act as a deterrent. The code of practice

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on litter and refuse provides guidance for local authorities, which remain responsible for local actions and are best placed to prioritise services according to local needs.

Mark Simpson: Many councils have been forced into four-weekly bin collections, restrict access to recycling centres and impose charges for garden waste collection because of years of real-terms cuts by the Scottish Government. The changes have reduced opportunities for legitimate disposal and are widely linked to the rise in fly-tipping. Will the minister commit either to restoring the funding that councils need to reinstate more frequent and accessible waste collections or to introducing a specific national programme that delivers the same outcome?

Gillian Martin: That is a first for me—being asked about weekly bin collections—as this is not a council chamber.

The 2026-27 budget provides a further real-terms increase in the local government settlement, delivering record funding of £15.7 billion, including a quarter of a billion pounds of unrestricted general revenue grant. That policy is to provide local authorities with the flexibility to determine how resources are allocated locally. The vast majority of funding is provided through the block grant, allowing councils to manage their budgets and prioritise their spending on the basis of their local needs and circumstances.

David Linden (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP): Yesterday, I met Baillieston community council, which again drew my attention to fly-tipping that regularly occurs on the private land at Gardeners Lane. Is the minister confident that councils are making enough use of section 179 notices, and what more can be done to compel those who have private land to clean up fly-tipping?

Gillian Martin: If private land is affected by the scourge of fly-tipping, the option of engaging with Zero Waste Scotland, which provides the private landowners grant fund to support the prevention and removal of fly-tipping on private land, is available to landowners.

In the past couple of years, £20,000 was awarded to three projects, and a further £38,000 was awarded to several projects last year. Various other practical interventions, such as closed-circuit television, lighting, barriers and signage, can also act as deterrents in such cases.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Littering and fly-tipping are deeply selfish crimes that ruin our beautiful countryside and landscape, and they put our cherished wildlife at risk. Does the minister believe that the punishment for fly-tipping should fit the crime and that mandatory litter picking should be enforced as part of any sentencing?

Gillian Martin: Ms MacDougall might want to look at the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024, which introduced powers for local authorities to issue a fixed-penalty notice to householders who fail to check whether a waste carrier is authorised when their waste is fly-tipped; civil penalties for littering from vehicles; and powers for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and local authorities to search and seize vehicles that are suspected of being used in waste crime.

The fixed-penalty notice was increased on 1 January 2024 to £500, but we will keep that level under review. The 2024 act provides powers to increase the penalty to £1,000, if required.

“Economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland.”

8. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address concerns raised in the Scottish Human Rights Commission’s October 2026 report “Economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland”. (S7O-00384)

The Minister for Equalities and International Development (Simita Kumar): Economic, social and cultural rights are of vital importance in enabling everyone across Scotland to live a life of dignity. Relevant Scottish Government actions that are under way in 2026-27 include the allocation of around £3.5 billion to policies that tackle poverty and the cost of living. Our £37 million rural and islands housing fund has already benefited a range of South Scotland communities, and we have invested more than £10.4 million in local action groups across the south of Scotland through our community-led local development programme since 2021. We will consider the report’s recommendations carefully and will respond in due course.

Finlay Carson: The Scottish Human Rights Commission has found that the “right to health” is “deteriorating” in the south of Scotland and that action so far has been “insufficient”. Does the minister accept that, after years of declining access to services, particularly maternity care in the west of Galloway, Government intervention is now the only credible way forward? Given the minister’s role in addressing human rights concerns, will she work with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care to trigger a higher level of national health service intervention in order to protect patient safety and to restore equitable access to care for rural communities in Galloway and West Dumfries?

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Simita Kumar: I will absolutely be working with all my ministerial colleagues, because we recognise that human rights sit across all our portfolios, including health. However, I am mindful that South Scotland's demographic issues are not reserved to one area and that isolation among older people is also an issue.

The Government is doing lots of work in this area, including funding the Food Train, which helps older people across Scotland to live healthy, independent and well-nourished lives. I will be focused on that, along with our other policies.

Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green): The Scottish Human Rights Commission has found that poor public transport is putting essential public services out of reach across South Scotland. I welcome the Government's recent announcement of greater public control of buses, but will it also consider a rural minimum transport guarantee like those in place in independent countries such as Switzerland, so that access to services does not depend on being able to afford a car?

Simita Kumar: That issue does not sit entirely in my portfolio, but I am more than happy to discuss it with Laura Moodie. One thing that I am mindful of is that transport is absolutely needed to remove barriers, particularly for people with disabilities. I am happy to work with Laura Moodie on that.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions.

First Minister's Question Time

Back-bench Members

14:30

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): We now move to First Minister's questions for back-bench members. Today, and uniquely so far in this session, questions will be answered by the Deputy First Minister rather than the First Minister.

Public Sector Jobs

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I welcome the Deputy First Minister to her dress rehearsal. Is she aware of a revelation in *The Sunday Times* this weekend that 800 ghost public sector workers—people whose jobs have gone but who are still turning up for work—are costing her Government £30 million per year? That includes one NHS Highland employee who is still clocking in 17 years after their role was made redundant. When the First Minister returns, will she take him aside, tell him to grow a spine, stand up to the public sector unions and finally drop the ridiculous policy of no compulsory redundancies in Scotland's public sector?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I am aware of the article in *The Sunday Times* that Mr Hoy alludes to. It is really important to put on the record that the jobs that he is referring to are under way at the current time and that, across the public sector, our public bodies are expected to deliver value for money.

The figures that Mr Hoy cited include staff who have been redeployed and who are currently engaged in meaningful employment that is appropriate to their pay grade. Of course, the Scottish public finance manual sets out the requirements for each public body to achieve value for money, which is something that I thought Mr Hoy was supportive of in terms of the public purse. It is important that, as we drive forward our programme on public service reform, we engage with the Opposition. I look forward to continued engagement with Mr Hoy and his colleagues on these important points.

Storm Damage and Flooding (Largs and Saltcoats)

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Largs and Saltcoats experienced significant damage due to the flooding over the weekend, and the towns face greater flooding risk as extreme weather events become more common. Can the Deputy First Minister outline whether financial support will be available to the businesses and individuals who are affected, whether Largs and Saltcoats will receive any of the new £5 million community flood resilience fund, and what further support can be given to reduce future risk?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): Katy Clark raises a number of important points. In terms of the issues at Largs and Saltcoats, colleagues will have seen the footage of some really challenging weather over the course of the weekend. Mr Flynn was down in Largs only yesterday, meeting business owners and hearing about some of the challenges. The extensive damage that has happened was also discussed this morning at Cabinet.

Ms Clark asked about the support that will be available for the community. As I understand it, at the current time, that has not yet been forthcoming from North Ayrshire Council. Indeed, that point was put to the council

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at yesterday's meeting of the Scottish Government resilience room. There will be another SGoRR meeting at 4 o'clock today, so I will be more than happy to follow up with the member on those points after that. Of course, we will listen to any calls for help in that regard and respond accordingly, given the extensive damage that has happened, particularly in relation to flooding.

Storm Damage (Moray)

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): Storm Boelo caused a great deal of disruption in my Moray constituency, and communities in other parts of Scotland have also seen significant damage, as referred to by Katy Clark. Tragically, two men lost their lives during the storm and, of course, our thoughts are with their loved ones.

After three consecutive days of weather warnings, can the Deputy First Minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's response to the storm and the anticipated further adverse weather conditions this week?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I extend my condolences and those of the Scottish Government to the families and loved ones of the two men who lost their lives in the storms this weekend.

The Scottish Government resilience room was activated on Friday, as I mentioned in my response to Katy Clark, and ministers and officials have been engaged with front-line agencies over the course of the weekend, to tackle the impacts that Laura Mitchell and Katy Clark have mentioned.

As members know, communities up and down the country have experienced power cuts, flooding, school closures and transport disruption. I pay tribute to staff who have led the response to the storm, particularly those braving the worst of the weather. This morning, just under 7,000 customers remained off supply. That remains of significant concern to the Scottish Government, which is exactly why SGoRR will reconvene following First Minister's questions this afternoon.

Flood Defences (Renfrew)

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Renfrewshire Council chose not to deploy physical flood defence barriers in Renfrew—part of a £10 million scheme—during an amber weather warning, because of an apparent failure in forecasting. Businesses such as McGregor's Bar and Ferry Nice Food have been left devastated with uninsured losses after the weekend's floods. What is the Deputy First Minister's response to that operational failure by the council? What financial support will be provided by the Government to affected businesses and individuals in Renfrew? What urgent action will the Scottish Government take to ensure that local authorities actually use the physical flood defences that they have spent taxpayers' money on?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): Mr Bibby refers to a local decision about flooding and the infrastructure that exists in Renfrewshire, and that would, of course, be a matter for the local authority. However, we will engage with the local authority directly. As I understand it, it has also been engaged in the SGoRR meetings that have been taking place. As I intimated, there will be a meeting later today, at 4 o'clock. It is not for the Government to instruct local authorities to use their flooding resources—I see the member nodding. We would expect them to deploy those resources, given the circumstances.

I should put on record that there were challenges around the weather and the forecasting, which at times caused a level of challenge across the country. However, I am more than happy to pick up the member's point with officials in relation to the local authority that he mentioned, and I will make sure that it is engaged in the SGoRR call that will take place at 4 o'clock this afternoon.

Oil and Gas Revenue

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP): Last week, the Labour chancellor admitted what we have said for decades: that our energy resources have been squandered and Scotland's £1 trillion future was stolen from us. We now know that Labour's new energy wealth fund will use oil and gas reserves from our waters to pay for projects in England. History is repeating itself. Given that the United Kingdom budget statement will be made tomorrow, does the Deputy First Minister agree that every single penny of Scottish oil and gas revenue must be invested right back into Scottish renewables, because we can never let Westminster steal our future from us again?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I absolutely agree with the sentiment behind Clare Haughey's question. Of course, the Scottish National Party has been calling for the establishment of a wealth fund for decades, so it is welcome that Scottish Labour has now joined those calls. The call for reinvestment in renewables, particularly in the north-east of Scotland, is certainly welcome. Over the years, £400 billion of revenues have flowed to the Treasury, so it is high time

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that those revenues came back to Scotland to be reinvested in communities in the area where they came from and to help drive the economic growth that we need to support our constituents.

Jackdaw and Rosebank Oil and Gas Fields

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): Can the Deputy First Minister confirm to the people of Aberdeen whether she is happy with the approval of Jackdaw and say whether she would like Rosebank to be approved for the benefit of the entire north-east?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): The approval of Jackdaw was a decision for the United Kingdom Government. In our view, it has taken too long to come to that decision, which has created uncertainty—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Let us hear the Deputy First Minister, please.

The Deputy First Minister: However, with that certainty, we very much hope that we will be able to move forward and that the jobs that will be created as a result will benefit the local economy.

Hoax Bomb Threats (Disinformation)

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The Deputy First Minister will be aware of the significant disruption to schools in Glasgow as a result of hoax bomb threats that were called in and that affected many parts of the country, but particularly Glasgow. Hoax threats of that kind are clearly deeply irresponsible, but these ones were quickly identified as hoaxes. It was when people were subject to disinformation through social media that the most significant impacts happened, particularly in the most deprived areas, where the number of children being held back from school significantly increased.

How does the Government support local authorities to respond to such situations? Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the situation underscores the need for the Government to develop a disinformation strategy to protect people when that kind of information is misrepresented?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I thank Mr Harvie for raising that important point. I know, for example, that there were issues in Edinburgh, with teachers being sent home who were undertaking their in-service training day on returning from the October break. There have been challenges across the country. As I understand it, Mr Gray has engaged with Police Scotland on the resilience work that is being undertaken on that.

The substantive point of Mr Harvie's question about absence in poorer communities in particular is important. We have a number of programmes running, including the pupil equity fund, which helps to support the work on attendance.

On his broader point about disinformation, there are significant challenges in that regard. He will be aware of the work with the Time for Inclusive Education campaign through the digital discourse initiative, which the Government has supported through the programme for government. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic would be happy to engage with Mr Harvie more generally on the points about the education support that is available.

Palantir Technologies

Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green): Palantir Technologies has reportedly secured contracts worth almost £1 billion in the United Kingdom, including in the public sector, through NHS England and the Ministry of Defence. That is despite serious concerns over the company's record relating to reported human rights abuses and surveillance and data privacy issues. Can the Deputy First Minister reassure those in Scotland who fear that we could follow the same path and commit to keeping Palantir out of the public sector?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I confirm to Iris Duane that we are not currently aware of any contracts in the national health service in Scotland in relation to Palantir. I hope that that will reassure the member on those points, given the considerable and understandable concern that has been raised in recent months about the operations of the company, particularly in our healthcare system.

Smoking Reduction (Child Poverty)

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Official figures reveal that, last year, more than £112 million was spent on legally purchased cigarettes in Ayrshire, which is almost four times the £30 million that was spent on the Scottish child payment for Ayrshire children. Given that studies conclusively prove that poverty and cigarette consumption are directly related, does the Deputy First Minister agree that redoubling efforts to reduce smoking in socioeconomically challenged communities will not only improve people's health but have a positive impact on reducing child poverty?

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The Deputy First Minister: I agree with Patricia Gibson's points on tobacco in relation to health impacts, health outcomes, household income and supporting our wider efforts to tackle poverty. That is why we are committed to achieving a tobacco-free Scotland by 2034. The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 will create a smoke-free generation by ensuring that anyone who was born after 1 January 2009 can never legally be sold tobacco. The act will also strengthen restrictions on advertising and promotion and introduce further controls on the sale of nicotine products, helping to prevent addiction in the first place. Those who smoke can access wider support through Scotland's quit your way services.

Hyperscale Data Centres (Planning Applications)

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): On 16 September, the Parliament, with the Government's support, voted in favour of a motion requiring new national planning guidance on applications for hyperscale data centres. That motion stated that no decisions on planning or consenting should be made until the Scottish Government publishes the guidance, by the end of this calendar year. However, the Larbert data centre application is still due to be determined by Falkirk Council on 13 November. Is the Deputy First Minister aware that some councils are progressing regardless of that vote? Will her Government step in to ensure that no decision is taken until the guidance is available?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): Jenny Young will be aware that I cannot comment on specific applications. However, she will also be aware—and she was right to set out to the Parliament—that, back in August, the Minister for Public Finance made it clear to the Parliament, through a Government-initiated question, that planning guidance will be published before Christmas. The mandating of environmental impact assessments for all data centres that exceed 50MW of power capacity applies to new and existing applications.

To respond to Jenny Young's substantive point, I note that ministers have call-in powers. Although I will not comment on specific applications, we can also recall any planning appeal rather than have the decision made by the Scottish Government reporter. I want to give some reassurance on those points without commenting on the specific nature of the application that the member has highlighted, given the restrictions that apply to ministers in that regard.

Coul Links Golf Course

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): Last week, the Scottish Government ignored local public opinion and rejected the application for Coul Links golf course in my constituency. Ministers said no to 400 full-time equivalent jobs, no to £12 million per year for the local economy, no to £1 million for habitat restoration and no to a community share that would have been worth hundreds of thousands of pounds per year. Given that Sutherland faces severe population decline, many of my constituents simply despair at that decision. Does the Deputy First Minister understand why that is? Will she explain to my constituents how she intends to replace the opportunities that the Government has rejected?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government: Mr Green is right to say that ministers have refused planning permission for the Coul Links golf course. The case has been ongoing for several years. The rationale behind the decision relates to adverse impacts on nationally and internationally important natural heritage interests. I recognise the significant public interest in the case. It should be said that strong views have been expressed on both sides—by supporters of the proposal, as Mr Green has set out, but also by opponents.

The Government is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth across the Highlands. Our decision letter accepts that the proposal would deliver local and regional tourism, as Mr Green set out. However, it concluded that those benefits would not outweigh the identified impacts on nationally and internationally important natural heritage interests—that is, the Loch Fleet site of special scientific interest, the Dornoch Firth and the Loch Fleet Ramsar site.

The full reasoning for the ministers' decision is set out in the decision letter and the accompanying reporters' report, which is published on the planning and environmental appeals website. I cannot comment beyond what was set out in those documents, as Mr Green will understand.

Ferguson Marine (Tugboat Order)

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the Deputy First Minister provide an update on the recently announced tugboat order that has been considered for Ferguson Marine in Port Glasgow?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): As the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport set out recently, the Government is working closely with Ferguson Marine to progress the commercial, financial and governance arrangements that are required to enable the yard to commence manufacture of the proposed tug boats as quickly as possible. The

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work is very much intended to support the retention of valuable shipbuilding skills and to sustain productive activity at the yard while longer-term opportunities continue.

As discussions are ongoing, a number of the details remain commercially sensitive at the current time, but the Government will update Parliament at the appropriate time when those arrangements have been finalised.

Secondary Breast Cancer

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): What progress has the Scottish Government made to improve data collection and access to treatment for patients who are diagnosed with secondary breast cancer?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I thank Mr Carson for his question in relation to secondary breast cancer. I think that it would be appropriate for me to ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care to write to him about the specifics and to provide an update on the data that he asked for.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The Deputy First Minister knows that Dundee is the city that is most exposed to RAAC, with council tenants and home owners being significantly affected. Last night, Dundee City Council agreed to a remediation programme, but that does not remove RAAC from affected properties or address the key concerns of home owners, who fear that no amount of remediation will prevent significant financial loss to them.

Will the Scottish Government commit to working with Dundee City Council, the Dundee RAAC campaign group, including home owners, and the United Kingdom Government to develop a plan that will deal with all the concerns that remain unanswered?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I have seen the reports today and I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing has been engaged with officials and Dundee City Council on the matter over a number of years. The issues in relation to RAAC predate devolution, so, when we talk about some of the spending that is involved, we need to talk about a partnership approach in relation to the role of the United Kingdom Government.

We have been very clear that we would consider requests from local authorities for flexibility to look at solutions that are bespoke to local circumstances. However, the UK Government has greater financial flexibility to step up a dedicated RAAC remediation fund—so far, it has failed to do so. We will continue to work with local government and encourage home owners to engage with it locally. I am sure that the housing secretary will be more than happy to engage with the member on the substantive point that she raised.

Police Numbers

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): Given that sexual offences and rapes have seen an upward trend over a 10-year period in Glasgow—with around 486 reported rapes and attempted rapes recorded annually, which averages out to roughly one every 18 hours—and given the Scottish Police Authority's recent report on the financial crisis that is engulfing Police Scotland, does the Deputy First Minister accept that Scotland needs to have more police officers on our streets, and not fewer? What action will she take to reverse the decline in police numbers?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I thank the member for his question and particularly for his interest in sexual crimes and domestic abuse cases. Recorded crime is down by almost half from its peak, back in 1991, but we are concerned by the increases in recorded crimes that we have seen in recent years, and particularly in sexual crimes and domestic abuse. Part of that is about reporting and people having confidence in coming forward, and part of it relates to the Lord Advocate's changes, which the First Minister has set out to Parliament.

On the member's point about police numbers, I will be meeting the chief constable about that in the coming weeks, ahead of the budget. However, we have more officers per 10,000 people in Scotland than in England and Wales, and our officers receive the best pay in the United Kingdom at the minimum and the maximum of each rank. As of 31 March this year, there were around 30 full-time officers per 10,000 people in Scotland, compared with around 24 per 10,000 in England and Wales.

Mental Health Services

Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The allocation of funding last week to reduce waiting times in the national health service is welcome. However, psychiatry has not been included among the specialist services that are receiving funding, despite record levels of demand and significant vacancies across the

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workforce. Can the Deputy First Minister explain why psychiatry was not included? Does she agree that reaching parity of esteem between physical and mental health support will require greater prioritisation of clinical mental health services?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

I am pleased that Joe Long welcomes the additional investment that the Government has been able to confirm in recent weeks, particularly in relation to driving down waiting times. Waiting times, and long waits in particular, continue to fall.

Joe Long made a specific point in relation to psychiatric care. I did not quite catch the last part of his question on mental health provision, but we have also been able to provide significant additionality for services in relation to mental health. I will take the member's specific point away and come back to him via officials in relation to the offer around how that £90 million could be diverted. I do not have the specific information in front of me today, so, if the member will allow me to, I will come back to him in writing.

Rest and Be Thankful

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The Deputy First Minister will know of the demonstration at the Rest and Be Thankful, involving many local hauliers and farmers coming together to highlight the route's vital importance. I am pleased that the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport is meeting the community later this week. Everyone in Argyll and Bute knows that a long-term solution to the threat of landslides is needed. However, the current proposal to introduce a single-lane convoy system for four years would be catastrophic for business while also creating serious risks for emergency services. Given the strong local feelings that have been highlighted by a petition that already has more than 8,000 signatories, will the Scottish Government reconsider the single-lane convoy plan?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

I am sure that I met and engaged with a number of the protesters in a previous life, when I was the Minister for Transport. I understand the local strength of feeling about the Rest and Be Thankful. The Government and the transport secretary are focused on coming to a solution and delivering it. Transport Scotland has undertaken further design and appraisal work in consultation with the A83 campaign group about an alternative, two-way, medium-term option. As the member said, the transport secretary will meet Ms Minto and members of the campaign group on Thursday to hear their views, and he will take a decision in due course.

Fire Service (Hawick)

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Last night, at a packed meeting at Hawick town hall, residents called for a review of the recent decision to hollow out the fire service in Hawick to a daytime service only. Trauma survivors shared powerful stories and accounts of how firefighters had saved their lives with minutes to spare, yet Scottish National Party cuts have hollowed out services and there has been a reduction in response times. Will the Deputy First Minister commit to ensuring that her justice secretary meets residents to hear their stories, and will she consider an independent review of the decision?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

The review that the member alluded to is based on service demands. The member has raised a local issue, and I am sure that the justice secretary has heard Ms Hamilton's point and will engage with her on it. This year's budget provides, in totality, an additional £23.8 million. That shows our continued commitment to supporting the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to deliver the high standard of service that is required to keep Scotland safe.

GlenWyvis Distillery

Andrew Baxter (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD): When the GlenWyvis distillery, in my constituency, received a £0.5 million Government-funded loan, ministers rushed to welcome the investment as a means of safeguarding jobs and supporting growth, yet the business had already ceased production and was embroiled in long-standing financial and legal difficulties. Will the Deputy First Minister explain what assessment ministers made of those risks before publicly endorsing the investment? Was the Government advised that the distillery's future was already in doubt?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

I do not have the details of the GlenWyvis distillery, but I am more than happy to engage with officials and to come back with substantive points. It would be remiss of me to suggest otherwise, and it is important to provide a detailed response, so I will ask the relevant minister and officials to engage with him.

Care Experienced Week

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Zen Ghani (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP): As someone who is care experienced, I know how important it is for care-experienced people to have a voice in the decisions that affect them. As we mark care experienced week, can the Deputy First Minister tell me what more the Scottish Government can do to ensure that care-experienced people shape the services that they use?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): I share Zen Ghani's acknowledgement of care experience week. I recognise that care-experienced young people must not simply be consulted but must be part of shaping the decisions and policies that affect their lives. That is at the very heart of the Promise. We continue to support organisations, including The Promise Scotland, Who Cares? Scotland, and Each and Every Child, which create opportunities for people with lived experience to influence change. As we implement legislation and reforms, we will continue to ensure that care-experienced children, young people and adults are directly involved in shaping how changes are delivered in practice, and we will ensure that we speak to care-experienced young people directly. The Promise will be kept by 2030. The Government is doing all it can to make that progress happen.

Renewables Development (Barriers)

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Following last week's decision on Jackdaw, which was welcomed by trade unions, Scottish Renewables has called for further action to support clean energy investment. SSE has also announced hundreds of skilled offshore wind jobs, including 400 in Scotland. What action is the Deputy First Minister taking to press the United Kingdom Government to remove the barriers to further renewables development, particularly transmission charging, so that we can deliver more skilled jobs for communities across Scotland?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): Karen Adam is right. Those jobs demonstrate the economic opportunities that the transition is already delivering for the north-east of Scotland. However, Scotland could support more jobs and attract further investment if our renewables generators were not held back by a transmission charging system that is unfit for purpose. That system unfairly penalises projects in Scotland, despite the immense contribution that they make to the UK's clean energy ambitions. We have raised the issue with the UK Government many times, over an extended period, and we have been clear that it cannot go on. The UK Government must now bring forward a long-term plan and interim measures to address the impact on Scottish generators. Unlocking our renewables potential is essential to delivering the economic growth that Karen Adam rightly speaks of.

Care Homes (Back-up Power Generators)

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Does the Deputy First Minister agree that care home residents should not be left relying on borrowed generators every time a storm downs the network? During storm Eowyn, care homes in Inverclyde had to be supplied with generators from Scottish Power. Will the Deputy First Minister tell Parliament how many Scottish care homes have any back-up power? I know from asking that an Edinburgh care home has no back-up power and relies on the energy companies. If she cannot come up with that number, will she commit to an audit to see what the situation is and whether something should be done before January, which the National Energy System Operator says is the tightest month?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): The situation that Helen McDade has set out is not acceptable in any way, shape or form—I want to make that very clear.

The Government has a system in place for the management of incidents, through which it works closely with resilience leads in our local authorities, health boards and integration joint boards in the event of a storm.

My understanding is that all care home residents—she has documented one case today, but there has been more than one—are safe and accounted for, and no evacuation was necessary. Officials are monitoring the situation and the wider impacts of the storm more generally. There will be a SGORR—Scottish Government resilience room—call at 4 o'clock today, and we may be able to share further information with the member following that call.

Violent Behaviour in Schools

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): The City of Edinburgh Council has paid more than £250,000 in compensation to support staff who were injured through pupil violence. Staff are being assaulted, councils are paying compensation, and unions have warned repeatedly that discipline is breaking down in too many schools. Given that the evidence is already in front of the Deputy First Minister, it is not acceptable to still be reviewing the issue. Instead, will the Deputy First Minister explain to us what action she will be taking to resolve it?

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The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

As Angela Ross may know, I took a range of different actions on that exact issue as education secretary over the past three years, not least in relation to the national action plan and to the budget agreement that was reached last year, which provided an uplift in funding related to additional support needs and to the number of teachers in our schools. Those are both fundamental elements in responding to some of the challenges that the member has rightly set out.

I would be more than happy to engage with the member ahead of the budget if she wants to talk about some of the issues that she has raised. However, more broadly, it is important to recognise that Ms McAllan is now leading on the action plan on behaviour in schools and that the improvements that we are seeing across the board are being supported by a range of different partners.

Accident and Emergency (Winter Pressures)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): In August, almost 51,000 people had to wait more than four hours at accident and emergency, which is the worst figure ever recorded for this time of year. Nine out of 10 accident and emergency doctors say that emergency departments are simply not ready for winter. We are seeing increasing use of corridor care, which is not safe. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine is pushing for a clear definition of corridor care and for the collection and reporting of data. Does the Deputy First Minister agree with that, and will she commit the Government to ending the unsafe practice of corridor care?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

Jackie Baillie raises a very important and timely point, given that we are approaching the winter period. I am assured by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care that that is in hand, and I think that she gave an update to Parliament in recent weeks on that exact point.

If we look at some of the Scottish Ambulance Service data for the week ending 18 October, we can see that the median response time was 7 minutes and 40 seconds. The SAS is making progress more broadly in ensuring that only those patients who need to be prioritised and taken to A and E are transported. Last week, for example, more than half—54.1 per cent—of Scottish Ambulance Service emergency incidents were managed without any need for transfer to hospital. That is important in the context of Jackie Baillie's question on the approach to winter pressures. That approach is centred on ensuring that people receive timely, safe and effective care throughout periods of increased demand.

Jackie Baillie's point about data has been addressed by the health secretary in the chamber. I am sure that the cabinet secretary would be happy to engage with Ms Baillie on the substantive points as we approach winter. We will, of course, be engaging with Parliament, too.

A801 Avon Gorge Crossing

Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP): The Deputy First Minister will be aware that improvement of the A801 Avon Gorge crossing in my constituency has been in the pipeline for decades. Given the strategic importance of that route, and given that the latest outline business case was submitted to Transport Scotland last March, when can my constituents expect to see progress on that long-awaited and vital project?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth):

I recognise the long-standing interest in the A801 Avon Gorge project in the member's local constituency.

I am advised that the business case that was submitted to Transport Scotland is currently under assessment. As with all major infrastructure proposals, any decision will be informed by the strength of the evidence.

Although I am not in a position to provide a timetable today, I assure the member that officials are actively engaged in relation to that further update, which will be provided to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport.

The Government very much recognises the importance of effective transport connections in supporting communities, including those in Falkirk and West Lothian and beyond.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the Deputy First Minister and the 25 colleagues who asked questions. I apologise to the many whose questions I was unable to take due to time constraints.

Keeping the Promise (Progress and Delivery to 2030)

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is a statement by Siobhian Brown on keeping the Promise, progress and delivery to 2030. Questions will be taken at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

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

I will allow a minute or so for the minister to get into place. I ask members of the public leaving the gallery to please do so quietly. We are about to recommence business.

15:02

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Siobhian Brown): Six years ago, Scotland made a promise that all children would grow up loved, safe and respected. Since then, we have taken important steps. However, as the Promise Oversight Board's latest report makes clear, we must take faster action.

In welcoming the publication, I thank the board for the important role that it continues to play in providing independent scrutiny and challenge. It is essential that we listen and be honest about the scale of the task ahead.

As we mark care experience week, let me begin by speaking directly to the children and young people whom I am privileged to represent in this ministerial role. The Promise will be kept by 2030, and I am doing all that I can to make that happen. Over the summer, I have made visits and seen many positive examples of really good work that is under way, including meeting kinship carers in Kilmarnock and attending the Who Cares? Scotland summer festival in August. I am also sure that, like me, many members were touched by the "One Hundred Voices" exhibit in Parliament, which reminded us poignantly that every experience of care in Scotland is unique. I have had the privilege to meet incredible young people across our country who have reminded me why our commitment must be delivered. It is an honour to be in this position, and I am laser-focused on accelerating delivery.

The board's report rightly recognises the progress that we have made so far. In justice, we have invested more than £30 million in the gold standard bairns' hoose model, creating a child-centred approach for children who have experienced or witnessed harm. We are committed to multiyear funding as we expand that model across the whole of Scotland. We have delivered a landmark commitment by ending the placement of children in young offenders institutions and we are delivering significant change through the redesign of the children's hearings system.

In education, we are breaking down barriers and creating opportunities through the Scottish attainment challenge. Since 2018-19, we have invested more than £80 million in funding through the care-experienced children and young people fund to help drive improvements in attainment and wellbeing. Through that funding, we are supporting mentoring, outdoor and play-based learning, wider targeted support and funded specialist staff, including educational psychologists, teachers, tutors, learning mentors and pupil support officers. Across 19 local authorities, we continue to back virtual headteachers, providing strategic leadership to improve attendance, attainment, positive destinations, wellbeing and exclusion rates. In North Lanarkshire, for example, exclusions have fallen from 205 in 2018-19 to just 15 in 2024-25.

That support continues beyond school. Scotland's higher education institutions guarantee an undergraduate offer to care-experienced applicants who meet the minimum entrance qualification. Both the percentage and the number of care-experienced entrants have increased every year since 2016-17. That education is supported through a non-means-tested bursary of £9,000 and is supplemented further by specialist support loans, summer accommodation grants and priority access to discretionary funding, providing financial assistance totalling £21.5 million to nearly 2,500 people in full-time higher education in 2025-26.

We also continue to strengthen support for those who care for our children. We have introduced, and subsequently increased, a national minimum allowance for eligible foster and kinship carers through the Scottish recommended allowance. That support has benefited more than 9,000 children, and consideration of its annual uprating is now required by statute.

For young people making the transition from care into adulthood, we have introduced the £2,000 care leaver payment, supporting 1,300 young people each year, and we continue to deliver a substantial package of aftercare and continuing care.

The Government recognises that support around the child and the family is what makes the difference. It is about prevention, ahead of reaction. That means embedding whole-family support and targeting whole-family wellbeing funding to enable local partnerships to improve support for families and deliver without stigma or judgment, making greater use of families' feedback to improve services. In Renfrewshire, for example, the request-for-assistance pathway has streamlined access to family support, enabling earlier help for families and creating a more co-ordinated and efficient local support system.

Taken together, those are significant changes. They demonstrate that the work to keep the Promise reaches across Government and across the lives of children and families. However, we have also enabled

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further change for the future. In March this year, the Parliament unanimously passed the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026. That significant legislation was developed through cross-party working and a shared sense of responsibility, which I am committed to maintaining over the next four years.

The legislation will strengthen the voice of care-experienced people through a right of access to advocacy. It will advance support for foster and kinship carers and take steps to address profit in residential childcare. It provides for action in areas including restraint, seclusion and housing, alongside substantial changes to the children's hearings system. It commits us to reviewing the impact of delays in decision making, to help to ensure that more children experience the security, stability and sense of belonging that a permanent home can provide. In recognising that listening to children, young people and their families and drawing on their understanding of their lives can secure the best outcomes, it strengthens the role of family group decision making.

Fundamentally, the reforms are about making sure that our care and support system works for children and young people, with their rights, relationships and voices at the heart of all decisions. The act's first provisions came into force on 30 September, and implementation of the reforms is under way.

However, to be clear, keeping the Promise requires action not only from the Government but across all public services and by local government. It requires us to think differently about how we offer support, take decisions and ensure that we are pulling together in the same direction rather than working in silos.

Our workforce is fundamental to that. Every day, foster and kinship carers, social workers, residential care staff, health professionals, teachers and third sector workers provide vital support to children and families across Scotland. I thank them all for their exceptional dedication and I recognise the pressures that they face. Through the National Social Work Agency, established by this Government this year, we will provide national leadership and strengthened support to the profession.

Keeping the Promise is public service reform in action. Through early prevention and intervention, we must move away from services that wait until families reach crisis. Our approach is one where services work together around the needs of children and families instead of expecting families to navigate complicated systems themselves.

When something works, we need to understand why and help it to spread. Where progress is too slow or where a child's experience of support depends on where in Scotland they live, we need to understand why and we need to act.

Through the Promise progress framework, we have better data and insight into where progress is being made and where improvement is needed, but, as the oversight board report makes clear, there is no point in collecting data if we do not use it to improve performance.

I see a real opportunity with our public service reform to do this better, and I implore colleagues across the chamber to work with me and the Government on sharing and encouraging good practice, and identifying where we can make improvements.

Of course, through the continued, ongoing work of Scotland's independent strategic adviser and The Promise Scotland, we will build our understanding of what works well, and promote and provoke action as required.

The gap in consistency of service and delivery must close, and I look to partners across Scotland to continue to work together and support each other in that delivery.

There is more to do, and I do not underestimate the scale of the task ahead, but nor should we understate the progress that Scotland has made or the foundations that are currently in place. Across the country, partners are strengthening family support and ensuring that children, young people and care-experienced adults have a greater voice in decisions that affect their lives.

I announce today that, in November, we will launch a new delivery coalition—chaired by me and the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic—to bring together partners from national Government, local government, public services and the third sector, and people with lived experience. The coalition will provide a dedicated forum to strengthen collaboration, drive collective action and accelerate progress towards keeping the Promise by 2030.

The Promise can be kept, but it demands co-ordinated action. This Government remains determined to lead, to work with our partners, to challenge, and to continue to listen to children, families and care-experienced people.

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By 2030, the ultimate test will be whether change is felt by the children and young people at the heart of the Promise. To get there, this Government will implement the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026; be crystal clear on the actions that we will take by 2030; and connect and drive forward the pace of change through coalition and joint working.

That is the task ahead. Together, we will accomplish it and, together, we will keep the Promise.

The Presiding Officer: I will allow around 20 minutes for the minister to answer questions on the issues raised. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak button now.

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance sight of the statement. The Promise Oversight Board is clear that

“The next 6 to 18 months will determine whether the promise being kept remains possible.”

In her statement, the minister said that the Government will be crystal clear on the actions that it will take by 2030, but, if the Promise is to be kept, we need action now. What action will the minister take within the next six to 18 months to ensure that the Promise is kept?

Siobhian Brown: The delivery coalition that I have just announced will be a very strong part of that. With four years to go until 2030, it is essential that we drive forward the change that is required at pace and with clear direction. The coalition that the cabinet secretary and I will chair will work alongside the independent strategic adviser for the Promise to bridge the gaps between individual organisations and geographical success, to inform a collective approach to change in policy and practice.

The coalition will also provide an informed route to cross-portfolio engagement on issues. Respective cabinet secretaries and ministers may be invited to attend the coalition in relation to specific issues and actions to be identified.

The final membership of the group is yet to be determined and invitations will be sent out shortly. The purpose of the delivery coalition is to achieve delivery of the Promise by 2030 and watch progress as we go along.

Amanda Lindsay (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform): I thank the minister for prior sight of the statement. In 2023-24, the school attendance rate for care-experienced children fell to 83 per cent while the rate for all pupils rose slightly to 90 per cent. In 2022-23, care-experienced children were six times more likely than the general pupil population to be excluded from school, and the exclusion rate rose for the first time in 12 years. Will the Scottish Government commit to scaling up the use of evidence-based interventions, such as one-to-one tuition and peer tutoring, which have been shown to be the most effective ways to close the gap in literacy and numeracy, and will it make an urgent commitment to establish a dedicated transitions fund to support care-experienced school leavers during the cliff-edge move into further or higher education?

Siobhian Brown: The £80 million Scottish attainment fund, which I mentioned in my opening statement, does exactly what Amanda Lindsay asks for.

Although progress has been made on the gap between exclusion rates for looked-after pupils and those for all pupils, which has fallen significantly in the past 15 years, care-experienced children and young people remain disproportionately affected by exclusion. That is not acceptable. Reducing that disparity is a key priority.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Can the minister speak further on what work is under way to address the challenges around the sufficiency of foster care placements, and on how the Scottish Government is listening to the voices of those in the profession and those with lived experience to inform its approach?

Siobhian Brown: We recognise the challenges around foster care sufficiency and the importance of children accessing the right home in the right place at the right time. We funded Scotland's first national foster care campaign and expanded fosterline support. Recently, I co-chaired a national round table, at which the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and partners agreed actions on recruitment, retention and placement availability. The National Social Work Agency has tested Thriving Futures training to strengthen carers' support. Our new foster carers strategic advisory group will help to shape reform, building on consultation with foster carers and care-experienced children and young people.

Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement and echo her words about the moving nature of the one hundred voices exhibition.

The Education and Gaelic Committee has heard that, although there remains a strong commitment to keeping the Promise, care-experienced children and young people do not always see that commitment reflected in their day-to-day lives. Evidence has also highlighted continuing concerns about social work

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recruitment and retention, inconsistency between local areas, and the pace of change. Can the minister outline the measurable improvements that care-experienced children should expect to see over the next year? How will the Government demonstrate that those improvements are being felt by the children themselves and their families, rather than simply being recorded through policy activity?

Siobhian Brown: That is the vital bit: we need the children to feel the change in their experiences on the ground. Even though a lot of work has been taken up so far, there is still a lot of work to do before 2030. The experiences as they are felt on the ground will be vital.

Ms Moodie mentioned the social care workforce. Having a sustainable, supported workforce will be fundamental to keeping the Promise. The National Social Work Agency, which was established this year, is leading national workforce planning to create a stronger picture of workforce demand, recruitment challenges and future supply. Through the Scottish social work partnership, the National Social Work Agency is working with COSLA and Social Work Scotland to develop a strategic plan, which will set out a shared commitment to strengthening the social work workforce. That delivery plan is on track for publication in spring 2027.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Con): In July, it was reported that a 13-year-old girl requested to be moved out of a Scottish secure unit in which teenage male offenders were housed. Her plea was rejected, with her right to a single-sex space and safety ignored. This year, The Promise Scotland said:

“The way secure care is currently provided in Scotland is not sustainable.”

Does the minister agree? How many more vulnerable young people need to be placed in unsuitable accommodation?

Siobhian Brown: We are laying the foundations for a more resilient and sustainable secure care system for the future. In the reimagining secure care consultation, which took place this year, stakeholders’ views were sought on a range of issues, including the nationalisation of secure care services, to see how we could improve things. Future decisions will be guided by evidence and analysis of the consultation responses. No decision has yet been made on nationalisation.

Secure care in Scotland is currently provided by four independent charity organisations, and we will continue to work closely with providers, local authorities and other partners as part of our wider programme of reimagining secure care.

Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

On 15 October 2016, I led care-experienced people into the Scottish National Party conference to hear Nicola Sturgeon commit to ripping up the care system. She said that we would not have to wait for change, but a child who was aged five then is now 15. The minister talked of commitments to action to drive change and implement legislation, but those children have been hearing these empty promises for years. The statement contains ad hoc actions that the Government has patched together as positive signs of progress, but they do not amount to ripping up the system.

Before the Promise, the SNP Government created the looked-after children strategic implementation group, but it was quietly discontinued as it achieved little impact. Does the new delivery coalition mark the quiet discontinuation of the strategic adviser—the Promise Oversight Board—or is it an example of more public relations that will add to public sector clutter, which Audit Scotland cautioned against only last year?

Siobhian Brown: I am proud of what Scotland is doing in trying to deliver the Promise, which we will do by 2030. That commitment has been made, and we have four years to go.

There has been progress. We have passed landmark legislation that provides significant packages of reform to support the Promise. We have committed £154 million to transform family support, and that figure will go up to £200 million by March next year. I could provide a list of things that we have already done. The delivery coalition will look at the pace of progress and at the challenges to ensure that we deliver the Promise by 2030.

The Presiding Officer: I call Patricia Gibson.

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Thank you, First Minister—sorry, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You would think that she would know. *[Laughter.]*

Patricia Gibson: A range of organisations are involved in helping to deliver the Promise and, inevitably, each has its own separate and discrete data. That can sometimes act as a barrier to care-experienced young people accessing the support that they need as they grow up, develop and move from one local authority area to another. What consideration has the minister given to having a more streamlined and effective shared

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data collection system—bearing in mind data protection requirements—to ensure that care-experienced young people can more easily access the support that they need, regardless of where they move to in Scotland or how their circumstances change?

Siobhian Brown: Care-experienced young people should not have to repeat their stories or navigate disconnected services to enable them to access support. Having better national data could help to identify unmet need and gaps in provision, but that must be accompanied by effective information sharing between services, particularly when young people move between services and need further support. Children's services planning and the wider public sector reform agenda provide opportunities to strengthen co-ordination. Our focus must be on ensuring that having such information helps young people to get the right support at the right time, while protecting their privacy and rights.

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): The Scottish Government's own figures show that pupils in care are seven times more likely to leave school with no qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 3 or above. That statistic relates to academic year 2024-25, which was a full 10 years after the Scottish attainment challenge was launched. Will the minister specify how a delivery coalition—or anything else that the Government is about to do—will help such kids to get a qualification in maths or English?

Siobhian Brown: That is why we are already investing £80 million. We want to keep those children in school so that they can have better outcomes.

The delivery coalition has four years to go and has a widespread portfolio, with a lot of work happening in national and local government and in the third sector. There is a lot of work for the delivery coalition to look at, and that is what we intend it to do. Keeping the Promise is all about achieving better outcomes for our care-experienced children.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): During the Education and Gaelic Committee's recent pre-budget scrutiny work, I asked our witnesses, including those trying to deliver the Promise, whether they saw public service reform as an opportunity to deliver it. Support for care-experienced young people across the nation has been bitty for too long. Does the minister agree that PSR offers an opportunity to deliver services in the places where they are needed, and when they are needed, to support families?

Siobhian Brown: Keeping the Promise is public sector reform in action. Our focus is on reducing complexity, improving collaboration across services and shifting the focus towards prevention and early intervention. Those are central aims of our public service reform programme, and—through whole family support, strengthened planning in children's services and the wider reform agenda—we are building more joined-up services around the needs of children and families, helping them to access support earlier and reducing reliance on crisis intervention. The forthcoming implementation strategy for the Promise will set out the actions that the Scottish Government will take to keep the Promise by 2030.

David Smith (West Scotland) (Reform): The minister repeatedly refers to meeting young people, listening to their experiences and placing their voices at the heart of decisions. The oversight board accepts that participation activity is taking place but says that Scotland still cannot sufficiently demonstrate that lived experience is genuinely influencing decisions. How does the minister propose that we actually measure how experience translates into action?

Siobhian Brown: I think that I have answered that question. We know what children are experiencing and feeling on the ground. We have made progress in the past four or five years, but we have more to make and we will measure that.

Since coming into this post six months ago, I have had much engagement with young people and have listened to their voices. I know that that happened prior to my coming into this role, and it will continue.

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): If we are to deliver the Promise by 2030, there must be a resolute focus on delivery. Will the minister outline in more detail how the Scottish Government's public service reform programme, which was mentioned in her statement, could support efforts to streamline services and shift the focus further towards prevention and, crucially, partnership working?

Siobhian Brown: As I said in a previous answer, keeping the Promise is public sector reform in action. The Scottish Government will continue to provide whole family support and will strengthen children's services planning. The forthcoming implementation strategy will set out the actions that the Scottish Government will take to deliver the Promise by 2030.

Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green): Many young people who are in kinship care are themselves providing unpaid care for a family member who cannot cope without their support. Those young carers face multiple and complex barriers to accessing the relevant support. Young carers are often hidden and their

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struggles can be overlooked. Will the minister outline what actions the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that young people with multiple needs are not missed and that they can benefit from the full implementation of the Promise?

Siobhian Brown: During the summer, I met many kinship carers and children and had many discussions with them, some of which were quite harrowing. I must be honest about their experience, which has enabled me to understand why we must do better and must deliver the Promise.

We know that kinship carers provide vital care and stability for children, often at short notice and in really challenging circumstances. We recognise that families' experience of accessing support can vary, depending on individual circumstances and legal arrangements. The Scottish Government has set out our vision for kinship care, which includes a broader approach to improving support for kinship families, while recognising that financial assistance is only one aspect of the support that carers may need.

We have also established a kinship care strategic advisory group to work with partners and kinship families to prioritise practical improvements, including more access to information, better co-ordination of services and more support for carers to evidence their caring role. That work continues.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am dealing with constituents who have fostered three children over the past five years. The relevant social work department is now said to be considering moving the children to a permanent home. That is causing an undue level of distress to the family—particularly to the children, who consider their permanent home to be their foster placement, where they are well integrated into the local community. No final decision has been made in the case, and I have written to the relevant local authority about it, but will the minister say what work can be done through the Promise to ensure that children's voices and rights are paramount when considering such permanency arrangements, especially when the children concerned have already been in a placement for such a long time and are integrated into the family there?

Siobhian Brown: I recognise the distress that uncertainty about a child's future home can cause, particularly when they have developed a really strong, loving relationship over many years.

I cannot comment on individual cases, but there is clear evidence that children thrive when they have a safe, nurturing and permanent home. The best interests of the child must always be at the heart of permanence decisions, with their views, relationships and sense of belonging being fully considered.

Our good practice in permanence guides reinforce that children's rights should be central to decision making. As part of keeping the Promise, we are reviewing delays in permanence decisions and strengthening advocacy rights for care-experienced children and young children.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Three years ago, Natalie Don told the Education, Children and Young People committee that there was a workforce plan. Two years ago, the SNP Government promised that it would publish the plan in autumn 2024. However, last month, David Anderson told the Education and Gaelic Committee that a workforce plan had not yet been delivered, even though the oversight board for the Promise had called for it two years prior to that.

Workforce is a critical factor in this. What responsibility does the minister accept for the delay? When will the plan finally be delivered?

Siobhian Brown: As I mentioned previously, in March we launched the national social work agency to strengthen and support social work across Scotland. Through the Scottish social work partnership, the national social work agency is working together with COSLA and Social Work Scotland. The partnership is currently developing a strategic plan that will set out our shared commitment to strengthening the social work workforce.

As I have said, the accompanying delivery plan will highlight the agreed actions and will be published in spring 2027.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement and questions on keeping the Promise: progress and delivery to 2030. The fact that Stephen Kerr got to ask a question proves that, even if members are not on a list of speakers, if they take the chance to press the request-to-speak button and there is time in hand, they will be taken.

Stephen Kerr: Hear, hear.

International Climate Justice

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The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01726, in the name of Gillian Martin, on Scotland's commitment to international climate justice. Members wishing to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button now.

15:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): I am pleased to open today's timely debate, which comes just ahead of the 31st conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—COP31—in Turkey and to have the opportunity to firmly reiterate the Government's and, I hope, the Parliament's, strong commitment to climate justice. As we debate today's motion, I ask members to reflect on the extreme weather that is affecting communities across the world. We have the strongest El Niño on record, which is intensifying climate change, delivering higher temperatures and exacerbating risks globally.

Scotland is clearly not immune to that, but it is beyond doubt that the worst impacts will not be felt here or in any of the other historic emitters in the global north that are most responsible for climate change. They will instead be borne by the most vulnerable communities in the global south, which have contributed least to the crisis but are paying the highest price, which is an injustice.

Achieving climate justice is not simply an environmental issue; it is a human issue that affects health, food security, economies and global stability. The accumulating impacts of the crisis will be felt everywhere, and we will all feel those impacts if we do not act to achieve climate justice for all communities. Without climate justice and without financially supporting the most climate-vulnerable communities, we put the world's peace and security at risk. That is not only my view or the Scottish Government's view; it is a position that is shared by experts.

Recently, the Scottish Parliament was the first Parliament to host a screening of "The People's Emergency Briefing". I thank the members who facilitated that screening, which the First Minister and I attended. In the film, I was struck by the contribution of Lieutenant General Richard Nugee, who is a former senior British Army officer. He talked about the impact of climate change on communities in the global south that are being forced to migrate to other countries and regions. They face pressures over basic resources such as water and are, in some cases, joining armed groups because they can no longer make a living from farming. He said that climate change posed the greatest risk to global and national security. He described a system that faces

"cascading crises"

in

"food, health, infrastructure, migration, energy and extreme weather"

that are all linked and will potentially all hit at the same time. If they are not addressed, they

"risk overwhelming government systems and eroding democratic stability."

Civil unrest can be fuelled by food shortages, displacement from homes and a lack of access to water. Those are not future problems. Addressing climate change and achieving climate justice around the world is essential to national security and peace today. The politicians who deny the need for climate action and climate justice absolutely miss that point. Simply, climate injustice fuels instability that directly affects United Kingdom security. Those who want to be in government but deny the need for intervention and support for the global south are proving their unsuitability for power.

Climate justice remains at the heart of the Scottish National Party Government's climate and international work, which reflects our values and responsibilities in an interconnected world.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Can the cabinet secretary explain how the decision today to approve the new Peterhead 2 gas-fired power station delivers security of energy supply or tackles climate change?

Gillian Martin: In my previous role as energy minister, I would have been happy to debate energy security and its impact on our way of life. I want to concentrate my remarks on climate justice and the need for investment in the communities that face the greatest impacts caused by weather events associated with climate change but also by the lack of investment in their infrastructure.

Let me outline some of the actions that we are taking on our commitments. Since 2012, Scotland has supported community-led climate resilience in some of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries through our world-leading climate justice fund. In Malawi, our support has helped restore access to safe drinking water after climate-related flooding had contaminated local water supplies. In Zambia, disabled people are shaping

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local plans for floods and droughts through community committees, which gives them a voice, and they are also coming up with solutions. In Rwanda, women wanted to earn an income by restoring climate-damaged land, but childcare responsibilities stood in their way of doing so, which is why we helped to establish community childcare centres—

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Gillian Martin: I will in a second.

We helped establish community childcare centres to enable women to work on vital climate restoration projects.

Our approach is simple. Those who are most affected by climate change and its impacts on their communities know what they need, and we are there to work with them to shape the response.

David Green: There is a review of the climate justice fund. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that community access programmes will continue to be funded through Scotland-based organisations? Will she also recognise the calls for a six-month bridging fund for those organisations that are currently in receipt of the climate justice fund until the review is over and the next round of funding opens up?

Gillian Martin: First, I have some more information on how we work with partners. It is not just Scotland-based organisations that we work with—there are also in-country organisations, which is really important. When we work with organisations such as the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, they have the ability to work with in-country partners that they have established links with. We will not be deploying resources and solutions to communities—David Green is trying to signal something to me, but I have not quite worked out what it is. I will be able to give him more information on that point as I go forward.

Some of the impacts of climate change cannot be avoided in the global south. Homes are destroyed and livelihoods are lost. Sometimes, what is lost cannot be replaced. That is why we became the first Government to commit dedicated funding for climate-related loss and damage. In the previous session of Parliament, we mobilised more than £10 million for loss and damage, including for projects in East Africa, the Pacific, the Andean Highlands and the Bay of Bengal. The women for the world project supported indigenous Maasai women in Kenya to play a greater role in local decision making on land management, conservation and climate adaptation.

We are also sharing our learning on our loss and damage fund and how we have deployed it, because we have not just pledged it; we are deploying it in programmes with other Governments, particularly with other devolved Governments that we speak to in partnership with our Regions4 and Under2 Coalition partners. Indeed, some of our bilaterals in the conferences of the parties that we go to help us to assist them with programmes that they want to get off the ground.

Achieving climate justice is not just about the programmes that we support; it is about how we use our voice and stand up for our values. Our funding for loss and damage at COP26 helped build the momentum for the creation of the first dedicated global loss and damage fund at COP28. Creating the fund, though, was only the beginning. Just last week, we saw an important milestone, with the fund for responding to loss and damage board provisionally setting aside US\$21.6 million in response to the devastating floods in Nepal. I warmly welcome that decision.

I want to build on this at COP31. I will go to COP31 to champion climate justice, to talk about what our loss and damage fund has achieved, to encourage the deployment of the UN loss and damage fund to get programmes on the ground, and to champion the role of regions and devolved Governments in accelerating climate action and resilience, including in supporting efforts to mobilise greater climate finance. It is very important that we have that position so that we can go to these international events and amplify the key priorities, particularly of devolved Governments. Next week, I will bring together a range of voices, including young people, climate activists, people with disabilities and those involved in delivering our programmes in partner countries, for the round table ahead of COP31.

Global climate justice also requires a coalition of the willing to come together and advance action. We are currently the president of Regions4, which is a global network of largely global south subnational Governments. Through our presidency, we are strengthening co-operation on adaptation, resilience and biodiversity, and ensuring that devolved Governments have a stronger voice on the international stage. In fact, I was at the biodiversity COP—the 17th conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity—in Armenia last week, where we were recognised by the UN organisers and had our own day of plenary sessions. As subnational, devolved and regional Governments, we were able to show how we are acting in a range of climate action and nature restoration activities.

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We are also the outgoing co-chair of the Under2 Coalition. We have served three terms as the co-chair, during which we founded the knowledge-sharing platforms that are the just transition task force and the net zero futures policy forum, which continue to promote and share best practice. As we step down from that role, we leave behind a stronger and more ambitious coalition that is united in its determination to reach net zero and also to not wait for state actors to take action but to carry on using the powers that we have.

As I have set out, the Government's action on the international stage is underpinned by an unwavering commitment to climate justice. Turning to the motion that is before us, let us consider what climate justice looks like in practice. It means getting climate finance to vulnerable communities before disaster strikes, helping them to build resilience and adapt to a changing climate. It means giving countries that are suffering from the worst impacts of climate change the tools to protect lives and livelihoods while supporting a just transition that creates opportunity for people. Above all, it means leaving future generations a world that is safer, fairer and more secure, so that people can stay in the communities where they want to stay. People do not, as the far right would have us believe, want to leave home and go elsewhere. We have a responsibility to assist them in that endeavour.

The decisions that we take in this decade will shape the world that our children inherit, and that debate matters. In stark contrast to global reductions in aid—including, sadly, by Westminster—the Scottish Government remains firmly committed to climate justice. Through the programme for government, we have committed to continue and grow the climate justice fund beyond the £36 million that was invested in the previous parliamentary session, including support for loss and damage. I am extremely proud to be part of a Government that is keeping its promises in that regard. Despite the limited resources, we are supporting communities that face the greatest impact of a climate crisis that they did little to cause. The impact on the global north will be catastrophic if we do not invest in those communities and help Governments in the global south.

Today, we have an opportunity to send a clear and positive message that the Parliament is united in our commitment to climate justice, as we were in the previous parliamentary session. In that regard, I am happy to say that I will support the positive amendments from some of the other parties. However, I will be rejecting the amendments that question the need for that commitment.

I move,

That the Parliament reaffirms its commitment to climate justice, accepting that those in the Global South who have done the least to cause climate change are facing the worst impacts, and recognises that Scotland's commitment to play its role in the global response to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss, including addressing climate related loss and damage, is guided by the principles of climate justice, fairness and global solidarity.

15:47

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the Government for bringing to the Parliament for its consideration the important topic of international climate justice, merely weeks prior to COP31 in Antalya. Although the world situation has changed dramatically since the optimism of COP26 in my home city of Glasgow, the need for global solidarity on climate change remains strong. The UK has an incredibly strong track record on climate change action. The ground-breaking Climate Change Act 2008, which was introduced under Gordon Brown's Government, set the first legally binding climate change mitigation targets for a country, and later UK Governments, alongside their counterparts here in Scotland, have, time after time, risen to the challenge that we all face due to climate change.

Although we can certainly be proud of our record, the world that we live in is rapidly changing. Last week, the United Nations Environment Programme noted in its emissions gap report for 2026 that, even in the best-case scenario, the world is looking at an overshoot beyond 1.5°C to 1.7°C to 1.8°C and that, without massive new intervention on a global scale, we are heading for a world that is 2.6°C warmed by the end of this century.

We should all know what that means. It will dramatically increase flooding and drought for Scotland and increase desertification, extreme weather and water scarcity across large swathes of the earth. It will be a world of extremes, with the long-term consequences of dramatically increased refugee flows and economic disruption. We are already living in that world, yet we know that things will get worse before they get better. In Scotland, we live in a country with a strong and robust state capacity to deal with a challenging climate, but many countries around the world—especially many of the poorest, which have historically contributed least to carbon emissions—will bear the brunt of the planet's new and more extreme weather conditions.

Commonwealth island nations such as Tuvalu face seeing their entire nation submerged by rising seas, while countries such as Kenya and Nigeria face dramatic desertification caused by a combination of elements, including the pressures of rising populations and, again, climate change. For that reason, Labour will always

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support international solidarity, stand with our global neighbours and work towards building a world in which no person needs to leave their country due to climatic pressures.

Our amendment seeks to strengthen the Government's motion in the spirit of cross-party collaboration. Last year, the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on international development published a report on Scotland's international development funding, and we would like its recommendations on transparency to be fully embraced in the Scottish Government's aid work.

For example, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund has expressed concern that a lot of the expenditure could be better targeted through local programmes that it and other Scotland-based charities are engaged with in countries around the world, rather than the expenditure disappearing into large international funds. Perhaps there could be more focus on considering what we can do to maximise impact through Scottish charities. For example, the share of the climate justice fund that goes towards loss and damage could potentially be increased towards 50 per cent.

We could also look at having a climate access window through the global solidarity fund, so that more of the fund is directed towards community-based programmes—that could be useful and worth the Government's consideration. It would mean that Scotland could champion international best practice and, as I am sure that every member agrees with the principle of “love thy neighbour”, our aid budget could be distributed in the most effective way possible and championed by Scots around the world. We want every penny to go towards those who will benefit most from the funding. In the spirit of public sector reform, I hope that the Government will actively support and engage with that proposal.

The other part of our amendment is about recognising the importance of the green transition if we want to achieve climate justice at home and abroad. That is not just about directly greening our own industrial, energy and transport systems but is about supporting and creating equitable supply chains globally. Allowing deindustrialisation, deskilling and rising poverty at home while importing cheap goods from polluting foreign industries leads to a lose-lose situation for everyone—that is the epitome of the tragedy of the commons. We must build supply chains in which living wages are paid to all workers and in which everyone, whether they are workers in the countries that provide the raw materials or those who create the finished goods, is treated with dignity and respect.

This is a broader topic than just climate justice—

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul Sweeney: I am happy to give way.

Patrick Harvie: I am interested that Paul Sweeney used the phrase “tragedy of the commons” in this context. Does he agree that countries around the world that chase after just one more fossil fuel licence are another example of the tragedy of the commons?

Paul Sweeney: It is important to ensure that there is a managed move away from emissions. For example, substituting coal for gas is a graduated transition. We need to be clear about the trade-offs that are necessary to make that opportunity happen. One of the opportunities that we should support is the increased use of nuclear energy, which is an opportunity that the Green Party unfortunately did not agree with at its conference. It is important that we recognise the difficult trade-offs that are necessary in managing a just transition in order to avoid the tragedy of the commons. We need to be clear that it is not possible to simply switch things off and expect there not to be terrible consequences for working-class people, and we need to consider the issue in the broadest possible context.

If we want there to be a green economy in the UK, it must be the result of supporting a green economy around the world. Where countries show a complete disregard for the natural world, we must not continue with business as usual but deal directly with that injustice. The late Pope Francis noted in his great encyclical:

“We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.”

We should therefore be proud of all the work that Scotland has done so far to see that vision enacted. I hope that, by supporting our amendment, the Parliament will help to build a stronger platform for greater climate justice at home and abroad.

I move amendment S7M-01726.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that any overseas development assistance (ODA) should be disbursed with the highest levels of transparency and a focus on maximising its impact, and recognises the importance of a just transition to a green economy, both domestically and across Scotland's international supply chains, to ensure climate justice for all.”

15:53

Duncan Massey (North East Scotland) (Reform): The motion is an absolute word salad. It is a bingo card of terms that will be meaningless to most folk in Scotland who are worrying about a cost of living crisis, their expensive electricity, gas, diesel and other fuel bills and a flat economy that is resulting in a lack of jobs and wage growth. In addition, the term “global south” feels like an outdated label that obscures more than it reveals. At the moment, the so-called global south includes new economic giants such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and several others.

We also have many countries that are growing faster than most developed economies, and certainly at rates much higher than Scotland’s. Asian countries such as Vietnam and South American countries are growing quickly. With the oil boom in Guyana, it is growing at more than 20 per cent. Sub-Saharan countries such as Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda are all growing at extremely fast rates.

Together, those countries account for a substantial share of global economic growth and they are increasing development, industrial production and innovation. In many cases, they are now the drivers of the global economy rather than countries that are in need of aid. No wonder many leaders of African countries, such as President Museveni of Uganda, have told European countries to copy China and India and seek to invest fairly in countries’ industries and robust energy systems rather than giving them lectures and grants that seem to do nothing to promote the long-term development of those countries.

David Green: Does the member understand that the reason why we talk about grants and not just loans is that a lot of those climate-vulnerable countries are also in debt? They cannot afford healthcare or education because of an economic global system that is stacked up against them. That is why grants are so important. Does the member understand that?

Duncan Massey: The point that I am making is that those grants are not really going to long-term solutions. I will come on to that later.

It is a truism that the poorer a country is, the more vulnerable it is to natural disasters, including weather events. However, it is not clear that those events are increasing. Annual deaths from climate-related disasters have declined by more than 96 per cent globally over the past century. That is because, as the world has got richer, we have had more energy and more technology, and those things have enabled us to deal with events far better. The sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment report, which is the basis of current attribution in climate science, sees an increase in hotter weather, but it also highlights no detected increases in global flooding and global drought, and especially no increase in tropical storms—indeed, no increases in most extreme events.

It is not clear what climate justice we are talking about, especially when we consider that Scotland produces only around 0.08 per cent of current global emissions and that China has burned more coal in the past three years than the entire world did in the whole of the 19th century.

Gillian Martin: Every Sunday, churches of all denominations throughout Scotland make collections and give to organisations such as SCIAF. Hundreds of millions of pounds come from people in Scotland who fundamentally disagree with what the member is saying and who understand that we have a responsibility to help communities that are most at risk. Is the member saying that they should not do that? Is he saying that the Government should not do that?

Duncan Massey: I am saying that any money has to be spent effectively, and currently I do not think that it is.

If we are perhaps talking about investing in very poor countries—this goes to the cabinet secretary’s point—to build infrastructure and cheap, affordable and reliable energy systems or, in short, to help to build proper long-term sustainable systems and proper resilience, I might welcome that. Indeed, President Museveni might welcome that.

David Green: Will the member take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Duncan Massey: No, I will not. Thank you.

However, that is not what we are doing. Investment seems opaque and it is directed through multiple organisations and agencies. Looking through the Scottish Government website, I note that projects seem weak and flaky—

David Green: Will the member take an intervention?

Duncan Massey: No. I am making progress.

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A lot of money seems to go to studies, such as £1 million for

“a pilot to assess the effectiveness of humanitarian financial architecture as a mechanism for disbursing loss and damage funding.”

I do not know what that means either. More seems to go to international advocacy programmes, such as £206,000 to support climate youth negotiators.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention so that I can answer his question?

Duncan Massey: No. I am progressing with my points.

Is that value for money? Is the money being spent wisely? Does anyone know? Meanwhile, Scotland and, indeed, the UK are in ever deeper financial difficulty. Scotland has its £5 billion black hole. The UK as a whole is borrowing about £150 billion this year and it has an annual interest cost of nearly £100 billion.

You would have thought that, given that background, we would be seeking focus and value for money, but it does not seem so. Are we even asking whether the aid that we give is useful for the nations concerned and whether it is helping to build resilience in poorer nations or whether it is just virtue signalling?

David Green: Will the member give way on that point?

Duncan Massey: Not at the moment; I am making progress. I doubt that those projects add the sort of value and provide the help that President Museveni is looking for, or the long-term resilience that is needed.

That brings me to what we should be talking about, which is the lack of resilience in Scotland. As I have said before, we are facing a significant energy crunch this winter. Across Europe, we need more diesel, aviation fuel and natural gas. Conflicts in Iran and Russia are the proximate cause, but decades of delusional policy making have left Scotland, Britain and all of Europe badly exposed to energy reality. The United Kingdom and Scotland have the highest industrial costs in the world, with high prices for electricity, diesel and other fuel. We have crushed our North Sea production due to bad policy choices, which has hit jobs and investments. We have shut down or severely damaged most major industries and are now dependent on imports for virtually everything, including food, energy and the other basic building blocks of society, such as steel, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, fertilisers and medicine.

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

Duncan Massey: No. I am concluding.

In Britain, that will be bad for us. We will have high fuel prices and other high-cost imports, but we still tend to get the supplies, even if they are at sky-high prices. With global shortages, what will happen if some countries do not get any of those supplies? That means that they will not get fuel, fertiliser or key medicines. That is the real global unfairness that has been driven particularly by net zero policies in the global north, which have left most of Europe desperately seeking imports.

We need to rediscover our resilience and be able to make things here again, so that we can be competitive, have cheap and abundant energy and maximise our own oil and gas resources. That would enable more resources to be available for poorer countries. If we seek to help poorer countries, we must do so effectively by seeking investment first and aid second, to help them to build resilient energy-rich and sustainable economies. That is how we deliver real justice and fairness.

I move amendment S7M-01726.2, to leave out from “reaffirms” to end and insert:

“must redefine its definition of climate justice, as harming the economic growth potential of the developing world is not justice; considers the reported pleas from leaders, including Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, to European leaders to invest in their countries instead of lecturing them, to represent evidence that debates of this kind are not welcomed in the developing world, and agrees that, given the cost of energy and what it views as a de-industrialisation crisis, the priority should be to provide cheap, abundant and reliable energy and ensure that well-paid jobs remain in Scotland.”

16:02

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The timing of the debate could not be more critical. With climate impacts all around us and last week’s approval of the Jackdaw gas field, it is more important than ever then we reaffirm the need for real action to deliver climate justice. It is more important than ever that the Parliament restates the Paris agreement goals to keep the world well below 2°C of global heating and to fight for 1.5°C, because every fraction of a degree of temperature increase that we can halt saves lives and slows ecosystem collapse.

We have seen increasing climate impacts in Scotland, but the impacts of climate change will always fall the hardest on those who are the least responsible for them. Climate change does not impact everyone equally.

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The poorest half of the world's population are only responsible for a tenth of global emissions but are the most exposed to climate risks. Climate change supercharges inequality. Women and girls often bear the brunt of climate change impacts that pose unique threats to livelihoods, health and safety. Recent floods in Nepal killed more than 1,200 people and 55 million people in East Africa were pushed into hunger following severe drought. Meanwhile, island nations such as Tuvalu and Kiribati are facing the existential threat of simply being wiped off the map as sea levels rise.

Real climate justice means that industrialised nations, such as Scotland, that have created the mess must also be the ones to lead the switch away from fossil fuels, cut emissions and support those who are most impacted. That is not a new or radical idea. Since 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has recognised that those in the global north countries should take the lead in tackling climate change and supporting adaptation efforts in global south countries. That commitment was reflected in the Paris agreement that was ratified a decade ago. Scotland has already played a leadership role in loss and damage finance and through the climate justice fund. Nicola Sturgeon was the first world leader to pledge money to address loss and damage at COP26 in Glasgow, which was a move that helped to build the momentum towards the global agreement to establish a fund at COP27 in Egypt.

Ultimately, the bill for planet adaptation will be unaffordable unless the global north makes a fair, just and rapid transition away from fossil fuels. I want to see the global leadership that Scotland demonstrated on the issue of loss and damage also being shown on the just transition. Therefore, I would welcome the cabinet secretary's attendance at the international conference on the just transition away from fossil fuels next year, which is being hosted by Tuvalu and Ireland, where we could once again work with small independent states to turn dialogue into firm international action.

It is clear that Governments must take a science-based position on oil and gas exploration and ramp up clean, home-grown renewable energy. The climate scientists have been clear that we have more oil and gas than we can afford to burn if we want to prevent climate chaos. The International Energy Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change all state that new fossil fuel exploration risks our exceeding the 1.5°C threshold. The IPCC warned that emissions from existing fossil fuel infrastructure alone could surpass the remaining global carbon budget.

Those conclusions were highlighted in the UK Labour Government's vision for the future of the North Sea, "North Sea Future Plan", which was published just 12 months ago—so that Government's decision to approve Jackdaw is nothing short of climate vandalism. It has been justified on the basis that it will reduce household bills, create jobs and support greater energy security, but none of those claims is based in reality. Jackdaw will meet only two months' worth of the UK's total gas demand. It will not bring down prices, which are set by volatile international markets. It will create only an additional 27 jobs. It does not make any sense at all, which is clearly why Donald Trump was one of the first people to welcome it last week.

The UK Government's own calculations show that the additional emissions that will be generated by Jackdaw will result in a further 8,000 heat-related deaths and cause more than £16 billion-worth of global damages. Again, those in the global south, who have contributed nothing to this situation, will face the most devastating impacts of the decision.

My hope is that the UK Labour Government sees sense when it comes to Rosebank. If Jackdaw is a disaster, Rosebank would be catastrophic, as it would release seven times more carbon and would send the message to states around the world that they should double down on extracting every last drop of oil and gas.

If the Scottish Government believes the words that it has written in its motion, it must also take a more responsible position by standing against there being more and more fossil fuel exploration. Not so long ago the Scottish Government drafted an energy strategy that did just that, but its reckless decision today to approve a second gas-fired power station at Peterhead looks set to make us dependent on fossil gas for the next 25 years. It is another decision that sends the wrong message internationally: one of the most renewable-energy-rich countries in the world is approving new fossil fuel power stations in the middle of a climate crisis.

The Scottish Government must show the leadership that is needed for a just transition away from fossil fuels, at home and internationally, in line with the science and the Paris agreement goals. It must continue to support those globally who are suffering from climate breakdown and have done the least to cause it.

I move amendment S7M-01726.5, to insert at end:

“; reaffirms the importance of the Paris Agreement Goals to limit the global average temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C; accepts scientific evidence from the International Energy Agency, United Nations Environment Programme and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which shows that new fossil fuel exploration risks exceeding the 1.5°C threshold; believes that new fossil fuel production beyond that which is currently approved, such as the proposed Rosebank oil field, will move the world out of alignment with the Paris Agreement Goals, and supports international dialogue and action on advancing a just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels.”

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The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Finlay Carson to speak to and move amendment S7M-01726.4.

16:08

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Climate change is real. It is happening across the world and there is no doubt that many countries in the global south experience a disproportionate share of its impacts, despite having contributed least to the problem. We recognise that fact and the devastating consequences that climate change is having on communities across the globe.

However, we must also recognise another reality: the effects of climate change are not confined to distant parts of the world but are increasingly being felt here, in Scotland. Over recent days, communities across the country have experienced significant flooding; damage to homes, businesses and infrastructure; and, tragically, loss of life. Many families are once again facing the anxiety and disruption that extreme weather events can bring.

I take this opportunity to put on the parliamentary record my profound shock and sadness at the death of Richard Baines during Sunday's storm. Richard was a remarkable gentleman with an infectious enthusiasm for horticulture. He was widely respected as a leading figure in his field, and his outstanding work at Logan Botanic Gardens earned him, and his special place in Galloway, well-deserved national and international recognition. I am sure that everyone in the chamber will join me in sending our condolences to his wife, Liz, and to all his family and colleagues at this difficult time.

Presiding Officer, this debate should not be about simply what Scotland does overseas; it must also be about whether the Scottish Government is doing enough at home. International development and overseas aid are reserved matters under the devolution settlement. They are the responsibility of the UK Government. Yet the Scottish Government continues to commit substantial sums through its international climate justice fund, while many of the services and priorities that fall squarely within its own remit face increasing pressure.

Gillian Martin: For clarity, were the Conservatives to be in charge of the Scottish Government, would they stop all the programmes associated with climate justice, which assist Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda?

Finlay Carson: Yes, we would. We would call on the Scottish Government to do more work with the UK Government to ensure that those countries that are currently supported are supported in the right way.

I ask the current Scottish Government what discussions it has with the UK Government to ensure that the reserved fund is spent to ensure that those communities are supported. I have absolutely no doubt, cabinet secretary, that some worthwhile projects have been supported through that funding, whether in Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia or elsewhere. However, Scottish taxpayers already make a substantial contribution to UK overseas aid through a reserved UK Government budget. At a time of stretched public finances, many will question why SNP ministers are choosing to top that up with additional Scottish Government spending while devolved services at home face cuts and mounting pressure. Public finances are stretched, and when people expect this Parliament to focus on devolved responsibilities it is entirely reasonable to ask whether ministers have their priorities right. While money is being diverted overseas, serious challenges remain unresolved here, in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly failed to meet its own tree-planting targets despite recognising the important role that woodland creation can play in carbon sequestration, biodiversity enhancement and climate resilience. Communities that are vulnerable to flooding continue to look for greater support and long-term protection. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service faces increased pressure from major incidents such as wildfires and extreme weather events, yet it has still been required to make difficult decisions about front-line service provision.

Communities across rural Scotland are right on the front line of environmental change, yet the Government has cut both the rural affairs budget and the agricultural budget. Meanwhile, our NHS continues to struggle with unacceptable waiting times, our justice system faces significant pressures and Scotland's educational standards continue to decline from the levels that once made our system the envy of many across the world. That approach makes little sense.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Finlay Carson has rightly pointed out the impact of climate change in Scotland, which I appreciate. Does he therefore disagree with Kemi Badenoch, who wants to scrap all net zero targets and who intends to ban candidates from standing in the next general election if they speak up about net zero and climate change?

Finlay Carson: The focus of this debate is supposed to be on where the funding for protecting the climate comes from. The issues around why we are not achieving net zero have to do with the way that we are

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approaching it. We need to be far more pragmatic rather than virtue signalling, as this Government has done far too often in the past.

The approach that the Government has taken makes little sense. Farmers and land managers are not obstacles to environmental progress but essential partners in delivering it. Investment in agriculture supports food security, strengthens rural economies and enables the adoption of innovative and environmentally sustainable farming practices. If ministers are serious about tackling climate change, they should be investing in those managing our countryside rather than reducing the resources that are available to them.

Our amendment recognises that those in the global south often experience the most severe consequences of climate change, but it also recognises that this Parliament must focus on the responsibilities that it holds. We want to see greater investment in practical, economically viable measures that will reduce emissions in Scotland. We want to see more tree planting in the right places, better flood protection in vulnerable communities, stronger support for climate resilience and public services equipped to meet the challenges that are posed by a changing climate, with support for agriculture, forestry and environmental improvement delivered in a way that strengthens rural communities rather than undermines them.

We want to see a Scottish Government that focuses less on headline-grabbing international initiatives and more on delivering results for the people who elect it. Climate justice begins with taking responsibility for the powers that we have. The Scottish Government should leave overseas aid and international development funding to the UK Government and focus its efforts on supporting Scottish communities, Scottish businesses and Scottish public services. That is the purpose of our amendment and I urge members to support it.

I move amendment S7M-01726.4 to leave out from “reaffirms” to end and insert:

“recognises that those in the Global South often experience a disproportionate share of the impacts of climate change; notes, however, that international development and overseas aid are reserved matters under the devolution settlement and are therefore the responsibility of the UK Government; further notes that substantial sums have been committed through the Scottish Government’s International Climate Justice Fund at a time when other domestic priorities face increasing financial pressures; highlights concerns regarding pressures on justice, health and other public services, and calls on the Scottish Government to focus its resources on supporting Scottish communities, businesses and public services to reduce emissions, improve climate resilience and deliver practical environmental improvements in Scotland.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Sanne Dijkstra-Downie to speak to and move amendment S7M-01726.3.

16:14

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): The climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing our generation. It is a challenge that demands urgent action at home and international co-operation, because we have only one atmosphere and it does not care about lines on a map.

Our historical responsibility for the causes of climate change demands an approach with fairness at its heart. Although the fathers of the industrial revolution may not have understood what happens when we burn large amounts of fossil fuels, for us the science is undeniable.

Given that another COP is approaching, we will, rightly, hear that climate change’s consequences are unequally shared. Although no country is immune to rising seas, floods, droughts and extreme weather, some, such as small island nations, face greater risks. Many also lack the resources to protect communities or rebuild after disasters that are made worse by climate change. However, climate justice is not just the right thing to do. As always, it is cheaper to prevent a disaster than to deal with the aftermath of one. Prevention includes flood defences, early-warning systems, drought-resistant agriculture and resilient infrastructure. Every pound that is spent on preparing for climate impacts can help to avoid much larger future costs. Climate justice involves sharing the costs of prevention, not leaving those countries to shoulder the much greater costs of recovery by themselves.

It is also about international resilience. A drought elsewhere pushes up food prices internationally. Flooding can close ports and affect industries, with widespread consequences. Damage to energy infrastructure disrupts electricity supplies. Food and water scarcity drives migration. Scotland is affected by all those things and more.

Time and again, climate finance promises have been made at COP. However, the reality is that the finance has not materialised on the scale that is needed. The UN Environment Programme’s 2025 adaptation gap report, “Running on Empty”, estimates that developing countries will need well over \$300 billion every year for adaptation. So far, only about 10 per cent of that funding has materialised—and, when it has, too much of the support comes in the form of loans, adding to existing debt burdens and leaving countries paying for a

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crisis that they did little to create. We cannot claim to be helping countries to tackle climate change if the price of that help is pushing them further into debt.

That is why our amendment calls for rapid progress not just in mobilising climate finance but for grant-based funding to be prioritised over loans, where possible. Grants can help countries to invest in their futures without forcing them to choose between climate action and essential public services such as healthcare, education and housing. Grants do not push the problem of repayments on to future generations.

At COP, Scotland has a responsibility to use its voice on the international stage to champion that principle of fairness. However, international solidarity must also be matched by action at home. We cannot credibly call for climate justice abroad while failing to make the changes that are needed to reduce our contribution to the problem. We must drive down domestic demand for fossil fuels and accelerate the decarbonisation of heating, transport and industry. That means making it easier for people to heat their homes affordably without relying on fossil fuels; improving public transport and supporting the transition to cleaner vehicles; and helping Scottish businesses and industries cut emissions while remaining competitive. Any solutions that are offered must be practical, affordable and fair—and, as with climate finance abroad, households here at home that are least able to afford the transition must not be left to shoulder the costs alone.

It is a core Liberal Democrat belief that climate justice means understanding that our actions in Scotland and on the world stage are inseparable. Cutting our emissions at home limits the impact on vulnerable communities around the world. Fair climate finance helps those communities to adapt, recover and build a more sustainable future. We cannot afford to ignore either of those responsibilities, because climate action is about not only the protection of our environment but fairness between nations, between generations and for the people who have done the least to cause the crisis but who stand to lose the most.

I move amendment S7M-01726.3, to insert at end:

“urges the Scottish Government to advocate at COP31 for rapid progress in scaling up the mobilisation of climate finance, with grant-based finance prioritised over loans to ensure that climate-vulnerable countries are not pushed further into debt as they respond to the climate crisis; believes that there is a strong need to drive down domestic demand for fossil fuels combined with the need to decarbonise heating, transport and industry, and highlights that this must happen in order both to meet net zero objectives and to uphold the commitment to climate justice.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to the open debate, during which the time limit for speeches is five minutes.

16:19

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Around the world, the devastating impacts of climate change are not a distant threat—they are very much a daily reality. The extreme weather that much of Scotland experienced over the weekend shows that those impacts are also much closer to home than they have been in the past, which demonstrates the growing threat of climate damage to all nations. However, that is nothing compared with the experiences of communities in the global south, who are suffering the most severe consequences of climate damage despite being those who did the least to cause it. During my involvement with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, that point has come up time and again at meetings, and it is also a continual theme at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conferences.

The motion that we are discussing today shows that Scotland recognises that reality and understands that genuine climate action cannot be just about achieving our domestic net zero targets but must be rooted in global solidarity, equity and the protection of human rights.

I am proud that Scotland has made a conscious decision to lead the way when it comes to our contribution to climate justice. Are we perfect? No, we are not. Do we have a lot more to do? Yes, we do. However, in 2012 we became the first nation in the world to launch a dedicated climate justice fund. Over the course of the previous parliamentary session, that fund was trebled to £36 million. In addition to the Scottish Government's £24 million climate just communities programme, Scotland is moving away from the traditional top-down aid and towards locally led participatory action in Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia.

That means putting marginalised groups such as women, young people and people with disabilities at the heart of decision making. In Malawi, Scotland's initiatives explicitly target women and youth to build agricultural and disaster resilience. Erratic weather is disrupting Malawi's two main growing seasons, leading to hunger, malnutrition, stunted development and loss of life. Extreme weather events have decimated crops, damaged infrastructure and led to food insecurity and the spread of disease.

In Rwanda, 65 per cent of the projects that the Scottish Government funds are embedded directly into local government priority contracts, ensuring systemic long-term change—I say that in response to Mr Massey's earlier comments. Many third sector organisations across Scotland are also involved in climate justice work,

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including Aid for Education, which is based in my constituency. Aid for Education has undertaken some remarkable work and was established by Douglas and Sarah Kakooza. Douglas is from Rwanda, and Sarah is from Northern Ireland. The slogan of their charity is:

“Helping Rwanda’s children have a future”.

How can anyone disagree with that slogan? If a small charity from Inverclyde can play its part in helping future generations in Rwanda, the wealthy nations in the global north certainly need to do much more than they are doing.

Scotland has also led the world by breaking the taboo on loss and damage. For too long, the international community completely ignored the hard truth that some climate impacts cannot be adapted to. Homes are lost, cultures are eroded and land is permanently swallowed by rising seas. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization—FAO—has warned that the strong to very strong El Niño effect will contribute to 2.6 million Malawians being food insecure from now until next March. That is a horrendous figure to discuss, but it is also the reality of the situation.

The Scottish Government has since allocated £10 million to support non-economic and slow-onset loss and damage across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, but we cannot be complacent, and groups such as Stop Climate Chaos Scotland are rightly pushing Scotland to go further.

The calls are clear. We must continue to increase our climate justice fund from 2027 onwards, deepen our commitments to loss and damage, and use our voice on the international stage to push the multilateral fund for responding to loss and damage to move faster—I say to Mr Carson that we must also use our voice in that way regardless of whether matters are devolved. As we look towards future global summits, Scotland must continue to step forward, not backwards.

I urge colleagues from across the chamber to reaffirm today that Scotland’s commitment to climate justice is unwavering. I say to Mr Massey that, in attempting to become more climate resilient ourselves, we cannot forget that our way of life has contributed to the climate chaos that communities across the global south have experienced for decades, notwithstanding developments that are taking place at the moment, despite their carbon footprint being minuscule compared with ours.

16:24

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP): Some members might remember that I recently had the pleasure of securing a members’ business debate to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of Blantyre in Malawi, which, of course, shares its name and deep ties with Blantyre in my constituency. During that debate, contributions from members highlighted the pioneering partnership working that had developed between Scotland and Malawi over the years. Today, much of that work is related to climate change. Malawi is a prime example of a country in the global south that is referred to in the motion that is before us—one that has contributed relatively little to climate change but is facing some of the worst impacts. Agriculture is very important to the country’s economy, so extreme weather and water shortages can have a huge impact.

The Scottish Government has long advocated for the principle that the global north holds the largest and most immediate moral responsibility to address the climate crisis. It is a matter of justice. That principle of climate justice and a commitment to support the global south to take climate action were embedded in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. Scotland was the first nation to commit funds specifically to that end and, in 2012, launched the climate justice fund. That fund supports community-led projects in countries including Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia, with a focus on climate adaptation, resilient livelihoods, water and sanitation, disaster risk reduction and food security. Scotland was also the first global north Government to commit funding explicitly to address climate change-related loss and damage. That funding supports communities experiencing climate impacts that cannot be prevented through adaptation alone. Those community-led projects are prime examples of climate justice work: they have local ownership at their core, with communities actively designing and implementing climate interventions rather than simply being the recipients of aid via more traditional, passive routes. Taking that co-designing approach to finding solutions that are rooted in local context and driven by local needs means that very targeted and effective work can be carried out for comparatively small sums.

During my recent members’ debate, which I referred to earlier, I was grateful to Clare Adamson for describing the work that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee undertook in the previous parliamentary session to look at how the relatively small pots of money that were provided to Malawi to map wells in the country turned out to be vital when the country experienced terrible flooding.

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Relatedly, I thank Water Witness International, a charity that is based here in Edinburgh, for sending over a briefing ahead of this debate. The charity is a long-term partner of the Scottish Government and, most recently, was a delivery partner in the climate just communities programme. It leads action, research and advocacy to ensure that people can access the water that they need to thrive and are protected against floods, drought, pollution, ecosystem degradation and water conflict.

Gillian Martin: Does Clare Haughey agree that access to water is also a gendered issue? If they do not have ready access to water, women have to take hours out of their days, away from other activities, to collect it.

Clare Haughey: I absolutely agree with that, and I add that children bear a burden of collecting water that, perhaps, is not as widely recognised as women's role is. The burden also takes children away from education.

Most climate impacts are water related, so investing in fair, well-managed water projects—such as the ones that Water Witness International champions—is central to building climate resilience and protecting those who are hit hardest. As climate change intensifies, the pressure on water supply and the decisions on who controls it, who profits from it and whose needs come first become a matter of climate justice. In order to stand any chance of tackling the climate emergency, and to best support people who are already suffering from its impacts, we in Scotland and internationally must all work together.

The SNP Scottish Government is committed to doing all that we can to tackle the climate emergency and to support climate justice in the global south. As well as providing funding, we are committed to being a bridge builder on climate justice internationally, including utilising our convening and influencing position to amplify other voices. Devolved Governments such as ours play a crucial role in tackling climate change in our countries, so it is only right that we work to enhance the visibility and influence of other devolved Governments, cities and regions in multilateral climate discussions. Doing so ensures that voices such as Scotland's and those of our partners help to shape global progress.

We should not indulge in the culture wars that spring up around climate change. I have been quite shocked by what I have heard from Finlay Carson, but I was not so shocked by what I heard from Reform, as I heard what I expected to hear.

We cannot shirk our duty to future generations by not taking our share of responsibility for those who are most affected today.

16:30

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): It is right that the Parliament reaffirms its commitment to climate justice. It is right that we accept the fundamental truth that those in the global south who have done the least to cause the climate crisis are already facing its worst impacts. It is right that we recognise Scotland's role in the global response to climate change, biodiversity loss and climate-related loss and damage. That response must be guided by justice, fairness and, of course, global solidarity.

The science is clear, and a human cost has already been paid. As we have heard, communities in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America face intensifying droughts and floods, rising seas, failed harvests and the loss of homes, livelihoods and lives. Such effects are increasing year on year. Climate change is real and is being experienced right now.

I was glad that the national emergency briefing, which the cabinet secretary attended, was shown in the Parliament before the recess, and I hope that it will be shown on UK national television.

We are talking about the reality of climate change and how it is being experienced right now, so it is concerning that fewer than 30 per cent of MSPs are in the chamber. We must ask ourselves whether the issue is important to the other 70 per cent.

These are the present realities for people in the global south who bear almost no historical responsibility for the emissions that have driven climate change. Climate justice demands that those of us in industrialised nations, whose development was built on the burning of fossil fuels, accept our responsibilities and act accordingly.

Scotland has sought to lead. We have talked about COP26, when Scotland helped to break the long-standing deadlock on loss and damage. Scotland was the first nation to pledge to the loss and damage fund. That was not a symbolic measure but a concrete demonstration that a small country can still show moral leadership.

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David Green: Paul McLennan is making a strong argument for the action that we are taking. Does he agree that, in order to tackle the climate crisis, we also need to tackle the debt crisis and that we should encourage the Scottish Government and the UK Government to work collaboratively on that?

Paul McLennan: I agree. I have mentioned the loss and damage fund. Global debt is a matter that is reserved to the UK Government, but I fully support what David Green has said in that regard.

I also agree with other points that David Green's Liberal Democrat colleague made. We must continue the approach of pushing for adequate grant-based finance in addition to existing aid budgets. That is fundamental. We must ensure that support reaches communities on the front line and is not diluted by bureaucracy or debt. As we have heard, that gives power back to local communities in the countries that have been mentioned.

Climate justice is not just about what happens far away; it is about providing consistency at home. In my constituency, we see the local face of a global problem. The coastline is already experiencing the pressures of rising sea levels, coastal erosion and more intense storms. That has been the case in East Lothian for at least the past 10 to 15 years. Communities along the coast, including those in Dunbar, understand what changing weather patterns mean for homes, farmland, infrastructure and biodiversity.

On the point that Finlay Carson made, farmers and land managers in the Lammermuirs know about the growing unpredictability of the seasons. That is why we need to do more in Scotland to tackle climate change. At the same time, our county is becoming a significant centre for renewable energy.

Finlay Carson: I am a bit disappointed by the reaction of some members. It is quite clear that we recognise the importance of funding the global south so that it can adapt to climate change. There has been faux outrage, and members are better than that.

Does Paul McLennan recognise that international aid is reserved and that the Scottish Parliament should do more in working with the UK Government to ensure that countries that are affected are adequately funded and supported?

Paul McLennan: I come back to my point about grant-based finance, which is incredibly important. I know that the cabinet secretary engages with UK Government colleagues to push them on that point and I think that the UK Government should be doing more on that.

To go back to the point about renewable energy, offshore wind developments, including the one at Berwick Bank, which has huge potential, place East Lothian at the centre of Scotland's contribution to clean power. We must seize that opportunity to create skilled jobs, strengthen energy security and ensure that communities share the benefits while also protecting our natural environment and adapting to the change that is already under way.

Biodiversity loss and climate change are also inseparable. The healthy ecosystems that we have heard about, such as peatlands, wetlands, woodlands and marine habitats, store carbon, provide a buffer against extreme weather and support the wildlife and landscapes that define my county and our country. Duncan Massey said that Scotland's contribution to emissions is around 0.08 per cent, but we still have a responsibility to play our part for people in Scotland and the rest of the world.

Scotland's work on nature restoration, peatland recovery and protecting our seas is all part of the same justice agenda. We cannot adopt a "We're all right, Jack" attitude and just move on. We have done that for a number of years and that is why the global south has suffered. When we degrade nature, we undermine the resilience of vulnerable communities everywhere, including our own communities. Fairness requires a just transition here, too, and workers and communities must not be left behind as we move away from fossil fuels.

Global solidarity means that we must not lecture others while failing to meet our own targets or allowing short-term interests to dilute long-term responsibility. It means supporting international mechanisms to deliver real resources for adaptation, resilience and protection against loss and damage and it means recognising that Scotland's voice is strongest when we act with ambition and integrity, whether in international fora or in the decisions that we take in this chamber.

The role of the East Lothian climate action network—ELCAN—cannot be understated, and nor can the role of other climate networks in Scotland because they lead, co-ordinate and motivate local action.

The motion before us is not radical; it is necessary. I urge members to support it and, more importantly, to ensure that the commitment that it expresses is matched by continued practical action at home and abroad, for the sake of communities that are already suffering the impacts of climate change and for the generations who will inherit the consequences of what we do, or fail to do, now.

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16:36

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): This has been a really helpful debate so far, because of the importance of climate justice and of the work that we are doing on it in the Scottish Parliament. Although it is not a devolved matter, we can make a real difference on it here.

I begin by saying that we live in one of the most beautiful countries in the world, from the hardy landscape of the Western Isles to the stunning scenery around Montrose on the east coast. I feel privileged to represent a constituency that reflects Scotland's diversity, with its thriving town centres, bustling high streets, farms, rural communities and open countryside, including the absolutely stunning Clyde valley.

We know that enabling a just transition to renewable energy is absolutely vital to protecting Scotland's natural beauty and reducing our contributions to climate change. As many members have said, such change impacts people across the globe who themselves have done very little to contribute to it but whose communities are paying the price. That is why we should all care deeply about climate justice.

Across my constituency, the transition to a greener future that will help to tackle our contributions to climate change is already visible. Renewable energy plays an increasingly important role, particularly through onshore wind farms such as Kype Muir, which stands as a testament to Scotland's commitment to tackling climate change and contributes to nearby communities such as Stonehouse by supporting local groups and causes through sharing its profits.

I have already mentioned Montrose. Earlier this year, I had the privilege of visiting the Seagreen offshore wind farm just off the coast there. It is Scotland's largest offshore wind farm and can provide more than 1075MW of electricity, which helps to power almost two thirds of Scottish homes. Scotland is a world leader in promoting the development of renewable energy and in doing our bit as part of a commitment to achieving climate justice. We have onshore and offshore wind power; tidal power is provided by facilities such as Orbital, the world's most powerful operational tidal turbine, based in powerful tidal streams near Orkney; and our publicly owned water companies make significant investment in pumped storage hydro power.

There is, of course, much to do to ensure that we are fully able to utilise our nation's renewables bounty. Scotland's energy bonanza from the oil and gas boom was squandered by successive Westminster Governments' misuse of money that could have been used to help turbocharge the transition and contribute to climate justice abroad.

The Minister for Equalities and International Development (Simita Kumar): We have had ministerial consent to work not only on climate justice but on overseas development since 2005. Does the member agree that some members may be choosing—

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