

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 9 September 1999

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 9 September 1999

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Programme for Government

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Good morning. The main item of business this morning is a debate on motion S1M-127, in the name of the First Minister, on the Executive's programme for government and an amendment to that motion, S1M-127.1, in the name of Mr Alex Salmond. The debate will last most of the day, but we interrupt it at 12.20 pm for the business motion.

I call the First Minister to speak to and move the motion.

09:31

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): The document "Making it work together", with which most members of the Parliament will be familiar, brings together radical promises that lie at the heart of the partnership in government. It is a pledge to the people of Scotland that members of the Executive will work together for them.

The document is exciting, innovative and original. It is certainly more innovative, original and exciting than the best charge our opponents can find to lay against it. On this morning's broadcasts, I heard that it was a relaunch; I fear that that is confirmation of the awful predictability of Oppositions through the ages. I know all about opposition. I relish the challenges of government, and that is what this document is about.

It sets out a framework—more accurately, a timetable—for action across a sweep of policy. In it, we set out not just our intentions and our pledges, but a programme for delivery. That is what makes it different. We are telling the people what we will do and when we will do it. It is—if you like—a yardstick against which future progress can be measured. Who knows, in that sense it may even be useful for the Opposition. That is a risk that I am happy to take and I welcome it, because risks are often worth taking. I am determined to deliver on our promises.

Why take on such a challenge? I will say a word or two about that. The electorate deserve it. The state of politics demands it. We all know and have suffered from the unease and cynicism about our trade; that should worry us. We see the evidence of it in falling turnouts. People tell us that they

never vote for politicians because it only encourages them. For the people, there are few signs of the guinea's stamp.

The situation is reinforced by the feeling that promises produced with a flourish under electoral pressure often blur with the passage of time and finally drop away into a political limbo. Over the years, unspecific, ill-defined promises, which are soon forgotten, have corroded public confidence in the political process.

We want to reverse the process that has led to that decline in confidence. This document is an attempt to stand against cynicism and fudge. That is what people voted for when they voted for the Parliament. The programme has big themes: the fight against poverty and the need to unlock opportunity and to raise standards.

Themes and aspirations are not enough, however. On their own, they are no more than political mood music. Without specifics, they are not challenging. I suspect that everyone here would sign up for hopes and ambitions, but what the public—understandably—want to know is how things will be done and when they will happen. This document attempts to answer those questions. It is not exhaustive—much more will be done over the next year or two—but it sets out the core of an agenda for change.

I would never accuse the nationalists of being devoid of style; I leave that to others. Even the most unlikely sources can have occasional eloquence. The public prints have been reporting that the Scottish National party group's standing orders ban inappropriate comments to the press. Apparently, he or she who is guilty will be banned from speaking to the press, and a repeated offence can lead to expulsion from the group. It does sound a little draconian, but I noticed in the prints the other day that the SNP chief whip, Bruce Crawford, said that every organisation he had ever worked in had had a disciplinary code.

I do not disagree with that, but when it was put to Mr Crawford that the new rules could be used to dump MSPs who did not obey the party hierarchy, he said:

"My understanding is that it would be the same as if an MSP fell under a bus. They would be replaced by the next name on the list."

That is smashing; it is the matter-of-fact style, reminiscent of the late J Stalin, that turns me on. What I found particularly disappointing is the SNP amendment before us today, which—I say this as a serious point—seems to be the worst sort of yah-boo, old-style politics, calling to mind the literary efforts of Michael Howard and Peter Lilley.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): They were brilliant.

The First Minister: If I ever wanted evidence for the defence, that is it.

The amendment is the worst of Westminster. I believe—perhaps naively—that Parliament's job is to scrutinise the Government's plans. The nationalists complain when those plans are made available for scrutiny; that is perverse.

Mr Salmond refers hopefully to a floundering coalition—good, constructive, thoughtful stuff. If the partnership was in that state—and fortunately it is not—I can think of nothing more likely to unite its component parts than the mess of nonsense that he has served up for us today.

The amendment asks us to use

“Scotland's resources to tackle poverty, lack of opportunity and unemployment”.

That is exactly what we propose. Mr Salmond is entitled—and I understand that it would be a great temptation to him—to quarrel with the strategic balance, but it deserves at least some serious consideration and debate. I hope that that is what it gets.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):

On the unity of the coalition—and the attack on poverty—I am sure that the First Minister will have noticed that the Liberal candidate in Hamilton South, Marilyn MacLaren, was quoted yesterday as saying that she would vigorously oppose the Labour Government's attack on the poor and vulnerable in Hamilton. What was she talking about, if the coalition is unified and the Government is attacking poverty?

The First Minister: The Liberal candidate in Hamilton will be enormously flattered that Mr Salmond has been sitting at the back of her press conferences, taking notes. [*Laughter.*] That is probably a substitute for sitting up through the night, looking at Ceefax; it is a nice extension of night-time activity, and I congratulate him on it.

Mr Salmond makes an assertion, and one would have to know a good deal more about it. I will be coming to poverty in a moment, but we have a great deal that we can stand by and push as the policies and the template for the future. I want to tackle poverty, lack of opportunity and unemployment. The only question that matters about this document is whether the programme passes this test: does it have the urgency and commitment that Scotland deserves?

It has got timings—that is important. It is not just a continuous text of aspirations. It says, “This is what we want to do; this is when we want to do it.” Any member may quarrel with individual items in the programme, but I remind the Parliament of some of them: a drugs enforcement agency by June 2000; the doubling of witness support schemes by October 1999; legislation this year to

help adults who are, sadly, incapable of helping themselves; a nursery place for every three-year-old by 2002; 100,000 out-of-school care places by 2003; 5,000 classroom assistants in place by 2002; 100 major school developments completed by 2003; class sizes in primaries 1, 2 and 3 reduced to 30 or fewer by August 2001; a health service appointments system that allows the patient to leave a general practitioner's surgery with a consultant's appointment in their pocket—in place and wired up by 2002; an additional 80 one-stop clinics by 2002; and eight new hospital developments by 2003.

Those measures are not insignificant; they are precise, ordered and timetabled, and they are relevant to the effort to unlock opportunity and to raise the quality of life in Scotland. To imply in the amendment that the measures are not relevant to that effort, or are ill-considered trifles, is a total deception. The measures are the promises that the partnership has come together to deliver. We believe in those promises and believe that they will greatly help the people of Scotland.

Managers of great enterprises tell us that objectives should be SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed. That is our aim, too, in government; it is the mark of our programme. No doubt Mr Salmond or one of his followers will object on the basis that that is importing efficiency standards from the private sector, just as they object to partnership with private money.

I understand from the broadcasts this morning that Mr Salmond intends to major on public-private partnerships. He certainly knows an auld sang when he hears one. I repeat and underline that this Government wants the hospitals and the schools that the patients, the pupils and the teachers deserve. We have no intention of letting his ideological hang-ups interfere with progress.

A key commitment is the attack on poverty—social inclusion and the social justice agenda. Much in the pledges in this document is relevant to that attack. We have to move on all fronts, as the social justice agenda is not some narrow field of activity; we all have to join in. We have also to co-operate with the policies of the UK Government and work together for common aims.

Phil Gallie: Given Mr Dewar's statements in Westminster in the past, Conservatives welcome the fact that he has now hung up his ideological thinking on private finance. That is a great conversion.

The First Minister: I am not ashamed to say that I believe in public-private partnership—it is essential if we are to make progress. I listened to people in the general election with great care; at face value—I realise that the pressure of

electioneering affects all parties—other parties seemed to be saying, “Stop the hospital building programme, don’t modernise our schools.” I will not go along with that Luddite approach.

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Will Mr Dewar give way?

The First Minister: No.

In October, the working families tax credit comes into effect. It is estimated that 130,000 families in Scotland—working families, struggling with low pay—will benefit; the added value will be about £170 million. That is direct help to make work worth while.

That measure goes with a more accessible health service and better educational standards, which are our responsibility, and with other measures to tackle poverty, create opportunity and build for the future. This Government will never accept a future that offers success for the few and continuing injustice to the many.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I am pleased to note that you have mentioned tackling poverty several times this morning, but I remind you of one of your first answers to me when I asked for a specific, measurable and achievable target for tackling poverty in Scotland: you told me that you were not interested in simplistic targets. You will be aware that your leader has now set a target of lifting 1.25 million people in Britain out of poverty; what is your target for lifting people out of poverty in Scotland?

The Presiding Officer: Order. Before Mr Dewar replies, I remind Mr Sheridan that I cannot give an answer to that question. Questions should be addressed through me to Mr Dewar.

Tommy Sheridan: Sorry.

The First Minister: A sorry Mr Sheridan is a thing indeed. I understand his concerns but I am sure that he has read the document and knows that on almost every page there is a series of timed objectives and targets. I hope that he will support us in the vote later today. I believe that anyone who is interested in these problems and wants progress may argue about the detail and the weighting in our programme, but I am sure that anyone of good will and sense will want to support its drive and thrust. I hope that Mr Sheridan will be such a person.

A lot of things are happening, such as the national minimum wage and the national income guarantee for pensioners, that are outside the Executive’s responsibility, but a lot is also happening in our areas of responsibility—that is outlined in the document.

Our programme is full of innovation. I can think of no more radical and fundamental reform than

the proposals on community ownership in housing. We will tackle the debt problem and create room for investment in the housing stock, which has been crumbling and is hardly viable in many areas. We will also put the tenants and their elected representatives at the very heart of the management of that housing stock.

There is a great deal of work to be done—I do not hide that fact. There are difficulties that may turn out to be formidable. Up to now, opposition has largely consisted of cries of “privatisation”. Our reforms are not, and cannot possibly be regarded as, privatisation. They are a proper reorganisation of resources to improve the housing stock. They put the community in charge of its own affairs and of the future of the housing stock. I challenge the Opposition to be constructive and to build with us a new democratic structure in an area in which change is long overdue.

The foundation for the future is an economy that works, grows and offers hope. The Scottish economy is changing, and we should not be afraid of change. There will be disappointments, but we should all look to the century that is coming, not back to the one that we are leaving; if we look back, we will do nothing to encourage our prospects in the next century.

There is good news. At a press conference last Friday, a journalist asked me why the announcement of new high-technology jobs was timed for the day on which Tony Blair visited Scotland. Was it, I was asked with a gleam of malice, just a coincidence? The answer was that it was a very good week, and that the same question could have been asked on any day of that week.

I remind people of what happened that week: Amtel announced 200 high-technology jobs in Hamilton; Quintiles announced 1,500 biotechnology jobs in West Lothian; Motorola announced 200 computing jobs in South Queensferry; Compaq announced the important news that its two major plants in Scotland would not suffer as a result of a global reduction in the company’s work force; and Unisys announced 350 software jobs in Glasgow. Those are jobs at the cutting edge of the new economy. It is right that we should take satisfaction from that and work to build on it.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I certainly welcome the good job prospects that those announcements bring, but does the First Minister intend to make representations today to the monetary policy committee of the Bank of England about its decision to raise interest rates? That decision drew a critical statement from the Royal Bank of Scotland, which said that the decision was not giving growth a chance and was motivated by a 10 per cent increase in house

prices in the south of England rather than a 1 per cent increase in Scotland. When will the First Minister stand up for the Scottish economy?

The First Minister: I have given evidence in the past two or three minutes to show that we have been standing up effectively for the Scottish economy. We have certainly not got into the ludicrous muddle that has marked the nationalists' position on interest rates, with which John Swinney has wrestled with some honesty but with great difficulty. As I understand it, if the SNP had its way, an independent Scotland would shadow the English pound for an indefinite period, so that we would have even less influence over interest rates than we have now, although we would certainly have to accept the consequences of them.

The independence of the monetary policy committee has been widely welcomed. Even the Conservative party now accepts that handing control of interest rates to a technical committee is a sensible way of ensuring that small adjustments can be made outwith political pressures to maintain a very low inflation rate—2 per cent—remarkably effectively. That objective has been achieved. To complain about it is almost perverse.

It is in our interests, as it is in the interests of the rest of the country, that downward pressure should be maintained on inflation. I suspect that that is why interest rates have been marginally adjusted on this occasion.

John Swinney quotes the words of one bank, so let me quote the words of another. The Bank of Scotland quarterly report, produced on 1 September—I am sure that Alex Salmond will remember it—shows that, in Scotland,

"activity in both manufacturing and service sectors . . . have risen again in August, with improved order books and business confidence driving a further increase in employment within both sectors . . . In the manufacturing sector, output rose for the sixth consecutive month, rising at the fastest rate since January 1998 . . . New orders rose for the sixth month running, with the rate of growth the fastest since September 1997 . . . In the service sector, business activity rose for the tenth successive month".

That is not a cause for gloom or dismay. It is certainly not a cause for complacency, but it gives genuine grounds for confidence about the future.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister talked about there being no room for complacency and said that complaints about interest rate rises were somewhat perverse. What would he say to the chief executive of Scottish Engineering, Peter Hughes—one of the people appointed to important positions in the Government policy-making unit by the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning? Yesterday, Peter Hughes said:

"This shows that the Monetary Policy Committee ignores the pain being suffered in Scotland."

The director of the Confederation of Business and Industry Scotland, Mr Iain McMillan—not known as a staunch supporter of my positions on many issues—says:

"It is all very well for the overheating south of the Border, but it is not happening here in Scotland."

I ask the First Minister: is the Scottish economy overheating or not?

The First Minister: If Mr Swinney wants to consult the chief executive of Scottish Engineering he will find that Mr Hughes praised the Government strategy and warmly welcomed what is happening.

We have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years, a net gain in jobs and growing business confidence, but the SNP's only interest is to look for the downside, the black cloud and the bad news. From time to time, there will be problems in the Scottish economy, as in all other economies. Let us at least work together to build and to recognise what is good at the moment.

I was at the unveiling of one of the recent job announcements and the chairman said that the company had come to Scotland because of

"excellent national and international communications, a high-quality workforce from an excellent educational system . . . world-class co-operation and support from investment agencies."

We are doing well and it would be gracious if that was occasionally recognised. I say that to John Swinney with some regret, because in some ways he is rather better than the ruck behind him. However, even he has the tendency to be an ambulance-chaser when it comes to the economy. That is in the nature of Oppositions, but at least let us stand back and get some perspective.

We attract industry because we welcome industry and I believe that we must continue to do so. It is important that we work together to deliver programmes that matter to Scotland, which is what this debate is about.

We should deliver on our promises as politicians—that, too, will mean a great deal to Scotland. The programme for government underlines our commitment to delivering those promises. It is specific, including timed pledges, which will allow the people of Scotland to judge our progress and, if necessary, to call us to account.

The Scottish Parliament was established by political parties working together with the people of Scotland. No one wants to blur the differences of political principle, but those differences do not justify an approach that is universally negative. Today's politics in Scotland should not be dominated by the 19th-century maxim that Oppositions oppose everything and propose

nothing.

The Government's programme contains ambitions that are shared by many members; there should be scope for working together, across the party divide, to deliver them. If that were to happen, it would do much to justify the votes so generously and determinedly cast in the referendum that created the Parliament. Promises made should be promises kept—that is the principle that underlines the programme. We want to work together to build a skilled, healthy and caring Scotland.

I move

That the Parliament endorses the contents of *Making It Work Together: A Programme for Government*.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I remind Parliament that it would help the occupants of the chair if members who want to speak this morning could indicate that by pressing their microphone buttons.

I call Mr Alex Salmond to move his amendment.

09:55

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I have pleasure in moving the amendment that seems to have irritated the First Minister so much.

The First Minister offered us some quotes from *The Sun*, I thought that I might reply with some quotes from the *Daily Record*. On 29 July 1999, it said:

"First Minister Donald Dewar took the unprecedented step yesterday of publicly backing his spin doctor David Whitton".

Well, no great split there, rather commendable unity in the Government ranks. However, what he was backing David Whitton on was his description of the rest of the ministerial team as "unproven and unqualified". As I understand it, the *Daily Record* has some degree of certainty about Labour party sources.

At the invitation of the First Minister, I was also looking at "Making it work together". I was trying to work out what the document reminded me of—it is rather like one of those lifestyle supplements that come with the Sunday newspapers.

There are some worrying messages in the document, particularly for the minor partners in the coalition. Yesterday, a member of the Executive described it to me as a tabloid document. I suppose that is right because almost one third of the document is pictures. There are some good pictures of various members of the unproven and unqualified ministerial team going about their business, looking vigorous.

However, when we come to the pictures of the

Liberal Democrat members of the coalition, things start to get rather different. There is a picture of the Deputy First Minister getting nabbed by the polis. Strangely enough, while the pictures of the policemen concerned are entirely in focus, the Deputy First Minister's picture is totally out of focus. Considering the stick he has had and how he has been hung out to dry over the Ruddle case in the last two weeks, that is fairly good symbolism.

Just in case that picture was a mistake—the wrong photographer or something—I turned to the picture of the other member of the Liberal Democrat party in the coalition Government. Mr Finnie's picture is not simply out of focus—the left-hand side of his body is disappearing altogether.

I turn again to the *Daily Record*—this time to its website, which had the pre-release of the Government's programme. I find, under the heading, "Labour Take the Pledge", that the ministerial commitments for every minister are listed with the exception of those of the Minister for Rural Affairs, who has disappeared altogether.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie): Am I to take that as a compliment?

Mr Salmond: I know that the press benches will have noted that further attack on the *Daily Record* from Liberal sources.

I heard the earnest pleas of two Highland MSPs on the radio a couple of days ago. I can see one of them, Mr Farquhar Munro, up there. He was very eloquent in saying that this Parliament had to produce for the Highlands and Islands. He said that there were already signs that the Highlands and Islands were being neglected by the Parliament. I thought that there was a lot in what he was saying and that answers would have to be given. I thought to myself, if only there were a Liberal Minister for Rural Affairs who could respond to those grievances. There is some schizophrenia as far as the relationship between the Liberal Democrats and the Executive is concerned.

I want to demonstrate a few things today. For a First Minister who has made a political career—admirably in my view—of being adverse to spin, presentation and public relations hype, the document represents something of a change of direction. The document does not just represent spin; it represents re-spin. Every serious pledge in the document is a recycled pledge from previous statements.

Let us see how far back we can go in terms of the 10 key pledges. The first pledge is on modern apprenticeships. Many of the pledges contain positive parts that should be considered constructively. However, I resent the fact that this document, published at public expense, is being

presented as novel, exciting, new and earth-shattering, when every single major pledge in it has been made before—often as much as two years before. I see the First Minister is poised, so perhaps I should let him in at this stage.

The First Minister: I am always delighted to receive compliments; I am not often called poised. [*Laughter.*]

There was never any suggestion that the policies were new. What the document does is this: it takes the partnership pledges and puts them into a time framework. If Mr Salmond does not think that it matters to people when things are going to be delivered and when actions are going to be taken, he is in a minority. Could he answer a simple question? If this document is so commonplace and pointless, does he know of any precedent of a government producing the same sort of timetable?

Mr Salmond: I am going to do exactly that over the next few minutes. Mr Dewar said that he never claimed that the document was something new, but he started his speech today by saying that it was original. I noted it down—he started by saying that it was original. Something original usually means something new.

I would like to examine the document's 10 key pledges, which are helpfully listed at the back of the tabloid version. Incidentally, none of the 10 key pledges is a Liberal pledge, as we are about to demonstrate.

The first pledge is on modern apprenticeships, and I think that it will have widespread support. It says:

"By the end of 1999 there will be places for 10,000 Modern Apprentices in Scotland."

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Mr Salmond: In a few minutes, after I have discussed the ten points in the document, I will give way to Mr Gallie—although I have to say that, because in his first intervention Mr Gallie came in with support for the First Minister, to his obvious embarrassment, I am wary of him coming in and supporting me. [*Laughter.*]

The trouble with that pledge on modern apprenticeships is that, on 28 October 1998, exactly the same pledge was made by the Scottish Office minister Mrs Helen Liddell—remember her?

The next pledge is on new businesses:

"We will help to create 40,000 new Scottish businesses by 2003"

and

"100,000 new businesses by 2009."

When I worked in economics, there was always a preference for long-term forecasts, on the basis

that the longer the term of the forecast, the fewer people would remember what the forecast had been. The pledge equates to 10,000 new businesses a year. The trouble with that is that, on 19 June 1998, the First Minister, when he was Scottish secretary, said that he wanted 100,000 new businesses by 2008. All that has happened is that the pledge has been moved back a year. Have we had 10,000 new businesses created by the Government in the past year? The First Minister screws up his face, but if that was a pledge—100,000 new business to be created by the Government—we should have had 10,000 new businesses, created by the Government, in operation since the commitment was first announced in June last year.

Next is the pledge on the Scottish drug enforcement agency. There is a lot of good will to maintain the cross-party consensus in tackling the drugs problem in Scotland; but the pledge in the document is a development of the drugs enforcement programme that was announced in November 1998. The pledge has good will, but it is not novel, it is not original.

On schools, there is a pledge to provide

"100 new or refurbished school buildings during the lifetime of the Parliament."

In November 1998, the First Minister in his previous incarnation announced a programme giving money to eight local authorities for 70 schools. Incidentally, 100 schools represents 3 per cent of the number of school buildings in the whole of Scotland.

The next pledge is that the Government

"will ensure a nursery place for every 3 year old whose parent wants it by 2002."

That was announced in the comprehensive spending review, just a few days after the Scottish National party, in constructive vein, had made the same commitment, and three years after the Liberals had made the same commitment. I think that the Deputy First Minister is about to claim that this pledge is the Liberal input to the Government's programme.

On hospitals we read that

"8 major new hospital developments will open between 2001 and 2003."

On 30 April 1998, the Scottish secretary, Donald Dewar, announced that eight new hospital projects worth £450 million had been given the go-ahead.

We have had a very constructive debate on public health, but the pledge on healthy living centres—No 7 on the list of key commitments—was issued by the health department in a press release on 30 December 1997.

There is a pledge on homelessness:

"We will ensure that no-one has to sleep rough by 2003, by providing new accommodation and better support services."

Six months ago, the then Scottish Office minister Calum Macdonald made the same commitment, except he said that no one would have to sleep rough by 2002. The only change has been that, over the past few months, the programme has slipped by a year.

Exactly the same pledge as is contained in the proposal for land reform was made by the then Secretary of State for Scotland and by me, on the same day, on 4 September 1998.

The last of the 10 key pledges, on natural heritage, was first announced on 2 February of this year. The only difference is that the February announcement stated that the national park was to be operational by April 2001, not summer 2001, as is stated in this document.

I am not doing this to decry the 10 pledges; I just resent them being announced as some major innovation, when every single one of them has been previously announced.

Two or three years ago there was a very popular film, which involved somebody being condemned to go through the same day time and time again. What we have here is the Groundhog programme—the same programme re-released and re-spun for public relations hype purposes. There is nothing wrong with some of the contents, but let us not kid on the people that they are novel, exciting and new.

Phil Gallie: On the issue of modernity, does not Mr Salmond agree with me that the proposals for modern apprenticeships, and even for skillseekers, go back not just to 1998 or 1997, but to the glory days of Tory Government?

Mr Salmond: An invitation to agree with Mr Gallie. I met Mr Gallie's cousin last week, playing a round of golf on the Jubilee course at St Andrews. Mr Gallie's cousin thinks very well of him, but he is a solid SNP voter.

Phil Gallie: He had a misguided youth.

Mr Salmond: None the less, Mr Gallie brings me on to a point that I think is worth making. It is not just that those commitments have previously been made by the Labour party: as I am about to demonstrate, the very centrepiece of those commitments had previously been announced by another person altogether. How do I know that it is the centrepiece? Again I refer to the *Daily Record* website.

David McLetchie: On a point of order. Is this constant propaganda to boost the faltering circulation of the *Daily Record*? [Laughter.]

The Presiding Officer: You tempt me, Mr

McLetchie, but I will call Mr Salmond to reply.

Mr Salmond: That is an amazing transformation: only yesterday David McLetchie was trying to curry favour with them. However, Presiding Officer, I know that the *Daily Record* is an impeccable source, as you have enunciated over the past few days. According to the *Daily Record*, the hospital building programme is the very centrepiece of Labour's commitments.

Let us have a look at that hospital building programme. It sounds quite impressive. There are to be eight new hospitals; everybody welcomes that—we want new hospitals built. But let us look in some detail at the hospitals that we are talking about. Seven out of the eight were approved in 1998 or before. The one exception is the Aberdeen children's hospital, which still awaits approval as it will be funded by the proceeds—as we know in the north-east—of the land deal. Of the other seven hospitals, four will be privatised hospitals under the private finance initiative.

The first of those four is the Edinburgh royal infirmary, costing £180 million. The outline business case was approved by Ian Lang in November 1994, and the invitation to tender was approved by Michael Forsyth in January 1996. The contract was signed by Donald Dewar.

Second is Hairmyres hospital in East Kilbride, costing £67 million. The outline business case was approved by Ian Lang in March 1994, and the invitation to tender was approved by Michael Forsyth in August 1995. The contract was signed by Donald Dewar.

Third is the Law hospital in Wishaw, costing £100 million. The outline business case was approved by—wait for it—Ian Lang in March 1994, and the invitation to tender was approved by Michael Forsyth in November 1995. The contract was signed by Donald Dewar.

Fourth is the East Ayrshire community hospital at Cumnock, costing £9 million. However, there is a change: both the outline business case and the invitation to tender were approved by Michael Forsyth in December 1995. The contract was signed by Donald Dewar.

The centrepiece of the policy programme is not just old policy—it is not even Labour policy. A centrepiece that is being trumpeted as a major change in the policy programme for Scotland is actually the Tory programme revisited. Over the summer, there has been speculation about who is pulling the Scottish Executive's strings. Is it John Reid? Is it Brian Wilson? No, it is Lord Forsyth, who is still here, pulling the strings of the programme's centrepiece.

I remember *The Scotsman* debate with the First Minister earlier this year. Andrew Neil asked a

question that we will call the Andrew Neil question: why should Mr McLetchie be the only person to try to curry favour with the press? Mr Neil asked the First Minister—the then Secretary of State for Scotland—what he would be able to do as First Minister that he could not do as secretary of state. Answer came there none. The document gives the impression that the entire Executive cannot think of an answer to the question.

I want to contrast the PR spin, the hype and the reissuing of policies in the document with what is actually happening in the Scottish economy and social life. The First Minister gave us a rosy picture of a series of job announcements over the past two weeks, which he is entitled to do. However, he missed out the closure of the Continental Tyres factory that was announced over the same time period. He missed out the fact that entire major industries such as tourism, agriculture, the manufacturing sector and the engineering sector are in serious trouble. Those industries are in trouble because of common causes that are outwith the responsibilities of the Executive. However, the Executive is not even prepared to face such problems by articulating any argument that might save those industries, which is why the First Minister dodged John Swinney's question about whether the economy was overheating.

We have had debates in Parliament in which ministers could not say whether petrol prices were a factor in the downturn in tourism this year. My extensive research over the summer tells me that both petrol prices and the strength of sterling have been factors in the fortune of the tourism industry this year. Mr Finnie, for the first time in many years, the agriculture industry is suffering a general recession because of a 20 per cent appreciation in the value of sterling.

The SNP knows that the Parliament's powers do not extend to legislating on some of those issues. However, this party—and the public—expect an articulation of a Scottish point of view from a Scottish Executive that should be examining the priorities of the Scottish economy.

Everyone salutes measures to tackle poverty. I supported the minimum wage. Although I disagreed about the level at which the wage should be set, I believed that the measure would make a major contribution.

The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell): Did the SNP vote for the minimum wage?

Mr Salmond: Yes, we did vote for it, but I want to leave that issue to one side.

I want to compliment the Parliament's researchers for reminding us of the statistics on poverty. If we define poverty as half the average income after housing costs, 1.2 million people in

Scotland—25 per cent of the population—live in poor households. Poverty is greatest among children: 34 per cent of all children—41 per cent of whom are under five years old—live in poverty. Furthermore, using the same definition, 29 per cent of pensioners also live in poverty.

Yes, Rome was not built in a day and measures in the programme must be given time to come to fruition. However, current statistics indicate that the poverty gap, instead of closing, has been widening over the past few years. There is evidence to support that view. The Liberal Democrat party in Hamilton has made a declaration about measures that the Labour party has taken to oppress the poor and vulnerable in that constituency.

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): Will Mr Salmond give way?

Mr Salmond: Of course.

Ms Alexander: Does the minister—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry. We will not have any more interventions; Mr Salmond is coming to a close. [*Interruption.*] We are well over the time that has been agreed, so will Mr Salmond please press on?

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): On a point of order. Surely it is up to the individual on his feet to decide whether to take an intervention.

The Presiding Officer: That is true. However, I have been kind and have not interrupted Mr Salmond in mid-flow, even though he has gone well over the time that we agreed. The First Minister did the same, which is why I have been very generous. Mr Salmond should now come to a close.

Mr Salmond: I was only responding to the fine example that the First Minister set me. As for being called a minister, someone has obviously been reading the Executive's website.

I will close by raising a restricted number of points. I want a Parliament that, instead of worrying about the press coverage, starts to introduce novel measures such as scrapping tuition fees—which we hope for—and the ridiculous beef-on-the-bone ban. I want a Parliament that makes real changes in the private finance initiative and in the privatisation of public services. I want a Parliament that articulates cases of justice and injustice internationally and, for example, gives Linda Fabiani a chance to speak about her findings as a monitor in East Timor over the past two weeks. I want a Parliament that articulates the case for a Scottish economy policy, not just hand-me-down policies from Westminster, and that realises that it should back fair taxation against unfair taxation and front-door taxation against the backstairs taxation of tuition fees and

road tolls.

A survey from the University of Aberdeen indicates that, across the north-east of Scotland, 10 per cent of pupils from schools surveyed are showing a disinclination to go to university because they are frightened of debt levels and tuition fees. Far from extending the ladder of opportunity in Scotland, the ministers who benefited from free access to education are pulling up that ladder behind them. If the Parliament were to articulate such changes, it would not have to worry about negative press headlines and would show the people of Scotland a vision transcending their experience.

I move, as an amendment to motion S1M-127 in the name of Donald Dewar, to leave out all from "endorses" to end and insert

"condemns the use of valuable Parliamentary time and public resources for yet another public relations re-launch of the floundering coalition, calls upon the Scottish Executive to bring forward a programme of substance rather than spin, and instructs the Scottish Executive to take steps to access and use all of Scotland's resources to tackle poverty, lack of opportunity and unemployment, and to raise the ambitions of all of Scotland's peoples."

10:17

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to debate the second Labour party political manifesto of the year. The only difference is that this document has been published at the taxpayer's expense, rather than at the expense of Lord Sainsbury, who is busy racking up his own reward points with the Labour party. I am sure that many of us would welcome a limit on the number of manifestos that a party can publish in a year, but that is probably the only new bit of red tape and regulation that Labour would not support.

Like Mr Salmond, I am impressed by the document's design standards, which are very much what we have come to expect from the post-Mandelson Labour party. I was particularly touched by the gem of a picture of the First Minister at work, filling in his pools coupon. He looks amazingly dishevelled compared with his normal smart appearance in the chamber. His shirt is creased, his tie is squint and his sleeves are rolled up in a contender for photographic cliché of the year. However, I found it very alarming that we could see right through his head to the venetian blind behind him, until I realised that that is a photographic metaphor for the openness and transparency of government to which he is committed.

Alex Salmond also drew attention to the other photographic gem of the Deputy First Minister. Alex wondered why Jim Wallace is out of focus; I can tell him that it is because the picture has been touched up. We can see that Jim Wallace has his

hands out, but we cannot see the handcuffs. The police officers in the photograph are actually questioning him about why, under Labour, the number of police officers is being cut when crime is rising. The Minister for Justice is proffering his standard defence, "It wisnae me."

The document gives clear and incontrovertible evidence that all the worst aspects of the new Labour project that we have seen at Westminster are to be fully replicated in the Scottish Parliament. There will be no aim beyond the maintenance and exercise of power and decisions will be made for the sake of news management and of policy driven by focus groups.

In the past, we have been led to believe by the First Minister's advisers that the First Minister is a politician of the old school, who has no time for spin-doctors or the soundbite culture. He is a man who values thoughtful and reasoned debate in which politicians can put forward carefully crafted programmes based on substance.

If all that is true, the First Minister must be deeply embarrassed by the document. Far from being a groundbreaking development in ministerial accountability, it is—as Mr Salmond rightly said—a lot of meaningless PR hype, which has been published to try to relaunch the Executive after its stumbling start over the summer.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): David McLetchie said that the First Minister should be embarrassed. Should not he be embarrassed given that under the Conservative Government unemployment was at its highest and that under Labour it is at its lowest?

David McLetchie: Under our Government, we transformed the Scottish economy. [*Laughter.*] We gave new life, new industries and new jobs to areas that were, frankly, going down the drain. One fine example is the accomplishments of Lanarkshire Development Agency, which has transformed towns such as Hamilton and Airdrie and many others in that area and brought new life, jobs and hopes. I am proud of our accomplishments in turning round Scotland's economy and making Scotland one of the fastest growing and most prosperous parts of the United Kingdom, which it became after 18 years of Conservative government.

This is a relaunch. As Conservatives know from bitter experience, relaunched are a sure sign of trouble, but this relaunch has come early in the life of this Administration. There is nothing new in the document—it is as much a rehash as it is a relaunch.

The First Minister: I asked Alex Salmond whether he would give me a precedent for the timetable, legislation dates and administrative actions in the document. He said that he would

and then did not. Can David McLetchie?

David McLetchie: Ministers regularly give target dates for completion when they announce programmes. What they do not do is put a mishmash together in a single document at the taxpayers' expense and pretend that it is something new. Every policy statement that I have ever heard from the First Minister has had a target date and time attached. We have political manifestos produced at our own expense for that purpose and we do not have to do the same at the expense of the taxpayer.

Even if individual ministers fail to hit the target dates that have been assigned to them, there is no sanction. Axes will not fall and jobs are not on the line, so what is the point of all of this? We have an expensive document that has been produced at the taxpayer's expense. I hope that the Minister for Finance, who makes a virtue of prudence, will tell the Parliament the total production costs and how he hopes to recoup all those costs at £4.95 a copy.

In his part of the paper, the Minister for Finance states that he now wants to spend even more of our money on

"customer focused policy development and service delivery."

That sounds suspiciously as if the Minister for Finance has a new role as the minister for focus groups. We all know that Labour politicians cannot leave home without consulting a focus group, but it seems as if we will have to fund that development—and key weapon—in Labour party policy on Executive administration here in Scotland. It is rather ironic that members of the Liberal Democrat party who have been highly critical of the use of focus groups by the Labour Government at Westminster now seem to have signed up for that strategy in Scotland.

One of the other dubious practices with which the document is littered is the setting up of reviews or the adoption of so-called strategies as a means of avoiding hard decisions. Being in government means having to take difficult decisions and not kicking them into the long grass or hiding behind some meaningless waffle. Judging by the programme of government, which is littered with references to new strategies for this and new strategies for that—I counted them and there are 17 in all—I believe that the Executive is firmly set on following the example set by Mr Blair and his Westminster Government.

In any event, why should we believe all the PR hype about what the Executive will do when over the past two years so many promises have been broken? Labour introduced tuition fees for students, despite a specific pledge not to do so by Mr Blair before the election. Labour promised to

shorten waiting lists in hospitals, but we now know that people have to wait even longer to go to hospital and to obtain an appointment to see a consultant. Labour promised to be tough on crime, but there are now fewer police officers in Scotland than there were in 1997 and crime has risen across the board in all categories for the first time in seven years.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Does David McLetchie not remember the Tory record on tax? The Tories gave guarantees that theirs was the party of low taxation and that no tax rises would be introduced after the 1992 election, yet 22 tax rises were introduced by the Tory Government. He has a short memory indeed pre-1997.

David McLetchie: I have a good memory because by the same criteria that George Lyon uses to tabulate 22 tax rises, I can tell him that there were 25 tax cuts during that same period of administration and, over that period, the proportion of gross domestic product taken in taxation was falling. As the Prime Minister acknowledged in the House of Commons a few months ago, the tax burden under Labour is rising, not falling.

It is interesting that Mr Lyon introduced the subject of taxes. Labour promised lower taxes. As the Prime Minister acknowledged in the House of Commons, the overall tax burden has gone up. Labour has introduced an array of stealth taxes, which have added some £1,500 to the tax bill of every taxpaying household in Scotland over the past two years.

The programme offers nothing to tackle the issues facing Scotland. On top of the stealth taxes that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already introduced for the UK, the programme confirms the Scottish Executive's intention to introduce new stealth taxes solely for Scots—toll taxes to travel on our motorways, to enter our cities and to park cars at our places of work. Those are new tax burdens to be introduced by Labour and Labour councils. They will damage the competitiveness of Scottish businesses and will hit hardest the most vulnerable households.

The programme confirms the Executive's failure to address what the real priorities should be to meet the crisis in rural Scotland. That part of the document is stuffed with platitudes and offers no encouragement to those living in the countryside. It shows that the Scottish Executive's priority is land reform—a bureaucratic nightmare that will deter investment and do nothing to help those struggling to make a living in the countryside. As long as the welfare of foxes is apparently a higher priority than the welfare of people who live and work in rural Scotland, those people will view the Executive and Parliament with contempt.

Ross Finnie: Does Mr McLetchie agree that

there is not one scintilla of evidence that the Executive has in any way put fox hunting at the top of its priorities? No one in the Executive has made a statement suggesting that. Does he further agree that the part of the programme that relates to rural development will be of constructive benefit for rural Scotland?

David McLetchie: The Executive is stuffed full of members of the Labour party. I think that, when asked for their views on Mr Watson's bill, most members of the Labour party have indicated their support and assent for it. There seems to be far more support and enthusiasm—

Members indicated disagreement.

David McLetchie: We have only to consider the analyses in the newspapers of support for this issue. Is the First Minister against Mr Watson's bill? We should be interested to know. Scotland's countryside awaits the answer; do tell the chamber.

The First Minister: As it happens, I am opposed to fox hunting and I have always said that, so Mr McLetchie will not get a great coup. Does he condemn John Young, his colleague on the back benches who is sponsoring Mike Watson's bill? Is he by definition against the countryside because of that view and is he someone who is interested in vilifying and downgrading the countryside? If that is so, why is he on the Conservative benches?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I ask Mr McLetchie to bring his remarks towards a close.

The First Minister: And answer the question.

David McLetchie: Certainly. It is highly appropriate that, in the discussion of rural affairs, the question is about a great coup.

My point is about the perception of people who live in rural Scotland of the priorities of this Parliament and its members, if members wish to prioritise this issue above all others. We will be interested to see the prioritisation of the bills that are lodged by members and the priorities that the Parliament attaches to them. I am simply flagging up the issue as of key concern to anyone who lives in rural Scotland.

George Lyon: In terms of those who represent the rural economy—

Phil Gallie: Labour forgot about and abandoned them.

George Lyon: Does not Mr McLetchie agree that the Conservatives did more to destroy the rural economy through their mishandling of and failure to address the problems of BSE?

Phil Gallie: Rubbish.

George Lyon: That is the reason why the rural economy is in such a bad state today. The Conservative party created the problem.

Phil Gallie: NFU traitor.

David McLetchie: I missed the last of Mr Lyon's remarks because of the synchronised sycophancy of his colleagues.

When a real public health problem arose, as we discussed last week—

Mr Salmond: On a point of order, Mr Reid. We all heard Mr Gallie's intervention and while he may be allowed to think that, I would have thought that he would not be allowed to say it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I note that point and will return to it shortly. Mr McLetchie, please continue; this will be your last minute.

David McLetchie: I will endeavour to do so, if I am not subject to such barracking.

When a major public health problem arose with BSE, our Government did not hesitate to devote more than £1 billion of funds to assist in alleviating the crisis and its impact on the farmers. Our willingness to dip into the reserves for that money, and to try to cushion the blow, contrasts with the pathetic, struggling efforts of the Administration—in the circus of the past week or so—to cope with the problems of the sheep farmers in particular.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Will Mr McLetchie give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must ask the member not to take further interventions.

David McLetchie: I have been instructed to bring my remarks to a close, but I will be happy to give way to the member on another occasion.

Given the programme's lack of references to the Liberal Democrats' policies, it must be an embarrassment to them. The document fails to mention the Liberal Democrats' supposed commitments to abolish tuition fees, restore free eye and dental checks, or stop the use of the private finance initiative. What about getting rid of the beef-on-the-bone ban, Mr Lyon? Or ending tolls on the Skye bridge, Mr Munro? I hope that Liberal Democrat members who support the coalition noted that their PFI policy was subject to particularly withering scorn from the First Minister in his opening speech.

Anyone in Scotland who reads the document will wonder why we need an army of ministers to administer and deliver such a lacklustre programme. We now have 23 ministers to govern Scotland; under the Conservative Government we managed with five. The fastest growing business in Scotland is the business of government; we have ministers, policy advisers, spin-doctors, task

forces, review committees and focus groups, all tripping over one another to tell the people of Scotland what is good for them. This is a circus that fools no one; the document is a triumph of style over substance. The emperor has no clothes and, before long, the people will see through him and find him out.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On Mr Salmond's point of order, I remind members to address their remarks through the chair and of their obligation to conduct themselves in a courteous, respectful and orderly manner, as laid down in rule 7.3.1 of the standing orders.

10:33

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): On behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, I welcome the publication of "Making it work together: A programme for government". The document is a bold and imaginative step by the Scottish Executive that puts further flesh on the partnership document agreed by the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Labour party.

We have listened to Alex Salmond's criticisms; he advocates that the only way to address Scotland's problems is to go for independence. I wonder whether Mr McLetchie, his partner in opposition—in the unholy alliance—agrees with him. Perhaps we will hear about that during the debate.

Mr Salmond: Mr Lyon began by saying that he was speaking on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. Is there any distinction between his position and the one that the Deputy First Minister will adopt when he winds up the debate? When Mr Wallace winds up, will he do so for the Scottish Liberal Democrats or for the Executive? Why did Mr Lyon begin by making that distinction?

George Lyon: I said that I was speaking on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats because I am a member of that party. I take it that that is not out of order, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The programme outlines 150 individually timetabled priorities. As Donald Dewar rightly said, that has never been done before. That shows the Government's confidence in its ability to deliver across a wide range of areas. Most important, it will deliver by improving our public services, the economy, our transport infrastructure and the environment and by tackling the needs of rural Scotland that were so badly betrayed by the Tory party when it was in power.

Mr McLetchie claimed that the Tories acted to address the problems that faced rural Scotland. I remind him that the Tory Government's failure to introduce a proper traceability system for cattle created one of the biggest obstacles to re-

establishing the beef trade. The Tory Government failed to deliver.

Mr Salmond said that there was nothing new in the document.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): On the failure of Governments to deliver on agriculture, what advice would Mr Lyon give to Mr Finnie, who trumpeted an announcement of aid for the sheep farmers and did not deliver?

On the question of not delivering, perhaps the party that Mr Lyon so proudly represents has nothing to offer us.

George Lyon: If Mr Hamilton understood what was announced yesterday, he would know that Mr Finnie reached an agreement—with the UK Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—that the Scottish Executive would draw up a plan to dispose of unwanted cull sheep; the Scottish Executive will take that plan to Europe for approval. Mr Brown said that under European rules, the cull scheme cannot include direct compensation for farmers.

Education is a key priority for the Scottish Liberal Democrats. The programme contains a commitment to nursery provision for all three and four-year-olds by 2002 and a commitment to drive up literacy and numeracy standards. Those are Liberal Democrat priorities.

On new measures announced, we already have the £29 million extra to tackle student hardship and the £50 million to help education—for new teachers, books and equipment—as part of the partnership agreement.

A rural affairs department has already been created; we pushed for that. An enterprise and lifelong learning department and a health department, which also covers community care, have already been created. Those are all policies that we Scottish Liberal Democrats brought to the "Partnership for Scotland" agreement; they have already been delivered.

David McLetchie: The list that Mr Lyon articulated comprises a series of policies that create bureaucracies, departments and ministries. Nothing is being delivered, but the number of civil servants and politicians is increasing. That has been the hallmark of the Executive from day one.

George Lyon: Mr McLetchie obviously does not understand that £29 million and £50 million is real money—real investment in education and in supporting students—not bureaucracy. He also fails to understand that the creation of those departments is about joined-up government. The people involved, in business and the higher education community, welcome the establishment of the new departments.

Phil Gallie: Will Mr Lyon help me to understand the economics? How much does it cost to go from seven to 27 ministers? How does it help to have 50 advisers instead of three and what is the cost? Such costs are part of the new expenditure that Mr Lyon mentioned.

George Lyon: The Conservatives' record in Scotland proves that their seven ministers failed completely to deliver.

David McLetchie: Answer the question.

Phil Gallie: He cannot.

George Lyon: The document demonstrates the partnership Government's commitment to delivering better public services, which remains one of our key priorities. Of course, we need to create wealth to fund good public services—that idea is central to the document. It outlines a powerful programme of measures to help the Scottish economy to grow, creating new jobs and new opportunities for our people. The commitment to create 10,000 new jobs or businesses per year is a big step forward, as is the introduction of a new manufacturing strategy for Scotland, which Henry McLeish set up yesterday to ensure that the Scottish economy continues to grow.

The overhaul of tourism strategy will be important for much of rural Scotland, although there has been some good news already in that sector. As Henry McLeish told us at the meeting of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee last week, the figures for this year show a 20 per cent increase in the number of Scots holidaying in Scotland—I am glad that Mr Salmond was one of them and was obviously contributing to the rural economy. Most important, spend was up by 30 per cent, which shows, thankfully, that last year's disappointing figures are being turned round.

Our Tory and nationalist friends in the Opposition—who, as we have seen on numerous occasions, are experiencing real tensions—should stop their usual opportunistic bleating, grow up and start to engage constructively in the debate on how to deliver for the betterment of the Scottish people. To say that the programme—100 new schools, 1,000 extra teachers, an extra £50 million for education, £29 million for students, eight hospitals and 10,000 business start-ups a year—is all spin with no substance is ridiculous and not even worthy of discussion.

So far, the Opposition has been characterised by wrecking tactics, in which Mr McLetchie—or should I say Mr Gerry O'Brien—plays the lead role. That strategy will bring comfort only to fundamentalist nationalists.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have been very relaxed about the duration of opening speeches, but I would be grateful if members

could aim to conclude their remarks within five minutes from now on.

10:42

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): My microphone does not seem to be working. Can members hear me?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a problem with the microphones. As on previous occasions, please project your voice while it is sorted out.

Mr McAllion: I am a shy and retiring creature, so I must concede that I am not sure that I will be able to project my voice, but I will try to ensure that members can hear me.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I have been informed that the microphone system has crashed. I propose that we adjourn the meeting until the problem has been sorted out.

10:43

Meeting adjourned.

11:05

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I reconvene this meeting of the Parliament and I wish to apologise to members for the inconvenience that has been caused. I am informed that the fault is not internal to the Parliament but was caused externally. Unfortunately, it caused a complete computer crash and I am now working blind—there is nothing on my screen. I would be grateful if members who intend to speak in this debate could indicate that again by pressing the appropriate button.

Mr McAllion: As I was saying, I have found some parts of this debate very interesting indeed, as Steve Davis might have said. The First Minister's insight into the new discipline that is operating within the Scottish National party was fascinating. It is nice to know that I am in more danger of being expelled from the SNP than from the SLP. That will at least improve my standing in the Scottish Labour party.

This morning's debate is about the programme for government, which was launched—or re-launched, according to taste—in Cumbernauld last week. As we know, Cumbernauld is not a million miles away from Hamilton, but I am sure that that is purely coincidental and that the choice of location for the launch was because Cumbernauld really is the First Minister's favourite spot in Scotland.

We must be clear, however, that the debate about the programme for government is not a debate about a manifesto for the Hamilton by-election. In particular, this debate is not a substitute hustings for that by-election. The SNP and Tory attacks this morning have been interesting. In the main, they have been focused on the Liberals, rather than on the Labour element of the coalition. That is, in my view, an attempt to squeeze the vote in Hamilton and to highlight the role of the Liberals there.

This debate should be about the core Executive programme that this Parliament has to deal with over the next four years. The focus of the debate should be on the powers of this Parliament and about what we can do with the Executive programme to make it relevant to the people of Scotland and to change their lives. Party politics should be put to one side, if possible; at least for a brief moment.

Mr Salmond's speech was, as always, very carefully and cleverly crafted. I particularly enjoyed the joke about "Groundhog Day". I, too, have seen the film. It is nice to know that Mr Salmond did not spend all his time reading Ceefax—although if I was a Hearts supporter I might be tempted to spend all my time doing that. Stripped of the jokes and the cleverness, however, Mr Salmond's speech was just a party political rant aimed at voters in Hamilton. That was a serious mistake.

The SNP amendment is even worse than the debate. It complains about the use of Scottish Parliament time to debate the core programme of the Scottish Executive, which is accountable to the Parliament. What on earth should this Parliament be doing, if not holding the Executive to account? That is the purpose of the Parliament. The amendment is a joke and it should be treated as such by all members, including some of the sycophants who sit behind Mr Salmond and applaud his every little student reference. I do not include Mr Swinney in that—he has some integrity and at least sits beside Mr Salmond, not behind him.

Mr Swinney: I am grateful to Mr McAllion for allowing my intervention. In a week that has seen a renaissance in the financing of Heart of Midlothian Football Club, his attack on that particular point is scurrilous. There is a serious issue that I want to raise. We are debating the programme for government, yes, but we have done that already. As Mr Salmond made clear in his comments earlier, very little of the programme for government has changed since the election, never mind since the debates we have had since the Parliament was constituted in the middle of May.

Mr McAllion: We may have had one debate, but if Mr Swinney believes that the purpose of the

Scottish Parliament is to have one debate every four years about the Executive programme for government, he has a very different idea of the role of the Scottish Parliament from me. We should have repeated debates about the core programme, how it is progressing and how it has been implemented by the Executive. It is legitimate to attack the Executive on that basis, but not to ridicule it for having a debate about its programme. That is nonsense, and it should not be tolerated by anyone in this Parliament.

We are told, for example, that the programme is all spin rather than substance. Are Opposition members saying that putting Scottish land reform at the heart of the programme for government is all spin and no substance? The United Kingdom, to which Scotland has belonged for nearly 300 years, has never had a nationalist revolution of the sort that happened in other parts of Europe in the late 18th and the 19th centuries. In those revolutions, the old feudal systems were swept away and replaced by modern democracies. Many would say more is the pity—although sometimes, when Mr Ewing stands up, I think that it is as well that we did not have a nationalist revolution, as there would be even more people like him around if we had.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I will take Mr McAllion's last remarks as an endorsement.

If the Government is so committed to land reform, why has the effective date of the land reform bill becoming law been postponed by two years, until 2003?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McAllion, you have about a minute.

Mr McAllion: That will be dealt with by the committees when they scrutinise the bill. That process is what this Parliament is about—holding the Executive to account for the way it implements its programme.

It would have been a disgrace if the Scottish Parliament had not included Scottish land reform in its first programme of work subsequent to reconvening after 300 years. In those circumstances, the Opposition could have legitimately attacked the Government, but when the Government does what Scotland has cried out for, the Opposition should accept that and congratulate the Government for so doing.

I am a wholly urban phenomenon. I have only ever been to the countryside during the Glasgow fair holiday to visit my uncle's hut at Balfron. I do not know much about the countryside. It is this Parliament that should speak for the countryside, not a countryside alliance that goes under the banner of the Tory party. It is time that this Parliament showed that it speaks for all Scotland,

not just part of it.

Can anyone here truly say that taking on drug barons is not a priority of this Government—that it is just spin without substance? Can anyone say that the setting up of a Scottish drug enforcement agency that targets the suppliers and dealers in drugs—who profit from the destruction and death that they inflict on ordinary working-class kids around Scotland—is not a priority?

Is not trying to tackle drugs in prison a priority? Is that just spin? It is estimated that four fifths of all crimes of dishonesty committed in Scotland are drug-related offences. We catch the offenders and put them into prisons. A few weeks ago I listened to a prison governor on the radio who praised the fact that for the first time Scotland has one drugs-free prison.

We are taking drug addicts off the streets and putting them into prisons where they are getting more drugs. We are then putting them back on the streets, which causes more crime and results in more people being picked up and put in prison. Surely we should be tackling drugs in prison. Surely that should be a priority and surely the Government should be congratulated on doing that.

We will probably also hear during this debate that there is no housing bill. I take an interest in Scottish housing and have done for a long time. I am delighted that, at this stage of this Parliament's life, there is no Scottish housing bill. The green paper consultation has just finished. No member of this Parliament can put their hand on their heart and say that they have read all the responses to the green paper.

There is a committee of this Parliament that is responsible for housing, but which has not had a meeting dealing with housing. We have not spoken to any of the people who are interested in housing in Scotland at the moment. We do not know what are the views of the people of Scotland. We do not even know who is for or who is against stock transfer.

We need to take time. We need to find out what is the best possible legislation on housing and then to implement it. The Executive should be congratulated on that.

The Executive should be held to account, but I remind all members that this is not Westminster. There is no luxury of Opposition in this Parliament because every member of it will, after four years, be held to account for how he or she has conducted himself or herself in those four years.

We are all members of powerful committees. We all have responsibilities and powers. Above all, if we argue for something in the Parliament, we had better be able to justify it and say how it will be

paid for. We cannot sit in the luxury of Opposition and call for everything under the sun to be done without explaining where the money will come from.

I welcome the Executive programme. It is a good start for the Scottish Parliament but it is not the entire work of the Scottish Parliament. We in the chamber, with the Executive, will decide what this Parliament will achieve in the next four years. It will not be done by the Executive alone.

11:14

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I can assure John McAllion that I am not going to target the Liberal Democrats with what I will say—I will stick completely to the Labour party, which runs the Executive. Mr McAllion's problem is that he fails to address the fact that this programme proposes nothing of substance and is almost wholly spin.

I believe that when an Executive presents its proposals, it has two clear duties: first, to address the immediate needs of the nation and, secondly, to implement its own ambitious programme. I regret that this new document does neither—indeed it is an abject failure on both counts.

I would like to deal in particular with transport and the environment, which is the portfolio that I cover. Ten key pledges are referred to in the programme for government—which was ripped to shreds by the leader of the SNP during his tour de force speech. The only pledge on transport and the environment is that there will be a national park at Loch Lomond in 2001. We look forward to that legislation coming in. We will examine it critically and constructively. The SNP views Loch Lomond as a national treasure and making it a national park will add to that. It is not, however, one of Scotland's immediate needs in terms either of transport or of the environment.

Scotland's clear and pressing transport problem is the crippling price of fuel and the excise duty that was imposed by the Labour Administration in London. Since it came to power in May 1997, it has increased the price of petrol and diesel by 25 per cent. That affects everybody. It affects not only motorists, but consumers and the whole nation in terms of our manufacturing capability and the ability to sell our goods abroad, which is necessary in a global economy. It is not something that we look at flippantly.

The Government has brought the price of a gallon of petrol up to £3.30 in central Scotland and even higher elsewhere. It takes 85p in every pound as revenue for Gordon Brown as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It is a pity that Sarah Boyack is not in the

chamber, because when I said that the minister was quite correct in pointing out that fuel and excise duties are reserved matters, she said that she would liaise with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. When I asked later what liaison she had had with the chancellor regarding fuel prices and the fact that we face a 6 per cent increase on top of a 20 per cent market force rise resulting from the fuel duty escalator, I was told—by the press corps—that the chancellor had not spoken to her.

I see no need for this Parliament to sit and wait for the chancellor to come to speak to us. As the elected representatives of the people of Scotland it is our duty to articulate their position. We should tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer that his ripping off of the Scottish motorist is undermining our ability to cope economically as a nation.

Mr McAllion: I am grateful to Mr MacAskill for giving way. I would like clarification—are Mr MacAskill and the SNP asking for a tax cut and a reduction in the public spending that is paid for by current taxes?

Mr MacAskill: We are calling now for what we called for before—abandonment of the fuel price escalator. It is causing and compounding problems. The price of a barrel of oil has doubled through tariffs. The Government is—as it did last year and the year before—adding 6 per cent to that.

We in Scotland have seen no tangible benefit to our public transport infrastructure. The Government has taken our money and, over the years, has built the M25 and other major components of transport infrastructure south of the border. We have received very little and we await with interest the implementation of a strategic trunk road review. We will see what we receive in comparison with what the review suggests.

We have asked some questions about the consultation document, "Tackling Congestion", and the minister has told us that it is up for discussion. Nothing is ruled out and nothing is ruled in. Where is the leadership?

When we ask what reduction there will be in the number of road journeys as a result of tolling, we are told that the Government does not know. We are told that it will depend on the type, the manner and the location of the tolling. That is not enough. If the Government does not know whether road tolls on trunk roads will reduce congestion, what is the purpose of implementing them, if not to tax the Scottish motorist more?

The Government says in its consultation document that it favours electronic marking and collection. Who will pay for the implementation? Who will pick up the tab? We are told that the Government does not know and that that is up for

consideration. That is an abandonment of the Government's duties.

Regarding the environment, we are told that recycling is to be targeted and that there will be a national park. What mention is there of genetically modified foods? Are not we, as a Parliament, meant to reflect and represent the needs, wishes and desires of the people of Scotland? Is the debate on GM foods not one in common currency among the general population of Scotland? Is that not worthy of a mention by the Minister for Transport and the Environment? Why is nothing said, with no plans or proposals? Is it perhaps because, as is the case in other areas, lobby groups down in Westminster have nobbled the real leadership of the Labour party?

What about landfill tax? We are told that the Executive wants recycling. This is a specific point, and it is unfortunate that the minister is not in the chamber. We are told that there will be a new recycling strategy because landfill in Scotland is an abomination and a blight on many communities. What do we know? At present, we know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer gets around £40 million per annum from landfill tax. That will increase every year. Where does the money go?

Apparently, we have hypothecation within the Labour Administration in London. The money the Chancellor of the Exchequer gets for his green tax goes to reduce the national insurance contributions of employers. I ask the Executive why we should not use that tax, brought in because of a blight on areas of Scotland, to assist with recycling and to create an environment fund.

What is contained in the document is could kail het up. It is not a recipe for a new Scotland; it is a diet of porridge and gruel for the people of Scotland.

11:21

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I see this week as containing an innovative approach—many would say a courageous approach—towards a programme for government. "Making it work together" attempts to prioritise the future work of the Parliament.

The importance of the timed action points should not be underestimated. They are what is needed for the credibility of the Parliament and they are an important aspect of the document. I do not think that we should apologise for the fact that the partnership agreement forms the basis for those points. The new document has re-emphasised key aspects of the partnership agreement.

"Making it work together" presents a way of working and a commitment to partnership at all

levels: not only at the level of the Scottish Parliament and of the people of Scotland, but on a local level between agencies and community groups. Believe me, that is why I came to the Scottish Parliament: I thought that we could make those links effectively and promote more effective decision making for Scotland. I think that the title "Making it work together" is therefore particularly apt.

It should, however, be appreciated that partnerships do not come easily and that there are difficulties. In the past, piecemeal funding has often meant that projects have not realised their full potential; they have not allowed communities to achieve the type of sustainability that the document aims for. Sustainability, like social inclusion, is one of the big trends that run through the document.

The problems of piecemeal funding have been clear in my and other constituencies. One example is in Crianlarich and Tyndrum. That rural area has achieved a great deal through the Strath Fillan Trust, which has brought together housing, economic development, childcare and the environment. The trust has provided us and all rural communities striving to create a sustainable environment with a model.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I agree that partnership and sustainability are important for the future. Can Dr Jackson tell me what partnership the Scottish Executive will enter into with Inverness College and the University of the Highlands and Islands to address the £4 million deficit the college faces, to continue its and the university's sustainability?

Dr Jackson: Mary Scanlon has raised a very specific issue and it should be directed to the appropriate area of the Executive for the fullest answer. I am sorry that I cannot answer that one.

The Strath Fillan Trust provides a model for other rural communities, but it has faced significant problems in developing its vision—and it still has problems because different funding streams for different services had to come into operation. The trust has succeeded only because of the enormous enthusiasm and hard work of key members of that community, supported by a range of services, including Forth Valley Enterprise and Stirling Council. It is vital that we ease the path for such initiatives and provide the mechanisms for funding agencies to be brought together in a more co-ordinated way to support communities.

A second important thread that runs through the document is the creation of a more holistic and joined-up approach to service delivery. I will mention two ways in which it emphasises that. The section on children brings together childcare and school issues. The section on health examines

effective community care, which requires an integration of social work and health provision.

Stirling Council is at the forefront of this approach, providing new structures to bring departments and agencies together, but there will be difficulties that we have to identify. They relate, for example, to the possibility of job change and raising awareness on the issues connected with that. In Stirling, the development of new structures in the council has all-party support, which is probably the most hopeful sign for the future.

The programme for government presents real challenges. It calls for change—in some cases radical change. That will never be easy. Those are the real issues that we must address. They must not be ignored: they must be anticipated and met head on.

Provision has to be made for negotiation. We know from the teachers' dispute that nothing is as important as on-going negotiation. Negotiation has to open up the possibility to modify plans before agreement is reached.

True partnership involves seeing each side's point of view and finding a solution that moves the discussion forward. I urge members in all parts of the chamber to look to the future in that constructive way. Partnership is at the heart of the document and effective partnership presents us with a real challenge. Although it will not be easy, it is worth pursuing. I commend the document and suggest that we all move forward constructively in the interests of all the people of Scotland.

11:27

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): In his remarks, Alex Salmond started an entertaining trend by commenting on some of the nice pictures that appear in the document "Making it work together". My favourite is the one of Sam Galbraith sitting next to a poster headed "Minor Trouble Shooting!" Given some of Sam Galbraith's public comments over the past few weeks, "trouble making" might be more appropriate.

It is not so much the document, but the letter from Donald Dewar accompanying it which first caught my attention. In the letter, he says that the document represents an unprecedented step by Scottish ministers. We heard him say this morning that the document is original. The problem is that both "unprecedented" and "original" suggest that there might be something new and challenging in the document. As Mr Salmond outlined this morning, nothing could be further from the truth. It is simply a rehash—a repackaged mixture of the 1997 covenant with Scotland, the election manifestos of 1997 and 1999, the comprehensive spending review of 1998 and all the countless launches and relaunches in between.

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Will Nicola Sturgeon give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not just at the moment.

Alex Salmond referred to this as “Groundhog Day”. We all have to hope that that movie is not repeated on television as often as the commitments in the document are repeated in and outwith this Parliament.

It is not the repetition that should have the Labour ministers—if most of them were here—hanging their heads in shame, but their total lack of aspiration. Donald Dewar says that the document is about allowing people to hold ministers accountable.

Mike Watson: Will Nicola Sturgeon give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: In a minute, Mike.

It is easy to talk about accountability when the commitments in some areas are so minimal that even a stalled Government, such as this one, would find it difficult to default.

I quote the flagship education policy that is mentioned on the back of the document:

“One hundred new or refurbished school buildings by the end of this Parliament”.

The commitment sounds fine until one does what Labour fails to do in this document and puts it in the context of the real world. There are 32 local councils in Scotland; it is hardly aspirational to expect them to build or refurbish an average of three schools each over a four-year period. Add to that the fact that two thirds of those 100 schools will be built using private finance and the sheer lack of ambition in Labour’s programme becomes even clearer.

Significantly, the Government has not published a list of those 100 schools. It does not have to do anything so concrete because it knows that, even if it does nothing more than it is doing now, those 100 schools are bound to appear by 2003. The school that Sam Galbraith visited the other day to launch this document—Gylemuir Primary School in Edinburgh—will no doubt count as one of the 100 new or refurbished schools, but that project is going ahead already out of the City of Edinburgh Council’s existing budget. Not much effort from Sam Galbraith is required there; no wonder he was so keen to sign on the dotted line.

One hundred new schools: it sounds great, but there are 3,000 state schools in Scotland, a frightening number of which are in a state of disrepair. The HMI reports that land on my desk every day highlight just how many of those schools are in a state of disrepair.

The First Minister: I am genuinely curious. I understand that Nicola Sturgeon regards our

provision as totally inadequate. I also understand that she rules out public-private partnership to finance these projects. Will she explain what budget, from the public expenditure survey figure of the Scottish Executive enterprise and lifelong learning department, she would anticipate spending if the SNP was in power?

Nicola Sturgeon: I shall state what I think this Government, if it were an aspirational Government, should be saying. The picture that is outlined in many of the HMI reports—such as that for Greenock Academy, the education minister’s own school—shows that many schools are in a state of disrepair, and that their accommodation is unsatisfactory.

The First Minister rose—

Nicola Sturgeon: I have already taken one intervention from the First Minister. He asked what I thought an aspirational Government should be doing. It should be pushing out the boundaries and raising aspirations. How about a genuine rolling programme of repairs to our school buildings, throughout this country, that is worked out in consultation with councils so that the educational experience of children will be improved?

The First Minister said that one of the Government’s key pledges was to reduce class sizes. That is commendable. However, the Minister for Children and Education said in yesterday’s Education Committee meeting that he had no problem with the idea of 100,000 Scottish schoolchildren going into higher composite classes, as is proposed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. How does that square with the First Minister’s commitment to reducing class sizes? Is his rhetoric as far removed from reality as that of his education minister?

Like Mr Salmond, I do not resent the proposals that are made in this document but, for goodness’ sake, the Government should get on with them—it has promised them for long enough—and move on to tackle some of the other issues that affect people in this country.

11:33

Mr Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Conservative party welcomes much—but not all—of this document. I particularly commend the Scottish Executive on its proposals on drugs issues.

Listening to the speech of the First Minister, I was reminded of a meringue—all sugary and sweet on the outside and nothing at all in the middle. On the outside is the wish list of targets; on the inside is a vacuum, especially where the business agenda is concerned.

It is easy for the Executive to meet targets when

it sets them, reports on them and decides the measurement criteria itself. At the meeting of Parliament on 16 June, when launching this programme for the first time, the First Minister said that we needed an economy that captured the new spirit of enterprise, and that we would succeed when we got the best out of all our people, grasping opportunity and making the most of our natural resource.

He went on to say:

"We need to generate the resources required to deliver a transport system that will be fit for the 21st century."—*[Official Report, 16 June 1999; Vol 1, c 407.]*

The Conservatives were the midwives of the enterprise economy when the Labour party still thought that the word profit was an obscenity—there are people in that party who still think that. The Labour party has no idea how to create such an economy. As the transport bill makes clear, an enterprise economy requires low taxation. That is why the Conservatives have consistently opposed the introduction of road tolls, workplace parking and tax barriers for our cities. Labour should work towards creating a level playing field for our hauliers; it should stop penalising the motorist and damaging our businesses.

The First Minister: I am curious about what steps Mr Johnston took to oppose the introduction of the fuel escalator of 5 per cent under the Conservative Government.

Mr Johnston: The First Minister gives me the opportunity to say what we have always said—an escalator usually stops at the first floor; it does not continue upward through the roof.

Business needs the infrastructure to grow. We have heard nothing today about improving the infrastructure of our transport network. Unhindered by taxes, road tolls and swingeing fuel prices, there must be a modern rail network, facilities to handle freight, an expansion to the docks and freedom to develop new facilities on the Forth and the Clyde, in Aberdeen and in Rosyth. The target of 10,000 apprentices will be met only if the employment prospects exist to begin with.

Dr Sylvia Jackson: Mr Johnston was talking about the importance of freedom. Will he comment on the proliferation of mobile telephone masts which, if less than 15 m high, can be placed without planning permission?

Mr Johnston: I have lodged a question about that subject, and I would rather comment after the minister has replied. I have my own views on telephone masts, as one has appeared right outside my kitchen window. However, I shall not let that influence my thoughts.

On 16 June, the First Minister also said that he wanted further extension of small and medium-

sized businesses. I refer him to the Scottish Engineering document that I received this morning. It says that, over the next few years, 11,540 jobs will be lost as a result of the energy tax. He would have a far better chance of achieving his aim if business was not hobbled by fuel costs, planners and petty regulation.

In the finance bill that is before the Audit Committee, we must ensure that rigorous standards are maintained and tightened. However, I am aware that company law is a reserved matter.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Will Mr Johnston give way?

Mr Johnston: I would like to finish this point, as it is a little obscure and I am sure that I shall lose the plot.

I am worried by the number of private companies that are being set up by local enterprise companies and local authorities—in competition with private enterprise—but that are not regulated by the Accounts Commission for Scotland and the Auditor General. I ask the First Minister to take up the matter with the powers that be at Westminster, so that proper scrutiny of that use of public funds will be allowed.

Helen Eadie: Mr Johnston mentioned the importance of the business economy and the relevance of transport. Will he comment on the fact that it was the Conservative Government that privatised the rail network and that in Scotland we have only 6 per cent of rail investment, although we have 12 per cent of the railway lines?

Mr Johnston: Would Helen Eadie like a comment on the rail network in general or on investment?

Helen Eadie: On the fact that the Conservative Government privatised the rail network so that it is now not the Scottish Government but the network itself that is responsible for investment. Scotland now has only 6 per cent of the investment, although we have 12 per cent of the rail network.

Mr Johnston: That is an indication that old Labour still lives. Mr Prescott will be upset to find that the issue of the rail network is being brought up yet again.

To create apprenticeships we need to create a vibrant economy and small businesses. There would be a far better chance of that if we were not hobbled by fuel costs and petty regulations—the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee should look at the regulation of business. We will work with the Executive—but what arrogance its members have to say in this document that they are going to be in power for 10 years. The First Minister said that he welcomes change—please will he change his policies on business to allow it, and Scotland, to flourish.

11:40

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I welcome the document for its content, if not for its awkward size. It makes a straightforward commitment that manifesto promises, negotiated into the partnership agreement, will be delivered—and it says when they will be delivered. I like the story of the old dear on the west coast who heard the Spanish word *mañana* and said, “Och, we have naething as urgent as that here.” Some of the actions outlined in this document are for *mañana*, as they have to be but, for a substantial part of the programme, *mañana* has been pinned down.

I may be in trouble on the west coast for the *mañana* story but, as equal opportunities spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, I point out that at least the “old dear” was gender free. Proposals that I am particularly enthusiastic about in terms of equal opportunities include more geographic opportunity for students, with support committed to the University of the Highlands and Islands. I am pleased that barrier-free housing standards will be looked at; it is better and very much cheaper to build houses that are barrier free at the outset than it is to adapt them later. I am also pleased to see the commitment to continuing to make public buildings really public by adapting them for the less physically able. I am glad to see support for concessionary bus fare schemes for pensioners and those with special needs and support for greater equality of access to public transport in rural areas through the rural transport fund, which has already been put in place.

On recycling and waste minimisation, I hope that the Parliament will use its purchasing power to close the recycling loop by buying recycled products. The only way in which to maintain recycling is to have a market for the recycled products.

In conclusion, I have a question and a comment. Would Mr Salmond have cancelled new hospital projects because someone else had begun them? My comment is for Mr McLetchie. If the Tory Government had spent half the £1 billion that it spent on the BSE crisis to deal with the problem at the outset, we would all be a lot better off now.

11:43

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the programme for government outlined this morning by the First Minister. It is an excellent opportunity for the government to reinforce the policies that will show the people of Scotland just how the Parliament can make their lives better.

I will focus on health and, in particular, on the environmental issues that have such a huge impact on health. As a member of the Transport and the Environment Committee I was pleased to

hear the Minister for Transport and the Environment say to the committee yesterday that she sees cross-cutting between her remit and that of most other ministers, including the Minister for Health and Community Care, as a vital part of her brief.

We have a real opportunity to make things better. By improving our environment we can improve the health of Scotland; we can reduce pollution and facilitate access to health and other services. We can improve the quality of life in rural communities by improving transport options. We can reduce the incidence of asthma and other respiratory conditions by cleaning up the environment and implementing the national air quality strategy. I have worked as a nurse in a respiratory unit and have seen how already debilitating illnesses can be exacerbated by poor air quality.

Some of the issues also have a feel-good aspect. When I was young we used to go down the coast in the summer. It was always a big treat for us townies to go to the beach and paddle in the sea. Parents today are a wee bit more reluctant for their kids to do that because of the dubious condition of some of the bathing waters. I welcome the huge investment of £115 million in making sure that once again our beaches and waters will be safe and clean for us to take our children to.

There is so much we can do to improve our environment and, in doing so, improve the nation's health and well-being. That is why I welcome the government's proposals. Mr Salmond is not here—he called the programme a tabloid. Perhaps he is a wee bit worried that it goes the same way as another tabloid that his party was recently associated with. I think in this case his worries are unfounded and I fully support this programme for government.

11:46

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): It is no wonder that this document has been called a triumph of spin over substance. It tells us that crime is a bad thing and bad health is a bad thing, but absolutely nothing new. To compensate for that there is a lavish number of photographs of members of the Scottish Executive—so lavish that I confused it at first with the theatrical directory “Spotlight”, because only it has more photographs. We all have our favourite—and so has the press. Mine is the one of Jim Wallace that has already been referred to. It is the subject of a funny caption contest and I plagiarise a journalist's suggestion that in the picture of two coppers and Mr Wallace the bubble says, “No, officer, I am not Mr Ruddle, I am Mr Muddle.”

Seriously, even in Westminster documents still

tend to be rather more humble than this one is. Mr Dewar referred earlier to the "guinea's stamp" and he and I have in common a love of Burns. With the "guinea's stamp"—just how much did this cost? Another line from the same poem is

"their tinsel show, an a' that".

This document is the tinsel show of 1999. This is the sort of spin that brings the Parliament into disrepute, but it is not the Parliament as a whole that should be brought into disrepute. It is the Scottish Executive that is on a nauseating degree of high-speed spin.

In Glasgow we see that behind that well-spun façade there is no real social inclusion and there is less open government than before. I am on the health committee, yet I was not told that there is a behind-the-scenes plan by the Minister for Health and Community Care that may lead to the withdrawing of paediatric cardiac services from the royal hospital for sick children at Yorkhill. The people of Glasgow will not tolerate that. This is a warning. The people of Glasgow have contributed lavishly to their hospital and they and the people of Lanarkshire are fed up with Edinburgh-centred thinking, which may now extend to danger to the health of their children.

Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: At the end of my speech—I only have a few minutes to go.

There is no social inclusion for individuals or groups that are not a pushover for the Executive's plans. I am regularly called out to people in the east end of Glasgow who have been promised consultation, but have received none. Mr Dewar referred to tenants being at the heart of the consultation over housing stock transfer, but they are not. The council admits that the tenants have been computer-picked from a list of people who had not been, and I quote, "previously vocal". All 50 of Glasgow's tenants associations oppose the housing stock transfer. Homelessness and child poverty are increasing in Glasgow under this Government.

Regularly, excellent social work projects are closed down without any proper consultation. An example is Easterhill day centre in Baillieston. A few weeks ago I was at that centre and witnessed a pitiful scene. The parents, some of whom were 80 years old, of severely disabled adults were being told—

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): Will Dorothy-Grace Elder give way?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: I will give way later.

Social work chiefs simply told those parents that the centre was closing and that their young people

were being sent to three other centres. The parents pleaded, "Don't do this. We want them to remain here", because those utterly helpless and speechless people had been together for almost 20 years. However, the social work department had decided to close that excellent centre.

Trish Godman: Will Dorothy-Grace Elder give way?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: No, I will not give way.

Trish Godman: I know why not.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Later. You had your chance.

Easterhouse is another example of social non-inclusion. A couple of weeks ago I attended a conference there involving Greater Easterhouse Council for Voluntary Organisations, which represents almost 300 organisations. It is an excellent body, with excellent people, and nobody wanted it to be absorbed into the new social inclusion partnership. One week before the consultation period ended on 30 August, it was told that it was to be absorbed into the SIP. The decision was made before the consultation was over. It is a shadow show.

It is after coming through sickening experiences like that that many in this chamber feel angry when we see this piece of flim-flam. However, I have one useful purpose for it. I have a cat. This document is the most expensive piece of kitty litter in Scotland, but it will be useful in that context.

I support the amendment.

11:52

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Far from what Nicola Sturgeon says is a lack of aspirational Government, what we are witnessing today is a lack of inspirational opposition. She neglected to answer, or deliberately avoided, the question put by the First Minister: how will she pay for all the things that she wants to be done?

If we had an inspirational Opposition that was genuinely concerned about trying to improve the lot of people in this country, perhaps we would have had something other than the facile amendment lodged in the name of Mr Salmond. What does the Opposition intend to do about poverty? We have heard a lot, but there is no substance. What does it intend to do about lack of opportunity? Absolutely no substance has been forthcoming. What does it intend to do about unemployment? No substance. What does it intend to do to raise ambition? Again, no substance. If the Opposition's idea of raising ambition is anything like the ambition shown in that amendment, we will wait a long time before anything comes from the Opposition that improves

the quality of life of people in Scotland.

I would have more faith and confidence in, and more respect for, an Opposition that tried to—

Mary Scanlon: What does Hugh Henry intend to do to improve the quality of life of the people of Angus and the Mearns—a delegation of whom visited Parliament yesterday—and what will he do with regard to their attempt to keep open Stracathro hospital?

Hugh Henry: I will return to some of the issues dealing with rural areas, but once again the Conservatives are asking questions of back benchers that are better addressed to those members of the Executive who are dealing with the issues. However, I will respond to some of the comments about rural areas. The Opposition is not showing any concern for raising the standard of living in Scotland: it is attempting to score cheap points.

Certain aspects of this document could be questioned. Perhaps some things need to be addressed in a different way. I welcome the opportunity that this document provides to ask about the number of students who are going into higher education, and to ask whether modern apprenticeships may, for some people, provide a better route to improving their life chances than a meaningless university course. We must have debates on the best way to improve the lifestyle, ambition and education of our young people.

I would like to have a debate on nursery provision for three-year-olds. Is it always best to provide that care in the current kind of facilities, such as nursery schools and nursery centres, or are there other flexible ways of supporting families in Scotland? The great thing about this document is that, for the first time, the targets and ambitions on which we will deliver are set out. We will provide facilities for three-year-olds, and we will provide facilities for the 16 and 17-year-olds who have been denied them.

We need to articulate the needs of rural communities, but when I hear rural issues being peddled in this chamber by people who show no concern at times for the poverty and deprivation in many of our urban centres, I am disturbed, and I begin to wonder what their agenda is. Is it about an inclusive Scotland, working together, and examining every area in Scotland?

For the first time in Scotland, this document begins to show some way forward for communities like those that I represent, for example, Johnstone, Glenburn and Foxbar. There, young people have been denied opportunities for many years, and people have been forced to live in intolerable conditions. Whether it is with regard to health, education, public transport or a whole range of matters, this document starts to address the

specific things that need to be done.

I welcome the opportunity to hold the Executive to account over its targets and progress in the coming years. I will hold it to account so that people like me can intervene in the debate to ensure that the measures in this document have an impact on the communities that we represent. If the Opposition has any faith in the people of Scotland and any confidence in this Parliament, it should stop doing the people a disservice by being a cheap Opposition that lacks ambition, inspiration and detail.

11:58

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I am a bit confused, because I am not sure whether I am attending the same debate as the SNP/Tory Opposition alliance. I am not even sure whether I am talking about the same document. Indeed, I wonder whether I inadvertently stumbled into a black hole on my way up here and slipped into an alternative universe.

David McLetchie: If Dr Murray slipped into a black hole, it is because the Labour council has not repaired the roads and pavements in Edinburgh, which are a disgrace.

Dr Murray: David McLetchie, Alex Salmond, Nicola Sturgeon and Dorothy-Grace Elder do not like the photographs in the document. They spent a lot of time talking about the style, but not about the content. Alex does not like it because it is too big. Perhaps the Scottish Executive will take that on board and produce one that he can slip into his handbag.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does Dr Murray think that the resources that were committed to this publicity stunt would be better spent on hospitals and schools, or does she think that this document is the priority?

Dr Murray: It is relevant that the people of Scotland see the programme that their Government intends to put into practice, and the time scales and performance indicators that it sets for itself.

I see that Mr MacAskill is here. I know that he and his colleagues like to comment on who is not here, so I will mention the fact that he is here. He said that there is nothing of substance in the document. Dorothy-Grace said that it is a triumph of spin. I will refute that by referring to the section entitled, "Working together for a successful and prosperous Scotland". It states on page 10:

"Our priorities are:

To create a culture of enterprise".

Is that nothing of substance? I know that Mr Johnston has said that the Labour party does not

know how to do that. I have to hold up my hand and say that I was a scientist, an academic, and I have not created jobs. Perhaps a number of us have not been business people, but we know how to ask people who can give us that advice. That was the point of the partnership, to find out from those who know how we can improve the culture of enterprise in Scotland.

The second priority is also on page 10:

"To provide training for skills that match jobs for the future".

I want my children to get the skills that match jobs of the future. I want that for my constituents and their children. That is hardly nothing of substance.

The third priority is

"To widen access to further and higher education".

I will let members into a secret. Opposition members talk about how we all had the benefit of a free education, which we are now denying to everyone else. I went to university in 1972. I know that that reveals how old I am—some members might think that I am one of the cast ewes of the Scottish Parliament. In 1972, the vast majority of students at Edinburgh University were middle-class kids like me, products of the middle-class selective education system. There has been a widening of the education system since then. The Labour Government intends to widen it further. I want my constituents in north-west Dumfries to have the same access to higher and further education as I had all those years ago.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Is Dr Murray insinuating that middle-class people do not have the right to free education?

Dr Murray: I prioritise the needs of working-class people over the needs of those who can afford to pay. That is the basis of socialism.

The final priority is

"To create a culture of lifelong learning, increasing adult participation in education and training".

I speak as a former lecturer at the Open University. I taught many people from disadvantaged backgrounds who wished to retrain. The vast majority had to pay their own tuition fees and had to support themselves without a maintenance grant. I am pleased that the Government has promised to consider sorting out the anomalies between part-time and full-time students.

The section at the bottom of page 10 states that a priority is also to

"Support the progress of the University of the Highlands and Islands and investigate a South of Scotland University."

In August, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning went with me to Crichton College in

Dumfries. I wish that Opposition members had been there. It might have helped them to set aside their cynicism. It is a terrific facility. We spoke to people who had been on the first access course at that college. We spoke to one woman—who was not my constituent but one of Alasdair Morgan's—who explained that, had that course not existed, she would not have been able to get access to lifelong learning.

The commitment to improve access to education in rural areas is extremely important. If the Parliament manages to deliver that for people in rural communities in the south of Scotland, I will be proud of it.

12:04

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): That was interesting.

I remind Hugh Henry that his is the party of government. This document is the Executive's programme of government. Unfortunately, only a few members of the Executive are here. At one point I thought that we had just the book-ends, but I am glad that Ms Alexander has now joined us. Coffee tables from Hamilton to Hyndland will groan under the weight of this latest designer fad in the relaunch, this ministerial montage. The black and white shades flatter the ministers and certainly do justice to the finance minister's crisp, white shirt.

The document flatters to deceive. It deceives the Scottish public by adding dates to the programme for government from June, to give the impression that we now have an Executive that means business. If it means business, many obvious things should be in that document that it could and should be doing.

Promises will not address poverty when the Executive is cutting back on services for families and children. Families and children in Scotland are suffering because of Labour—and Tory—spending cuts in public services. In the first three years of the Labour Government there have been cuts of £176 billion—it is spending even less than the Tories spent. It is not just the coffee tables that are groaning; the coffers of Gordon Brown's Treasury are groaning with cash, and we hear estimates ranging from £10 billion to £22 billion.

The Scottish Executive should be Scotland's voice, ensuring that that money is spent now rather than later to tackle poor, damp housing. So much of what the Executive does is driven from London. We acknowledge that. That is why it cannot take housing out of the public sector borrowing requirement, as happens in other European countries. That is why it cannot lift the 75 per cent clawback rule, or can it? Labour is following the Tory economic dogma. That is why it

is poor on producing a vision of how the housing debt can be dealt with in Scotland. That is why it is poor on exploring the range of financial opportunities to direct finance into rebuilding Scotland's housing, which would create real jobs and homes. Scotland's housing policy is decided for Scots by London.

The promises in the document are not based on what the Executive guarantees it will do in housing; they are based on what it hopes will happen. It hopes that there will be a mass council house sell-off to inject private cash—if the tenants agree and if the figures stand up. Those are hardly reassuring promises that will stand up under the scrutiny of the Parliament. Most of the limited cash that the Executive has identified is going on feasibility studies and consultants' fees, not on bricks and mortar. Not a penny of the £125 million that is going into servicing debt and producing feasibility studies will remove a single damp spore from a child's bedroom.

The rough sleepers initiative is discussed on the blood-red pages. The document states that we will tackle rough sleeping, so that nobody will sleep rough after March 2003. Remember that in February this year Calum Macdonald said that rough sleeping would be finished by 2002. That is enough to make us see blood red.

We must examine what the Government could be doing. The Executive has been pushed into examining suspended repossession orders. That was in the SNP's manifesto. The Executive is finally thinking about it. The Executive acts only when it is pressured or panicked into taking action. The subject should not be tackled by a member's bill—the Executive should take action. When the Executive does something, such as suggesting on-line surveys, it does it in haste after prodding from the Opposition. On the substance of housing policy, it delays; meanwhile the children of Scotland cough, splutter and wheeze in cold, damp houses.

12:08

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): As has been said, this is another expensive relaunch of a disappointing legislative programme. It puts land reform at the top of the agenda on three occasions and does not address issues that matter to the people of Scotland: the desperate need for good, affordable housing; jobs; the decline in the agricultural industry; and the fall in tourism.

I will address matters that are covered by my portfolio—local government and housing. There is not a lot to be said because there is not a lot in the proposals. I note that, as has been mentioned, the rough sleepers initiative has been extended for

one year. Even at this early stage, one former target has been revised. How many more of those targets will not be met? Apart from a code of conduct for local government, there are no initiatives to address the failures of predominantly Labour-controlled councils. As the controller of audit revealed this morning, the £10 million losses in direct labour organisations and direct service organisations in 1997-98 were compounded in this financial year by losses of another £4 million.

All that is being picked up by the council tax payers. It is time that we began to consider the issues. There is more than £800 million outstanding in unpaid community charge and council tax, and non-payment in Glasgow alone amounts to some £24 million. When will we act to recover the £40 million in rent arrears? The disgrace of empty council houses results in the loss of rent of almost £30 million. The recovery of those moneys would go a long way towards addressing some of the problems that the Minister for Finance, Jack McConnell, has to tackle, and towards dealing with some of the housing issues, such as the increased target for improving houses that suffer from dampness and condensation.

Why are we not setting targets for reducing homelessness? Such targets should be set and monitored, and best practice introduced throughout the country. Let us begin to deal with homelessness, instead of just talking about it.

We welcome the McIntosh report, as we realise that it will address many issues in local government. We look forward to the forthcoming debate on the implementation of proposals agreed. However, those alone will not address one overriding issue: the need to review the financing of local government. Already we hear through the press that £80 million in savings has to be identified to meet education commitments. That, along with the rising costs of ministers, parliamentary advisers and spin-doctors—goodness knows what this publication cost—will stretch the imagination of even the Minister for Finance, well known for his innovative approach to finance in Stirling, where he and his Labour controllers were surcharged for setting an illegal rate. Happy days, when Jack was a socialist. *[Laughter.]* Now we are in the real world, and the destiny, welfare, aspirations and future of Scotland are in his hands.

I note that the First Minister, in his foreword to "Making it work together", states:

"We will be a listening and learning Government—hearing what our people are saying and acting on it."

I welcome that statement, but I wonder why we are having an expensive inquiry into tuition fees, when the people have already said that they wish them to be abolished. Was the Executive not

listening then?

I realise that these are early days and that this programme was cobbled together because of the coalition. However, I look forward to the real issues being addressed in the coming months, particularly through the committee structures. I trust that by the end of this Parliament we will be able to say that we have really made a difference and that the quality of life for the people of Scotland has improved.

12:12

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate on an excellent programme for the good governance of Scotland and, more important, an agenda designed to ensure the delivery of this Parliament's priorities and promises to the people of Scotland.

The concept of identifying year by year a timetable for delivering the priorities will undoubtedly revolutionise the way in which Scotland's people hold the members of this Parliament accountable. However, I would like to refer members to one promise that is made in this programme—the promise to introduce next year a carers strategy to assist unpaid carers.

The issue is pertinent to a great number of my constituents in Coatbridge and Chryston and to thousands of carers throughout Scotland. According to current statistics, at least one eighth of the members in this chamber should have already experienced the demands and difficulties of caring at home for a friend or relative.

I welcome the initiatives that were previously announced by the Executive in pursuit of a needs-led caring at home agenda. I commend it also on its recognition of the unpaid work carried out by many of Scotland's citizens. That work, undertaken by almost 500,000 people in Scotland, is estimated to save the Scottish taxpayer some £3.4 billion a year. Appreciation of that is long overdue.

Additional funds have already been allocated to local authorities throughout Scotland for the provision of respite care, and the resourcing of much-needed assistance for carers is symbolic of the commitment shown by the Government and is richly deserved by Scotland's carers. I share the Executive's hope and vision for modern community care provision and look forward to the adoption of that ideal by local authorities and other care providers.

While congratulating the Executive on its current and future pledges to carers, I seek assurances that the needs of carers and the cared for will be central to the development of our agenda and our

legislative proposals. I hope very much that monitoring procedures will be put in place quickly to guarantee that our plans for community care are effectively delivered at local level, for the benefit of people in greatest need.

I see that Dorothy has left, but I take on board to some extent her comments about consultation. I trust that our vision of a needs-led approach will be successful and will ensure proper consultation and resource allocation by local service providers.

I look forward to the programme for government being implemented and I support the motion.

12:15

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate the Executive on being very good on motherhood and apple pie, but it is very poor on substance.

Let us analyse what this document says and what it will do in relation to the situation in which we in Scotland find ourselves. It says that the Executive intends to tackle poverty and ensure the best environment for children to grow up in, and that it will do that primarily through the new social inclusion partnerships. Let us consider the effect of the Executive's policy in the light of what its partners in London are doing.

When we examine planned expenditure on the social inclusion partnerships over the next three years, two points stand out. First, the expenditure that is planned by the Executive in this area will go down—not up—in the third year. How can we tackle poverty when we are reducing expenditure in poor areas? Secondly, when we compare the expenditure that is planned—between £30 million and £40 million a year—and compare that with the scale of the problem, it is peanuts. It is putting a thumb in the dyke of poverty and deprivation in Scotland.

We need also to consider Alasdair Darling's targets for poverty reduction in Scotland. Two weeks ago, he announced that he intends over the next three years to take 1.25 million people out of poverty in the whole of the UK. Even if he achieves his target, he will leave more than a million people in poverty in Scotland at the end of a four-year Labour Government and a three-year Scottish new Labour Executive—1 million people condemned by two Labour Governments to eternal poverty and deprivation.

What is proposed in this document does not begin to tackle poverty and deprivation in Scotland. One third of our children are living on or near the poverty line—that is not my figure, it is the Government's figure. More than 30 per cent of our pensioners—who are not mentioned in this document—are living in poverty, and that is getting

worse. Our disabled people, who are barely mentioned, are living in poverty. Their benefits are also being cut from London by the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

The Executive's promises on welfare to work involve cutting welfare without creating work. How is it that, according to today's *Daily Mail*, people who live on peripheral housing schemes are going to be told by Gordon Brown that if they do not get a job their benefits will be frozen for at least a year?

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I will take Duncan's intervention later.

What hope have those young people when there are no jobs for them to take up?

The Government says that its answer is the new deal, but according to the Office for National Statistics, despite the fact that £4 billion is being spent on the welfare-to-work programme, the way in which that money is being spent means that it is having no significant effect—the office's words, not mine—on the level of unemployment.

Mr McNeil: Does the member accept that the best way in which to tackle poverty is to provide people with jobs?

Alex Neil: Absolutely.

Mr McNeil: Will Alex Neil also accept that we now have the lowest unemployment figures in Scotland for many years?

Alex Neil: More than 130,000 people are unemployed in Scotland. Until they get real jobs, we will have a high level of unemployment.

We should compare the unemployment level in this country with that in other small European countries. In Luxembourg, the level of unemployment is 2 per cent; in Austria, it is 3 per cent; and in Norway, it is between 2 per cent and 3 per cent. It is three times those rates in this country.

Consider the new deal. In Ayrshire, for example, 5,000 people are on the unemployment register and 211 are on the various options that are available under the new deal. Finding funding for a change is not a substantial problem: as Fiona Hyslop said, Gordon Brown is building up a huge cash mountain of between £10 billion and £20 billion. He should spend that money on creating jobs and eliminating poverty instead of saving it up for tax breaks for the rich. That is what socialism used to mean.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is time to move on to the next item of business. As was said earlier, the debate on S1M-127 will resume after open question time this afternoon.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): The next item of business is consideration of a business motion from the Parliamentary Bureau setting out a revised business programme. I call Mr Tom McCabe to move the motion.

12:21

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): The motion sets out the business for next week and the provisional business for the following week. In addition, there is a slight suggested amendment to the business for today. The amendment is that, after the motion to approve the Scottish statutory instruments, the Parliament considers a motion on the lead committee for the Public Finance and Accountability Bill. That amendment would allow the committee to get down to work and report prior to stage 1.

On Wednesday 15 September at 2.30 pm, there will be a debate on an Executive motion on the Food Standards Agency. That will be followed by a motion on the nomination and appointment of the Auditor General for Scotland. There will then be a formal motion, which will be taken without debate, to designate lead committees for the Scottish statutory instruments. Decision time will be at five o'clock. After decision time, there will be a members' business debate on motion S1M-86, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, on Wigtown, Scotland's national book town.

On Thursday 16 September, the first item of business, at 9.30 am, will be a non-Executive business debate on a motion by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party on the subject of transport. That will be followed by another business motion and the afternoon session will start with question time at 2.30 pm, which will be followed by open question time at 3 pm. At 3.15 pm, there will be a ministerial statement on the water industry, which will be followed by a debate on an Executive motion on homelessness. Decision time will be at 5 pm. After decision time, there will be a members' business debate on motion S1M-98, in the name of Mr Tavish Scott, on the crisis in salmon farming.

The business for the following week is provisional. It is proposed that there will be a debate on an Executive motion on tourism at 2.30 pm on Wednesday 22 September. Decision time will take place at 5 pm and will be followed by a members' business debate on a subject yet to be announced.

On Thursday 23 September, the printed motion suggests that the morning will begin with a debate

on the manufacturing and industrial strategy for Scotland. I give notice, however, that business for that day is likely to be changed. An alternative subject will be announced in next week's business motion. Immediately before lunch, a further business motion will be moved. The afternoon will begin with question time at 2.30 pm, followed by open question time. At 3.15 pm there will be a debate on an Executive motion on the voluntary sector. Decision time will be at 5 pm and will be followed by a members' business debate on a subject that has yet to be announced.

Today's motion also indicates dates by which committees should make recommendations on Scottish statutory instruments to the lead committees.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following amendment to the programme of business agreed on 1 September—

Thursday 9 September 1999

after "Motion to Approve SSIs (to be taken without debate)" insert —

followed by Motion to Approve the Designation of the lead Committee for the Public Finance and Accountability Bill (to be taken without debate)

(b) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 15 September 1999

2.30 pm Debate on an Executive Motion on the Food Standards Agency

followed by, no Motion on the Nomination and
earlier than 4.30 pm Appointment of the Auditor General for Scotland

followed by Motion on the Designation of Lead Committees for SSIs (to be taken without debate)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business Debate on the subject of S1M-86 Alasdair Morgan: Wigtown, Scotland's National Book Town

Thursday 16 September 1999

9.30 am Non-Executive Business: Debate on a Motion by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party on the subject of Transport

followed by, no Business Motion
later than 12.20 pm

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no Ministerial Statement on the Water
later than 3.15 pm Industry

followed by Debate on an Executive Motion on Homelessness

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business Debate on the Subject of S1M-98 Tavish Scott: Crisis in Salmon Farming

Wednesday 22 September 1999

2.30 pm Debate on an Executive Motion on Tourism

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 September 1999

9.30 am Debate on Executive Motion on a Manufacturing and Industrial Strategy for Scotland

followed by, no Business Motion
later than 12.20 pm

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no Debate on an Executive
later than 3.15 pm Motion on the Voluntary Sector

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and (c), the following dates by which other committees should make any recommendations on instruments or draft instruments to the lead committee—

i. The Rural Affairs Committee and the European Committee to report to the Transport and Environment Committee on The Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 (SSI 1999/43) by 29 September 1999

ii. The Rural Affairs Committee and the European Committee to report to the Health and Community Care Committee on The Food (Animals and Animal Products from Belgium) (Emergency Control) (No. 2) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/32) by 29 September 1999

iii. The Rural Affairs Committee and the European Committee to report to the Health and Community Care Committee on The Animal Feedingstuffs from Belgium (Control) (No. 2) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 (SSI 1999/33) by 29 September 1999

iv. The European Committee to report to the Health and Community Care Committee on The Spreadable Fats (Marketing Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 (SSI 1999/34) by 29 September 1999

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S1M-132, in the name of Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Question, That the meeting be now adjourned until 2.30 pm today, put and agreed to.—[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]

Meeting adjourned at 12:25.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We proceed this afternoon with question time, and I remind members that it is question time and not statement time. I also advise members that three questions—Nos 9, 10 and 14—have been withdrawn, so members should be alert to that.

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Citizens Justice

1. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will make a statement on support for local community involvement in regeneration through citizens juries. (S1O-279)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): We are determined that the views of local people are at the heart of regenerating Scottish communities. I therefore announced, at a Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations conference last month, our support for a people's jury in every community that we support through our social inclusion partnerships. The juries will address issues chosen by representatives of the local community.

Mr McNeil: I welcome the minister's response. As I have already referred in the chamber to the serious problems of crime, ill health and poverty in the Greenock and Inverclyde district, I also welcome the fact that the first citizens jury in Greenock will take place at the end of October. Ordinary people will be allowed to discuss key concerns in the community. Given that there are 30 citizens juries in the United Kingdom and six in Scotland, does the minister agree that they are a well-trying and trusted method of canvassing the views of communities? Can she assure me that the Scottish Executive will take seriously the views of those citizens juries? What other ideas does she have for further consultation with communities?

Ms Alexander: The people's juries will be an important way of putting communities at the heart of decision making. I would like to stress that the wider programme involves having a representative of the voluntary sector on every partnership board, and spending £2 million in the next three years on a new national skills development programme for community representatives, so that they can influence decision making in their local areas.

Child Care

2. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will make a statement on the progress being made towards a national child care strategy. (S1O-250)

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): The document "Making it work together" sets out our pledges for developing child care strategy in Scotland, pledges that are backed by extra resources of some £49 million over the next three years.

Elaine Smith: I thank the minister for his response, but I would like to draw his attention to one particular aspect of the child care agenda that I feel is not given the acclaim that it deserves—that of safe play. No doubt the minister is aware of the added value that play can offer to a child's education and social development—

The Presiding Officer: Elaine, I am sorry, but you must ask a question.

Elaine Smith: Yes, I am about to.

The Presiding Officer: But you must ask a question at the beginning.

Elaine Smith: I just wanted to put safe play into the context of the child care agenda. Could the minister clarify the role that play will have in Scotland's child care strategy, with specific reference to the advancement of the provision of out-of-school care? Could I also draw his attention to the excellent facility at Kirkshaws built by Parents Action for Safe Play?

Peter Peacock: I am happy to respond to that. Earlier this week, I was at Bells Bank adventure playground in Ayrshire. I was there to demonstrate our commitment to safe play as an important part of the child care strategy. I can assure Elaine Smith that we will continue to give whatever support we can to safe play throughout Scotland.

Victims of Crime

3. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will make a statement on how it intends to keep victims informed of the progress of cases against offenders. (S1O-261)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): As set out in "A Programme for Government", the Scottish Executive will develop a system to provide key information to victims who wish to be kept informed of the progress of their case.

Maureen Macmillan: Will the minister elaborate on that answer, and say whether information given to victims will include reasons for decision taken by the Crown, for example, to drop or to reduce

charges?

Mr Wallace: What is envisaged is an effort to improve on the present arrangements, which are sometimes made by word of mouth. We recognise that cases pass from the police through to the procurator fiscal, and it is hoped to get a pilot scheme using computer technology up and running by 2000-01.

The issues that are raised in Maureen Macmillan's question are for the Crown Office. As the Lord Advocate, Lord Hardie, explained when he gave his presentation to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, it is common practice not to give explanations about why charges are changed or are not pursued.

Tobacco

4. Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will outline its proposals for action to prevent young Scots from becoming addicted to tobacco. (S1O-281)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): The Scottish Executive is firmly committed to reducing the levels of smoking by children and young people in Scotland. The white paper "Smoking Kills" outlines a comprehensive range of measures that we are introducing. Specific action includes steps to improve the enforcement of the laws relating to under-age sales of tobacco, and targeted health, education and promotion activity. We will also be legislating later this year to ban tobacco advertising, which does so much to influence our young people to start smoking in the first place.

Ms Oldfather: I am particularly pleased to hear the minister mention the issue of enforcement. Will she join me in condemning the unscrupulous practices of some shopkeepers who put private profit before children's health by selling tobacco products to children? Furthermore, will she and her colleagues examine what measures could be introduced to tackle that problem?

Susan Deacon: I share the member's concern about the importance of effectively enforcing existing laws that relate to the sale of tobacco to young people and I am keen to introduce measures in that area. However, on this issue, a balance needs to be struck about protecting the interests of young people. I support the Lord Advocate's views that children should not be used to test-purchase tobacco as part of local enforcement strategies.

However, Scottish Executive officials are working closely with police and local authorities to investigate ways in which we can enforce the law more effectively in this area. I will be happy to discuss this further with Ms Oldfather.

Stobhill Hospital

5. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Minister for Health during her visit to Stobhill hospital will meet the Medical Staff Association to discuss its concerns in connection with revised site proposals to build an ambulatory care and diagnostic unit on the grounds of Stobhill hospital. (S1O-295)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): As the member indicates, I will be visiting Stobhill hospital on Monday 20 September, when I will be presenting the gold award which staff at Stobhill hospital have received under the Scotland's Health at Work award scheme. Owing to other commitments that day, I will be unable to meet with the Medical Staff Association on that occasion.

Paul Martin: I am obviously disappointed that the minister is unable to deal with the matter. I think that the days of rehearsed, "I've baked you a cake" visits to hospitals are past.

The Presiding Officer: Order. As I said last week, even disappointment must be in the form of a question.

Paul Martin: Does the minister share my concerns that the Medical Staff Association was not consulted about the proposals to reduce the ACAD unit from 10 acres on a greenfield site to a two-acre site on the hospital's car park?

Susan Deacon: I take very seriously a visit to a hospital that involves presenting an award that recognises the achievement of NHS staff. That is very far from a baked-a-cake visit. I have received a number of other requests for meetings on that day that I am also unable to accommodate.

As for the issue that Mr Martin raises, I am aware of the range of views that are held in the hospital and locally. Those views are a matter for local consultation and discussion. I have met the member to discuss the issues at some length and have encouraged him, the local board and the local trust to have further discussions at a local level. When proposals are finalised, they will go out for local consultation.

Landraise

6. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the current policy is on the use of landraise for the disposal of domestic and non-domestic waste. (S1O-286)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): Landraising is an acceptable form of controlled waste disposal, provided such development receives the planning permission and waste management licence required from the appropriate authorities.

Bristow Muldoon: Will the minister comment further on the planning and licensing aspects of landraise and on whether any improvements can be made to the system?

Sarah Boyack: There are no special rules governing landraise. Each planning application must be considered on its own merits and in the light of the development plan. The management of licences for those sites is carried out by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Dental Health

7. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are in place to promote dental health in Scotland. (S1O-259)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): A wide range of measures is in place, both at local and national levels, to promote dental health.

Health boards run educational programmes in conjunction with local authorities and the voluntary sector. These focus on dietary change: reducing the high sugar foods and drinks consumed by children; oral hygiene—toothbrushing with a fluoride toothpaste; and attendance at the dentist for supportive advice and treatment. The Health Education Board for Scotland supports this activity through research and development of programmes and by the production of supporting audiovisual material.

Karen Whitefield: Does the minister agree that children from deprived communities have at least three times more dental decay than children from more affluent communities? Will she commit the Scottish Executive health department to taking action to improve local access to dental services, especially in some of Scotland's poorest communities, as well as taking steps to improve public health education specifically related to dental decay?

Susan Deacon: I agree strongly with the member's views on the importance of tackling our children's dental health, in particular in our most deprived communities. As I indicated in the public health debate last week, I think that it is startling that the poorest 10 per cent of our children have half our country's dental decay. We have to tackle the matter on a range of levels and, as I indicated, that is about both local and national activities. It is important that we work across sectors and agencies to get dental services and dental promotion messages across.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Victoria nursery school in Airdrie on recently receiving the best oral health initiative award from the British Dental Health Foundation. Some of the work that is going on in our schools is a terrific example of

how we can take this approach forward.

Tourism

8. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it intends to take to assist the tourism sector in areas of rural Scotland such as Dumfries and Galloway and the Highlands and Islands in the light of the decreases in visitor numbers. (S1O-264)

The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): We shall be publishing a new strategy at the turn of the year and an important objective will be to boost tourism in the remoter areas.

Alasdair Morgan: I think that I could have anticipated that reply. Will the minister say what representations he has made or will be making to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in light of the increase in interest rates yesterday? While he keeps the pound at an excessively high level, high interest rates are having an adverse effect on the number of foreign visitors coming to Scotland.

Mr Morrison: The evidence we have to date on the first quarter of this year shows that figures for visitors from overseas are at the same level as they were last year. I think that that is also true of visitors from within the United Kingdom.

Alasdair Morgan: Is the minister saying that tourism is price inelastic?

Mr Morrison: No.

Railways

11. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to develop the electrification of Scotland's railways. (S1O-252)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): Investment in the development of rail infrastructure is principally a commercial matter for Railtrack. If local authorities wish to work with the rail industry on enhancing the rail network, their proposals may be eligible for support from the public transport fund.

Mr MacAskill: Does the minister support the Larkhall rail extension to the Haughhead junction, when will she authorise its construction and how will it be funded?

Sarah Boyack: If Mr MacAskill likes, I can provide him with a written answer on that detailed matter.

Mr MacAskill: This matter has been outstanding since December 1998—

The Presiding Officer: Order. I did not call Mr MacAskill for another supplementary.

Secretary of State for Scotland

12. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Scottish Executive when the First Minister expects to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what subjects he expects to discuss. (S1O-247)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I meet the secretary of state regularly and no doubt I will be doing so again shortly. We discuss a wide range of subjects.

Dennis Canavan: Before the Secretary of State for Scotland's job becomes totally redundant, will the First Minister ask Dr Reid to tell Scottish Labour MPs to stop whining about Scottish members of this Parliament expressing concern about important matters affecting their constituents?

For example, this Parliament, as well as Westminster, has an important role to play regarding the high levels of Scottish unemployment. Is it not significant that some of the Scottish Labour MPs who have been bleating the loudest—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Canavan, the last part of your question was out of order.

The First Minister: Dennis Canavan will agree that there is no danger of John Reid ever being described as redundant. I note Dennis's interest in the activities of his former friends and colleagues; I am sure that they will welcome that.

I hope that Mr Canavan will join me in rejoicing at the fact that the unemployment claimant count in Scotland is at its lowest level for almost 25 years. We have every intention of trying to keep it there and no doubt we will be working very happily, in co-operation with colleagues at Westminster, to do exactly that.

Health Care

13. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to enable acute hospital and primary care trusts to meet the aspirations for joint investment funds set out in the "Designed to Care" white paper. (S1O-255)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): The joint investment fund is an innovative mechanism for redesigning services to meet patient needs and to ensure that resources move with any service change.

Health boards and NHS trusts were advised earlier this year that their current health improvement programmes should identify the areas for service change and resource transfer that they would explore jointly in 1999-2000. A support group of senior managers and professionals was established to assess progress

and to share good practice. An interim report was produced in August and a final report, which will set out models for achieving change, is due shortly.

Mary Scanlon: The new joint investment fund bridges the gap between primary and acute care. Local doctors feel strongly that the funds are not being released and that they are not able to deliver appropriate care.

Diabetes is an example—

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister support initiatives such as the care of diabetes to promote patient care under the new joint investment funding?

Susan Deacon: As I said earlier, the point of the joint investment fund is to have in place that and many other measures that will ensure that we find the best way of providing patient care that cuts across different sectors or different agencies. The joint investment fund is at an early stage of development. It is starting to make progress in bridging the gaps that Mrs Scanlon referred to, and I will continue to monitor that progress carefully.

Yorkhill Hospital

15. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure the retention of the paediatric cardiac surgery service at Yorkhill hospital. (S1O-296)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): As Ms White will be aware, paediatric cardiac surgery is performed currently in two centres: Yorkhill hospital in Glasgow and the sick children's hospital in Edinburgh.

All the clinicians concerned agree that it is in the best interests of patients to concentrate the service in one centre. In reaching a decision on where the service is to be located, my primary concern will be to ensure that the highest quality of service is provided in future for those children who need cardiac surgery.

Ms White: In the week that Tony Blair visited Hamilton and pledged to pour £21 billion extra—that is on record—into the health service and to give priority to consumers ahead of profits, why should any of the facilities, at Yorkhill or Edinburgh, be closed?

Yorkhill carries out 65 per cent of paediatric heart operations in Scotland. It is the only hospital in Scotland with ECMO—extracorporeal membrane oxygenation—life support machines. It has two cardiac surgeons and is respected worldwide for its expertise. Does the minister agree that Yorkhill deserves that respect and must

be retained?

Susan Deacon: With respect, members ought to be careful of engaging in such sensitive issues on a relatively ill-informed basis. The matter is not a debate but a sensitive and important issue. I take the decision very seriously indeed. This is not about closing facilities, but about improving services. As I said earlier, every clinician agrees that the best thing for Scotland is to unify paediatric cardiac surgery on one site. To reduce this debate to a turf war between one end of the M8 and the other is to do a great disservice not only to the national health service, but, most of all, to the people who rely on the paediatric surgery service.

Ms White: That is the usual Labour-speak. You are the ones who are starting a turf war.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I called you, Ms White, to ask another question.

Ms White: I have been accused of reducing this debate to a turf war. I got my information from a newspaper article, which quotes Tony Blair.

The Presiding Officer: This is not argument time, it is question time. We will move on.

Teachers

16. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to help bring about a settlement in the dispute over teachers' pay and conditions. (S1O-267)

The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith): The Educational Institute of Scotland has balloted its members. We have stressed the need for a settlement and regret that the EIS has recommended a no vote. We have not yet heard the outcome of the ballot and do not want to prejudge it. As I have said, however, an adverse result would raise serious questions about the future of the present Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee machinery. We are examining that issue closely and are considering the arguments for and against establishing a committee of inquiry into the future of teachers' pay and conditions. However, we await the outcome of the ballot.

Nicola Sturgeon: Does the minister agree that industrial action by teachers would have devastating implications for children in our classrooms and that averting such action should be one of his top priorities? Does he further agree that the only way to bring about a resolution of the dispute is to negotiate, with both sides being willing to compromise?

Does the minister agree that one of the areas on which the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities must compromise is the proposal to increase the limit on composite class sizes? Rather than issuing idle threats from the sidelines, will he give

a commitment that, if necessary, he will provide the additional resources to ensure that 100,000 children in Scotland do not end up in higher-sized classes than they are in at the moment?

Mr Galbraith: Resources are not the issue at stake in this dispute. Of course, everyone would bitterly regret industrial action, which no one wants and which is in the interests neither of the teachers nor of the kids. As I said, we are considering all the options and await the outcome of the ballot.

Nicola Sturgeon: It is clear that COSLA is proposing to increase composite class sizes from 25 to 30 to save £20 million to pay for other aspects of the pay and conditions offer. How, therefore, can the minister suggest that resources are not an issue? Given that the minister holds the purse-strings, does not he think that he has a more active role to play than issuing threats from the sidelines?

Mr Galbraith: Spending on education has increased every year since 1967. This year, it is being increased by 8 per cent. Resources are available to COSLA to reach a settlement in the dispute. We are keeping a close eye on the situation and we await the outcome of the ballot. In the meantime, we are considering our options, which include setting up a committee of inquiry into the future of teachers' pay and conditions.

National Stadium

17. Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will make a detailed statement on the current financial situation at Hampden stadium and the Scottish football museum and on the implications for the future operation of the national stadium and museum. (S10-294)

The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith): Presiding Officer, I have been asked for a detailed statement and I hope, therefore, that you will indulge me somewhat by allowing me to make my answer slightly longer than usual.

I am very concerned about the financial problems relating to the national stadium at Hampden Park. We are co-operating closely with the major funders—the Millennium Commission, the Scottish Football Association and others—in trying to resolve the current problems and ensure the long-term viability of the stadium.

The funders, including the Scottish Executive, commissioned an independent financial and technical assessment of the project. The final report by the consultants will be submitted shortly. The preliminary findings have already begun to establish a basis of information for reaching firm decisions on the way forward.

We and the other funders are discussing the position with National Stadium plc. It would be inappropriate to comment in further detail at this stage, as there are important issues for the funders and for National Stadium plc to consider in the light of the consultants' preliminary findings.

Fiona McLeod: I have been asking this question since July, and I am glad that the minister is giving members an answer.

The Presiding Officer: Let us have another question, then.

Fiona McLeod: In light of today's news reports, will the Scottish Executive support a proposal to call in the receivers to put Hampden into administration, and how will that affect Scotland's crucial qualifying match against Lithuania on 9 October?

Mr Galbraith: I hope that Fiona realises that I am answering the question because I was asked it, which seems to me to be appropriate.

Fiona McLeod: I asked it in July.

Mr Galbraith: We and the other funders sent in advisers, and we have just received their preliminary report. The implications for National Stadium plc and for the funders are being discussed and it would be inappropriate for me to take the matter any further at this stage.

Railways

18. Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to improve the railway network in Scotland. (S10-248)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): This financial year, more than £208 million of public money will be spent to secure passenger train services in Scotland. An additional £6.1 million will be available for Scottish rail freight schemes.

Brian Adam: I am grateful to the minister for her answer. However, I would be extremely grateful if she answered the supplementary question put by my colleague, Mr Kenny MacAskill, which directly related to improvements in the line at Larkhall and Hamilton. Can she say when that work will be done or, if it will not be done, what the problem is?

Sarah Boyack: As I said to Mr MacAskill earlier, I am happy to address that matter and will provide a detailed answer in due course.

Signum Circuits

19. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has taken place in relation to the Borders printed circuit board manufacturer Signum Circuits'

request for regional selective assistance which would allow it to expand its operations in Selkirk. (S1O-254)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): I am aware that Scottish Borders Enterprise is discussing help that might be made available to assist Signum Circuits with its plans. This week, the enterprise and lifelong learning department received a preliminary approach about regional selective assistance. That form of aid is not at present available in the Borders, although the proposed assisted areas map would, if agreed by the European Commission, extend regional selective assistance coverage to parts of the area.

Christine Grahame: I thank the minister for his answer.

Is the minister aware that Signum Circuits has a full order book and has set up a European development to bring in business? He may not be aware that the company is in a position to take on 40 or 50 workers formerly employed by Viasystems. Will he assure me that progress towards allowing Signum Circuits, an indigenous Borders firm, to expand into the former Viasystems site will take place as soon as possible, if not immediately?

Henry McLeish: I warmly echo Christine Grahame's sentiments about Signum Circuits, a company that we want to assist and which has a huge future. When I was in the Borders recently, I had a constructive meeting with the company.

The key issue is that, because there is a Labour Government at Westminster and a Lib-Lab Government in Scotland, we are now extending regional selective assistance to Selkirk and other parts of the Borders. With the greatest respect to Christine, the article in the *Border Telegraph* of Tuesday 7 September did not allude to any of those issues. In this chamber, we want to work in partnership, to ensure that a company with a great potential realises it as soon as possible, and we will do everything we can to ensure that that becomes a reality.

Christine Grahame: Is the minister aware that that article was prompted by the fact that the company itself is most concerned that the commercial urgency of expansion does not appear to be given enough weight by the Executive?

Henry McLeish: I am not conscious of direct quotations in the article, but the key issues are that we met the company and that it has a great plan of action. However, it is significant that regional selective assistance is not yet available. If we are able to get our proposal past the European Commission, we will want to help the company. Indeed, when I met senior officials from the company, I gave them every encouragement by

assuring them that the proposal must move forward. We will do everything we can to assist.

Court Proceedings

The Presiding Officer: Phil Gallie, just in time. [Laughter.]

20. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): As an aside, this is the third week running that it has seemed that I was about to lose out.

To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it will take to put an end to the situation whereby minor technical discrepancies prevent court proceedings in cases where there is evidence of an individual's wrongdoing. (S1O-272)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): I am grateful that you found time for Mr Gallie, Presiding Officer.

The law governing criminal procedure and evidence is kept under constant review, but it is for the Lord Advocate and the courts to judge when technical procedural errors make court proceedings inappropriate or unsafe.

Phil Gallie: I thank the minister. Does he recognise that the public cannot understand it when someone who is clearly guilty in the eyes of a court or a jury goes free because of a technical discrepancy, such as the lack of a birth certificate? In another case, there was clear evidence of someone having carried drugs, but he went free because of a mistake on a warrant.

Angus MacKay: It is for that reason that I am delighted to have the opportunity to remind members that, following several high-profile cases in 1998, a review of procedures that was announced by the Lord Advocate has been completed. New procedures will be in place from 1 October this year, which should mean that those circumstances occur less frequently.

Open Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Concordats

1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S1W-886 by Donald Dewar on 24 August 1999, what the current position is in respect of the development of concordats. (S1O-258)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): The texts of the overarching concordats have now been received and, as I have made clear on many occasions, they will be published in due course and debated in the chamber.

Mr Salmond: On 31 March last year—18 months ago—in the House of Commons, Henry McLeish said that the single reason why the concordats had not been published was that work was at an early stage. Work cannot still be at an early stage. Can the First Minister give us a date when we can expect the concordats to be published?

The First Minister: Work was certainly at a very early stage when my colleague made that statement. Mr Salmond will no doubt remember—and this is a serious matter—that these are the overarching concordats, so there are four parties to them. That means that there is a good deal of consultation and consideration. We are getting there, and I hope to have something positive to say shortly.

The important thing is that these are working documents between administrations. They are ground rules to allow good co-operation over a wide range of areas, whether it be the formation of European policy or the correlation of statistics. It is important that we get them right, but they are agreements between the Whitehall departments and the various administrations party to them.

Mr Salmond: Surely one of the parties to those concordats is this Parliament. One of Mr Dewar's other colleagues, Mr McAllion, suggested in that same debate in the House of Commons that the concordats could be, as he put it, "completely revised" once they were put before this Parliament. Is that the position? Does he agree with his colleague that, one by one, the concordats will be put before this Parliament and will be subject to amendment if members of this Parliament believe that they are worthy of amending?

The First Minister: No. I do not see the concordats as being documents that can be amended in the way that Alex Salmond suggests.

They are, as I said, administrative ground rules. They are not legally binding. They lay down good practice between the Scottish Administration and the Whitehall departments; they build on co-operation at official level and underpin present good relations. That is the right way to approach them. That is their status.

I hope that this will not be seen as gratuitous good advice that is resented, but it is important for Mr Salmond to realise that if he approaches the concordats on the assumption that he will apply an inappropriate test to them, he will no doubt be disappointed by them. If he sees them as do the vast majority of the people of Scotland who voted for the devolution settlement, he will see them as a sensible, useful and progressive way of ensuring that the new settlement works well.

Mr Salmond: Let us test a couple of the leaks that we have had over the past 18 months. In November 1997, a leak of the concordat on inward investment suggested that Locate in Scotland's ability to attract inward investment would be restricted. Is that still the position, or has the concordat been amended?

In March 1998, a leak of the concordat and attendant papers on agriculture suggested that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would be the lead department in European negotiations, even on matters such as fisheries where the Scottish industry dominates. The question is quite simple. If that is still the position in the MAFF concordat, will this Parliament have the right to seek to amend it to ensure that this Parliament and this Executive are in the lead in European negotiations on the fishing industry?

The First Minister: I apologise for repeating myself but, as I said a few minutes ago, those agreements are not legally binding. However, they are important in an administrative sense to the Scottish Executive and to Whitehall departments. I do not deal in leaks. As far as inward investment is concerned, Locate in Scotland was never likely to be victimised. It is extremely important that there are ground rules that prevent the component parts of the United Kingdom bidding against one another to the advantage of incoming industry and to the disadvantage of us all.

I am very much in favour of debating the concordats thoroughly, but they are not documents that are open to amendment in the way that I think Mr Salmond envisages. Old habits die hard. I see that he has been rummlin through his old cuttings from Westminster. Perhaps old habits die hard with him as well.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many times the First

Minister has met with the Prime Minister since 1 July 1999 to discuss matters relating to the governance of Scotland and whether further regular meetings between them have been scheduled. (S10-263)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I met the Prime Minister on 3 September when he visited Scotland. I talk to him on a fairly regular basis and will continue to do so. It is evidently in all our interests that that level of contact and co-operation is built into the system.

David McLetchie: I agree entirely with the First Minister and I welcome his answer. I am glad that there is a degree of concord at this level of government.

Will the First Minister tell us whether, at his meeting with the Prime Minister on 3 September, they discussed the future of higher education funding in Scotland? Will he let us know whether the Prime Minister, as the architect of tuition fees, is happy for tuition fees to be abolished for Scottish students, if that is what the Cubie committee recommends?

The First Minister: That decision will be taken in this Parliament. We have not seen what the Cubie committee will recommend. I will go so far as to say that, when we look at how we organise those affairs, what happens to the 20 per cent of the undergraduate population in Scotland that comes from England is a matter of some importance and sensitivity. That is not a reference to any specific conversation with the Prime Minister, but is a general point of importance. It is right that we try, at least, to keep our colleagues in touch with what is happening, so that they can consider the implications. I would certainly expect a similar courtesy if things were the other way round.

David McLetchie: I am glad that the First Minister confirms that we are free to develop a Scottish solution to the problem. Having been teased this morning about filling in his pools coupon, will he demonstrate that he really is a gambling man?

Mr Donald Gorrie has said that he would happily bet a year's pay that tuition fees will go. Is the First Minister prepared to bet a year's pay on Mr Wallace abiding by the principles of collective responsibility should the Executive decide otherwise?

The First Minister: I will not say this. I was going to say that—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Salmond: Go on, get your money out.

The First Minister: Mr McLetchie's question was lodged as a very clever question, but it has not reached first base.

In my gambling activities I give ground to the leader of the nationalist party who is, I gather, a confirmed player of the tables.

Mr Salmond: Only horses.

The First Minister: Only fools and horses. [*Laughter.*]

As for Donald Gorrie, he is far too stylish and rakish a figure for me to compete with.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Further to that lesson from Mr Dewar's charm school, and as Mr McLetchie's question was confined to meetings between the First Minister and Mr Blair, will the Scottish Executive say how many times the Prime Minister of England telephones the First Minister of Scotland about the governance of Scotland?

The First Minister: We can look at it two ways: either it adds to the gaiety of the nation or it is a cross to bear—I am not quite sure which. I have made it clear that I keep in close touch with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair. I am glad to do so. I count him as a friend and, more important, as a player of some significance. However we organise our affairs in this Parliament and in this country, I can assure Dorothy-Grace Elder that that will still be the case.

Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning

3. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what resources, in terms of funding and expertise, are being made available to tackle the algae responsible for amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP), and to ascertain the threat to public health represented by ASP, and what time scale it has set for lifting the ban on scallop fishing currently in place on Scotland's north-west coast. (S10-262)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): Mr Lyon's question covers a number of points; I will address each one briefly. The monitoring and research programme on marine biotoxins is funded by the Scottish Executive and amounts to approximately £600,000 per year. Amnesic shellfish poisoning is a naturally occurring toxin that causes illness in humans.

The current ban on scallop fishing will be lifted as soon as toxin levels are consistently below the specified legal limit.

George Lyon: Will the minister ensure that fishermen's leaders and the local communities that have been badly affected by the bans are kept fully informed when decisions are taken, and that they are closely consulted as part of that decision-making process?

Susan Deacon: The Scottish Executive has worked hard to keep fishermen's representatives

informed and will continue to attempt to do that. The results of the testing and monitoring programme are faxed weekly to the fishermen concerned. Additionally, as soon as the orders were made, we ensured that fishermen's and trade organisations, local authorities and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency were alerted. I am mindful, however, of the point that George Lyon has made and I will continue to be active in that area.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Is the Executive aware of the laudable responsibility shown by Scottish scallop fishermen in complying with the ban despite the great financial loss to themselves? Can ministers give some idea of the lead time between the results of monitoring being ascertained by the scientists and those results being made public?

Susan Deacon: I am glad that Mr McGrigor mentioned the scallop fishermen's approach to the ban. They have been very responsible, recognising that our imposition of the ban is in the interests of public health. I am grateful to them for having adopted such a positive approach in their discussions with us. As I indicated earlier, we keep in regular contact with the fishermen about the test results and have partly lifted the ban where it was safe to do so. We will continue to take the right precautions in the interests of public health while remaining mindful of the interests of the scallop fishermen.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In recognising that ASP is a major public health issue, how close is the Minister for Health and Community Care to setting a time scale for lifting the other important ban—on beef on the bone?

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but that question is on a different subject.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): If the Executive is so keen on consultation, why did Susan Deacon's colleague, the Minister for Rural Affairs, refuse to meet fishermen on Mull last week, on the ground that it was "not his responsibility"? If it is not his responsibility, whose is it?

Susan Deacon: As Mr Hamilton knows, we discussed the entire issue at some length—for an hour and a half—at the Health and Community Care Committee meeting earlier this week. He raised the same point then. I have spoken to the Minister for Rural Affairs about the matter and, if I may speak on his behalf, the claim that Mr Hamilton makes is not accurate. If he wishes to discuss it further with the Minister for Rural Affairs, I am sure that the minister would be pleased to do so.

I restate the point that I made earlier: both I, as

health minister, and the Minister for Rural Affairs are pleased to engage in dialogue with local representatives, whether it be on public health issues, for my part, or on wider industry concerns, for my colleague's part.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the scientific advice provided by the Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen is soundly based, but that scientific understanding of the related issues is at an early stage? The laboratory needs more support to progress that understanding.

Susan Deacon: I acknowledge and concur with Lewis Macdonald's views on the role played by the Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen. It is engaged in research not only in the Scottish interest, but as part of a worldwide research programme. We give a good degree of support to the Marine Laboratory, which does an excellent job. We must continually consider how such matters can be investigated further, and take the necessary action in the future.

Programme for Government

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is the continuation of this morning's debate on motion S1M-127, in the name of the First Minister, on the Executive's programme for government. I ask members who want to be called to press their buttons now so that their names will come up on the screen.

15:15

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I do not intend to speak for long. I did not intend to speak in this debate at all, but I felt that it was incumbent on me to pick up on some of the comments made by SNP members this morning.

Alex Neil said that there was nothing about poverty in this document. Elaine and I had to ask ourselves whether he had read it. Page 12 is about nothing but poverty and the social inclusion agenda. The document states that the Scottish social inclusion strategy will be produced this year and is designed specifically to address poverty and the regeneration of communities. Social inclusion is, and should be, the concern of all ministers and their departments. Comments on consultation appear throughout the document.

I am glad that Dorothy-Grace Elder has remained in the chamber, as I would like to pick up on what I thought was a pretty damaging comment that she made this morning about the social work department of Glasgow City Council. As Dorothy-Grace Elder's comments are on the public record, I would like to challenge on the public record what she said.

I start by declaring an interest. As the senior convener of social work at that time, I instigated the review on Easthill with officials in January 1998, and the consultation process continued until July 1999. That process was thorough and wide-ranging. It is always difficult to ask people who have attended the same care centre all their lives, who are used to the people there and the area, whether that is the best place for them now, given what we know about what is wrong with them. Each individual was assessed thoroughly and each carer was taken into consideration. We are talking about people with learning difficulties, not people with a handicap, as Dorothy-Grace sometimes says. Perhaps she should look to her language.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP) *rose—*

Trish Godman: I shall give way.

Dorothy-Grace Elder *sat.*

Trish Godman: She has changed her mind.

Dorothy-Grace Elder *rose—*

The Presiding Officer: Which of you has changed your mind?

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): I apologise. I must point out that the carers—including parents who were aged around 80—were unanimously against their young people being split up and sent to three different centres. They also feared that, if those young people were put among others who had more mental ability than they did, there could be abuse. They were unanimously against the plan in late June and again in August 1999.

Trish Godman: That is exactly what I am trying to say: it is an extremely difficult thing to do. However, if it is better for the person who is receiving the service, that is what we must do. I understand how a parent who is 80 would be anxious about what might happen to the person who is receiving that service—it happens every time—but Dorothy-Grace's comments this morning against Glasgow City Council were bad, and I do not accept them. That is why I want to put on record the other side of the story.

The document deals with education. My constituents in areas such as Kilbarchan, Houston and Bridge of Weir will have the opportunity to claim nursery places for three-year-olds—something that has never happened in those areas, which would never before have been included in such programmes.

Constituents in Port Glasgow will benefit from the regeneration of disadvantaged communities, of which, unfortunately, it is one. They will benefit from

“decent, affordable housing”

and from

“high quality local government services which provide customer care, flexibility and choice”.

As John McAllion said this morning, no one can object to a drugs enforcement agency when not only all our constituencies but every part of them suffers from the scourge of drug abuse. We must support those initiatives. Elaine Smith's comments on carers were well made. I am involved with carers groups and they welcome their inclusion in the document.

The document is a timetable. If the Executive does not keep to the timetable or does not allow appropriate parliamentary debate, those of us in this part of the chamber will hold them to account—Donald has turned round and is smiling at me, but that is what I am here to do. I commend the document.

15:21

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): Like

Trish Godman, I expect to hold the Executive to account. I have found a gem in the document—I will comment on content rather than style. It says:

“Increase the number of doctors and recruit more nurses and introduce more family-friendly policies as part of our overall commitment to retain and to value all NHS staff”.

I could not have put it better myself. I congratulate Susan Deacon—I am glad to see that she takes the comment in good spirit, because I want to measure those words against the reality of the decision that she has to make on the provision of paediatric cardiac services.

I am aware of the professional advice that is likely to have been given and of the fact that there are only 50 miles between the two existing units. The best practice that the professionals would like us to adopt is for a unit to serve a radius of territory that encompasses about 10 million people—in some parts of the world, particularly north America, where a one-centre system of excellence is operated, those areas can often be more than 50 miles in diameter.

When you are making that decision, minister, do not be held fast by the professionals. You say that you want more family-friendly policies. It will not be friendly to any of the families whose children have, unfortunately, been admitted either to the royal hospital for sick children at Yorkhill or to the Edinburgh sick children's hospital if you have to close one unit. I do not underestimate the difficulty of the decision that has to be made and I share your concern that there should be no turf wars, because we should have the best possible service.

Mr Reid, I apologise for speaking directly to the minister, but she has the responsibility for ensuring that we have a quality service and that that service is dictated not by the professionals but by need and by what we already have. We have two centres, each with an excellent record and each with competing claims that are very difficult to judge between.

In the case of Edinburgh's unit, we know that, if we lose the paediatric cardiac service, we may lose the whole intensive care unit. That is a huge price to pay. I do not imagine that any of my colleagues from Glasgow would want to be forced to take the decision that you, minister, are going to have to take if, as is said, you have already conceded the case for there being only one centre. I hope that you have not conceded that case. The document makes a pledge:

“Increase the number of doctors and recruit more nurses”.

I fail to see how that pledge will be met by cutting one unit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George

Reid): Members should address their remarks through the chair.

15:24

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): I always make it to the floor in your period of tenure, Deputy Presiding Officer—it is a coincidence, I am sure. The theme of the programme for government is “Making it work together”, which is a reference to the partnership between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. I want to stress the partnership approach to delivering the changes that we want in Scotland—partnership between ourselves and the Liberal Democrats delivering legislative change and partnership between the Parliament and civic Scotland working together.

An example in the document of the use of a partnership approach is the commendable target to create a network of healthy living centres by 2002. I have a declarable interest, because I am a member of a healthy living centre project involved in social inclusion. The centres will focus on improving health in areas of poverty and deprivation.

Healthy living centres address the wider determinants of health, such as social exclusion, mental health, poor access to services and other social and economic aspects of deprivation. Like the one in which I am involved in the Garnock valley, centres have been developed by broad partnerships, which have included health authorities, local authorities, voluntary organisations and local communities.

Local communities and the users of the centres are involved in all aspects of the development and delivery of the service, which links in with local economic regeneration programmes, welfare-to-work programmes, education action zones and drug action teams. This wider action agenda, involving public authorities, voluntary and community associations and local commercial and industrial enterprises, makes use of vital partnerships, which must succeed if the other equally commendable public health targets are to be met. The targets to cut the number of deaths from heart disease by half and those from cancer by 20 per cent by 2010 underpin our commitment to those other vital national health service and public health commitments.

The healthy living centre initiative delivers £34.5 million of lottery funds to Scottish projects, helping people of all ages to maximise their health and well-being. The initiative will make a major contribution to the Executive's drive to tackle health inequalities and to improve the health of those living in deprived communities. The cornerstone of that initiative, and the theme to which I return, is the partnership between the

public and private sectors, between voluntary agencies and communities and between this Parliament and the people. I commend the document to Parliament.

15:27

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I will address one part of the Government's legislative programme—land reform. Land reform has been criticised as one of the most uninteresting topics in the Government's programme, but it is actually one of the more interesting parts, as we are legislating for the rights of ordinary people—this is about our right of use over our own land.

It is because we are a modernising Government that we recognise that Scotland is still the only country in the western world that has a feudal system. That system has existed for 300 years and must be swept away. The old laws have created traumatic situations for those ordinary people who do not have the right to improve their properties. The Government's programme will sweep away that system. The abolition of feu duties, the rights of communities to buy their own land and the right to enhance one's property will no longer be determined by a remote superior. Most important will be the sweeping away of the obscure language—such as vassal and superior—that that no one understands.

The role of this Parliament and its committees is to add to the Government's programmes in a positive way. We must not stop at what we have done, so I will be supporting Adam Ingram's proposal for a bill on the abolition of leasehold casualties, because that is a way of demonstrating that we aim to modernise land laws.

I put the case that the Government's agenda is a positive one. Land use must be viewed as a central issue for Scots. We must ensure that our national resources are used for the benefit of all and that we all have the right to determine rights of ownership. Those are crucial issue for Scots, as they understand.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members that, in accordance with the Procedures Committee ruling, all occupants of the chair should be addressed as Presiding Officer.

15:29

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): I am severely tempted to refer to the photographs in the Government's document, as many members did earlier. I bring to members' attention the photograph of Ross Finnie. As everyone will know, he went to London yesterday to negotiate on behalf of Scotland's sheep producers, with the principled support of the entire Rural Affairs Committee and, I hope, every member of this

Parliament. At the end of that meeting, I am sure that he shook hands with Nick Brown. The photograph shows Ross Finnie counting his fingers afterwards.

The principle of cross-party support is not universal in this Parliament. George Lyon took a different approach this morning when he raised his hands in the air to proclaim that he was a Liberal Democrat. Given some of his statements, it is difficult for us to believe that he is a Liberal Democrat. The close relationship that seems to have developed between George and the First Minister is as cosy now as it appeared to be when they were both in different jobs.

I am the Conservative party's rural affairs spokesman, so I will deal with the parts of this document about rural affairs. I will not go into great depth, but will address a couple of issues briefly.

I think that Agenda 2000 will be more significant to the work that this Parliament does on rural affairs than the two references to it in the document suggest. We must remember that the United Kingdom is always accused of over-zealously implementing European regulations. When this Parliament gets the opportunity to consider European legislation—and with Agenda 2000 there will be a great deal of it—we must implement the regulations so as not to disadvantage Scotland's farmers, fishermen and rural dwellers. It is important to remember that standards are not equal across Europe and that the way in which we implement regulations will be crucial for Britain's—and Scotland's—competitive activity in rural areas.

The document suggests that there should be an independent appeals mechanism for farmers suffering penalties in relation to their EU subsidies. As far as I know, that proposal was in our manifesto and the Liberal Democrats' manifesto; it also appears in the partnership agreement. Many farmers would desperately like it to be implemented, but I am concerned that the date in the document shows that implementation is at least a year away. Why cannot the time scale be much shorter?

Much of what was said this morning—admittedly in reaction to comments from Conservative members—was slightly dangerous and misleading. Rural Scotland is an important part of our country. Those of us who represent rural Scotland—in all parties—realise how important it is to maintain a balance between the rural and the urban. Hugh Henry and John McAllion suggested that the balance was in danger of being tipped too far towards the rural. I urge members to remember that rural Scotland is different and that people there sometimes feel that they are being ignored. I ask members to keep rural Scotland at the forefront of their minds to ensure that we are

treated with the same respect as people in urban Scotland.

15:34

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am the Liberal Democrats' local government spokesman, so I will concentrate on that issue. I apologise because, as I am heavily involved in the Hamilton by-election, I was not present to hear Donald Dewar's gracious remarks about me. I was busy being briefed on the very intricate affairs of Hamilton Academical Football Club. It is funny what becomes involved in by-elections.

Twice in his speech, Alex Salmond very kindly advertised our excellent candidate in the by-election, Marilyn MacLaren. She made remarks criticising the Government—it is a Westminster election, and I should make it clear that she was criticising the Government in London for, in her view, not doing enough about poverty. That seems a perfectly correct thing to do. I think that Alex was trying to suggest that it was a criticism of the partnership Executive here, which it was not.

In the terminology, as I understand it, the Government means the Government at Westminster and the Executive means the Government here. Perhaps we will have to talk about the Westminster Government and the Scottish Executive to make the distinction clearer. The rules must be made clearer so that it is obvious which we are referring to. In this case, we are—quite legitimately—criticising the Government in London.

The partnership document contains a lot of good stuff. In fact, my main criticism relates to its size. It does not fit nicely into my very amateur filing system. My helper said that that was a subtle move; it meant that, because I could not file it away and had to have it around, I would have to read it more. There may be something in that.

Much of the content in the section on local government is excellent, although we would like to push various things further. There is a commitment to proportional representation, which—although not a panacea—will improve local government more than any other single measure.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Donald Gorrie says that he would like to see some things pushed further—will he name them?

Donald Gorrie: I am about to do that. In the excellent Local Government Committee, chaired by Trish Godman, there has been considerable discussion of a thorough review of local government finance, for which there is great support. The Executive has problems with that, but the committee wants to explore the concept. There

is also widespread support in the committee and throughout the local government community for powers of general competence. We must explore that issue with the Executive and push it along.

There is a great deal of agreement, not only in the committee but across parties and throughout local government, on a great many issues. I hope, therefore, that we can make progress quickly and effectively on a great many of them.

The document contains many good things on improving housing, with respect to both the physical content—building more houses for social rent, which is critical, and improving houses that are damp—and to improving relations with tenants. Communities could be improved if there was a much simpler system of adjudication between tenant and landlord, between tenant and tenant and between neighbour and neighbour.

There are many good ideas in the document on providing more employment. The document also mentions the voluntary sector, on which we will be having a separate debate. That is absolutely critical. This Parliament has a great opportunity to put real drive—an engine—behind the voluntary sector, which makes such a huge contribution to wide areas of our life.

Despite the many good things, there is one fundamental problem, which relates back to the Westminster Government—the underfunding of local government. This Executive and this Parliament will have to make the best of the budget that they have, but the Liberal Democrats believe that there must be well-directed increases in money for a great many local services. That money must come from the UK Treasury. We will continue to argue for that at Westminster.

I am, allegedly, a member of the awkward squad—a maverick. I discovered that Mr Maverick was an American gentleman who did not put marks on his cattle—that is a piece of useless information for members. I do not know whether I am a maverick.

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Mr Maverick was also a gambler. It seems that Donald Gorrie is aping his style with the large wager that he made yesterday.

Donald Gorrie: I bet only on certainties. The only bet that I have placed in the past 10 years was that I would win in the last general election.

15:40

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): The First Minister, who I hope has only temporarily departed, gave some excellent advice this morning. He said that we should be positive. I must acknowledge that all members want what is best for Scotland, no

matter which party we belong to. My question about the Government's programme is whether it is best for Scotland. I am afraid that it is not good enough.

As the SNP's spokesman for small business, I am interested in the only specific proposal in the document—that the Executive will

"help to create 100,000 new Scottish businesses by 2009".

Anybody can set a target, but how is it to be delivered? No measures in the document indicate how the Government's target will be achieved. Last week, in the committee on which I serve, I was positive, as Mr Dewar advised us to be. Henry McLeish listened to three specific proposals that I made that would help to deliver the Government's target. The first was de-rating for small businesses, as proposed by the Federation of Small Businesses. The second was a root-and-branch review of planning law. The third was an elimination of red tape. I am sure that there would be a high level of support for those proposals.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will Fergus Ewing inform us what the SNP's position is on the penny rise in tax that it proposed?

Fergus Ewing: The SNP will always support progressive taxation, just as the late John Smith did. I inform Duncan McNeil that the yield from Gordon Brown's increases in fuel tax is far in excess of one penny in the pound. The difference is that Scotland gets none of that money back, while it would have had the whole of the yield from forgoing Gordon Brown's one penny tax cut, which we advocated.

In the absence of any specific measures in the document, is the Government even willing to recognise the fact that Scotland has the highest fuel tax in the European Union? In her meeting with Gordon Brown, Sarah Boyack failed to mention the issue. I find that almost incredible.

The Government has no ideas for solutions and no idea of the problems. Perhaps it has one cunning plan: to suggest that the 100,000 Scots for whom it aims to create jobs apply to Chris Tarrant's programme, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" I ask the Executive to answer this simple question: which country in the European Union has the highest fuel tax? Is it a) France, b) Germany, c) Spain or d) Scotland, trapped in the United Kingdom?

The Executive does not have to answer immediately. If Mr McConnell wants, he can telephone a friend. Gordon Brown, for instance, who not only knows the answer but caused the answer.

When we ask the audience on 23 September, we will find that they know the answer, too. They

also know who will best fight for the interests of the people of Scotland.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): I wonder whether Fergus Ewing wants to follow Donald Gorrie's example and will place a year's salary on the prediction that he has just made.

Fergus Ewing: As part of the SNP's economics team, I am not inclined to recommend that anybody gamble one year's salary on anything. However, a member of my family who was involved in a certain by-election 32 years ago made a bet with odds of nine to one. I remember getting a rather good toy the day after the result. Who knows, I might break with my inclination and place a bet on my sister's winning.

15:45

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Fergus Ewing cannot be as sure as Mr Gorrie about what is a sure thing and what is not.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Scottish Executive's programme for government. We should recognise that the Scottish Parliament faces the challenge of building the confidence of the people of Scotland and that there has been a bit of damage to that confidence in the Parliament's first few months. I appeal to members of all parties to start to play a constructive role in shaping the programme of government. One of the encouraging things about Fergus's contribution—something that has been lacking in many speeches—was that he came up with ideas and tried to move the debate forward.

While the leader of the Scottish National party's speech was humorous, once the humour has been stripped away it will be found to contain little substance. I encourage the SNP genuinely to welcome the parts of the government programme that it supports and to present its ideas on the areas that it wishes to develop further.

One of Mr Salmond's criticisms of the Executive's programme was that it was not original. Why was it not original? Many of the ideas were brought out during the election campaign.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does Mr Muldoon realise that many of the ideas to which he refers were germinated by Ian Lang and Michael Forsyth? That is the point—they are Tory ideas, not Labour ideas.

Bristow Muldoon: That is a travesty of the position set out in the Executive programme. Had, by some miracle, Mr McLetchie's party won the election in May, very little of the programme would have been implemented. The programme is being implemented, and it received the support of a larger proportion of the Scottish people than did

that of Andrew's party.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is there not a great deal of difference because the vast majority of the programme contains Conservative policies that have already been implemented?

Bristow Muldoon: Absolutely not. I do not accept that for one minute and I do not think that the people of Scotland would either—hence Mr Harding's party's continued low position in the opinion polls.

Mr MacAskill concentrated quite heavily on the subject of fuel taxes, but I have not yet heard what the SNP would like to be done about fuel taxation. By how much does the SNP want fuel taxation to be reduced? How would the SNP pay for the reduction? Is it another of the things that the penny for Scotland would pay for? Is this the elastic penny for Scotland?

Mr MacAskill said that the SNP is opposed to certain aspects of the proposed road charging, but he stated in the Transport and the Environment Committee that he is sympathetic to congestion charging in cities. Could the SNP convey that to its colleagues in West Lothian, who are opposed to road charging in cities? Or does the SNP intend to continue its practice of espousing different policies for different audiences?

I would like to highlight the concentration of the programme for government on the subject of education. The Parliament has an obligation to the children of Scotland to provide them with the best possible standard of education. It is much to the credit of the Executive that one of its first bills will be an education bill that will aim to raise standards in Scottish education and maintain them at the highest level. The programme sets out areas on which we can make real improvements, particularly in dealing with educational inequalities.

I am receiving hints from the Presiding Officer. Because of all the interventions that I have taken, I am curtailing my speech.

To conclude, there is much to commend in the programme for government. I repeat my appeal to the Opposition parties: engage with us and try to shape policies that will build a better Scotland.

15:49

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): The purpose of the Parliament is to hold the Executive to account. The programme for government does exactly that. As John McAllion and Hugh Henry said this morning, a timetabled programme, especially with a regular monitoring debate—as John McAllion in particular mentioned—gives the Opposition the opportunity to scrutinise progress.

In June, we had a debate on the legislative programme; today, we are having a debate on the programme for government. Both debates have given the Opposition an opportunity to scrutinise progress. The Tories and the SNP have been entertaining at times today, but their front benchers' concentration on the size of the booklet and the quality of the photographs could not be described as the Opposition in scrutiny mode.

The programme for government includes many important transport and environment policies, which I will talk about briefly. Parliament has the opportunity to set those policies in action.

When addressing transport policy, there is no point in ignoring financial realities. According to the press this morning, the Confederation of British Industry will be told that there is a huge need for public investment in transport. Where will the resources come from? Changing political priorities—across the parties—are reflected in funding for transport. The Scottish Office trunk road capital programme fell from £208 million in 1995 to £104 million in 1998.

What are the options for getting funding into transport, which it is broadly agreed is necessary to improve public services? One option is to invest through taxation, but the Tories have demonised tax over the years, so we cannot have a debate on using tax to invest in public services without the kind of advertising campaigns that have appeared at general elections. This morning, the First Minister mentioned the public's cynicism about the political process; it has certainly not been helped by those campaigns.

By implication, the SNP and the Conservatives have said that they will cut transport funding. If they are to find funds for transport, they should explain from where in the Scottish block they will take it.

Andrew Wilson: Last week, *The Guardian* had the headline "Brown builds war chest". It said that the chancellor has £24 billion to spare before he breaches the Maastricht criteria. Does Tavish Scott agree that the First Minister should suggest to the chancellor that that money be invested in public services?

Tavish Scott: This debate is about public services in Scotland. Submissions on public services will no doubt go forward, so Scotland will receive its share of that funding. It is very important that we make our arguments as strong and as clear as possible; I hope that the SNP will join us in that.

Mr Salmond called congestion charging taxation by the back door. The SNP's spending commitments in its penny for Scotland campaign were for health, housing and education—there was no mention of transport. The SNP cannot

argue that it will increase investment in transport—it was not included in that campaign. That is opposition for the sake of opposition. The SNP's manifesto was in favour of congestion charging, but now a campaign has been mounted against it—that is having it both ways.

We would be very grateful for an explanation of how the Conservatives and the SNP would provide funding for transport if they will not do so through taxation or congestion charging. The Executive, at least, is illustrating in this programme potential routes to investment in affordable public transport.

It is right to consult on urban road charging, as the Executive is doing. It is hard to argue against the case for congestion charging in our cities. Working in Edinburgh, we are made aware daily of the disbenefits of congestion: CO₂ emissions, pollutants in the air, frustration and lost time.

David McLetchie: Is the member aware that the Government's principal transport adviser, Mr Begg, acknowledges that no more cars are coming into Edinburgh than 20 years ago? Much of the congestion is caused by the traffic management measures that he imposed.

Tavish Scott: David Begg made a very interesting presentation to the Transport and the Environment Committee about how we should take congestion planning forward. It is quite clear that the current policies cannot continue. We must improve public transport so that we can achieve the reductions in pollution and CO₂ emissions that we need to achieve now. Offering arguments against that is bizarre and goes against what we need to do.

Motorway charging is different from urban charging. The Executive's proposal is certainly right in seeking to find whether there is merit in motorway charging, but there are justified concerns about it. The key questions for the Executive in responding to the consultation are: where the revenue goes; what the objective underpinning the approach is; and, perhaps most important—particularly for local people—what the effect of diverted traffic will be.

Those issues need to be addressed when the responses come in, but it is important that we take those ideas forward. Transport is the main issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: David Mundell will wind up for the Scottish Conservative party. You have a maximum of 10 minutes, David.

15:55

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I am one of those people who have been calling for the Scottish Executive to listen to business. Behind the spin, there is some evidence that it has

been doing so. However, in relation to the production of "Making it work together", it is clear that—right down to the pastel shades so beloved of those wanting to create a caring, sharing image—the Executive has been listening to the message from just one section of the community: the marketing men.

No doubt seven out of 10 people in a focus group somewhere have said that the shade of burgundy used in the document is both warm and inclusive. As Conservative members would expect, the blue on the cover is the colour of prudence and responsibility, although it must not be too deep a blue in case it is perceived as cold. Then, as we have already heard, there are those photos: half art house, half small child with unsteady hand.

From my experience of business, the style of the document is out of date. Not only is the current trend to be environmentally friendly and smaller, really successful organisations include feedback from their customers in their brochures. However, it might be difficult to find a farmer with enough positive feedback on the Government's performance so far to fill the six inches of unused space in the entry by the Minister for Rural Affairs.

As Mr Gorrie suggested, the awkward size of the document may not be a mistake. In a short time, it will fit into nobody's filing system and will have to be discarded.

Who is the document—produced at the taxpayer's expense—aimed at? It should not be aimed at members of the Parliament; most of us could have managed with a simple e-mail, as could the work force of the Scottish Executive. Surely it cannot be aimed at the people who voted for Labour in the general election, as they have the Labour manifesto. At £4.95, I do not think that it will be read by many members of the public—certainly not the poor and disadvantaged whom the Executive says it wants to help.

The only specific audience that I can think of are those poor unfortunate souls who voted Liberal Democrat in the Scottish Parliament elections, because for them it sets out the full catalogue of broken promises: tuition fees, free eye and dental checks, beef-on-the-bone ban, Skye bridge tolls and the end of the private finance initiative.

Earlier today, Mr Salmond referred to the film "Groundhog Day". He has a point. Given the Executive's performance, a more appropriate film—and indeed its innumerable sequels—might have been "Rocky". If we read the *Official Report* of 16 June, we find that apart from the birth of Duncan McNeil's granddaughter and Keith Raffan's very individual contribution—which we have missed today—nothing new is being said and nothing new is being offered. That is no

surprise.

The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell): Will Mr Mundell give way?

David Mundell: Are you going to say something new, Jack?

Mr McConnell: Does Mr Mundell agree that the line-by-line timetabling of the 100 commitments in the document is indeed new? If he admitted that, his speech would be far more valid.

David Mundell: I admit that the Executive has brought together, in one document, many things that have been stated over many years.

When I was working outside the Parliament, I was subject to an appraisal scheme and I was paid on the basis of achieving objectives. One of the tricks that the Government has pulled off—which I never managed—is to set a group of objectives of which some have already been achieved, others are at so long a distance as to ensure that no one will be around to pick up the bonus in 2009, and yet others are simply unmeasurable.

I am not surprised that we have not heard anything new, because we have had nothing new from the Government since 16 June.

The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Iain Smith) *rose*—

David Mundell: Are you going to say something new, Iain?

Iain Smith: I was going to ask whether the Opposition was going to say something new. In this entire debate, we have heard only talk about the style and presentation of the document, and nothing about the content.

David Mundell: Iain Smith has hit right at the Government.

Iain Smith: David Mundell is summing up on behalf of the Conservative party. Can he tell us which of the items in the document his party disagrees with?

David Mundell: What our party disagrees with is the list of broken promises over the past two years: tuition fees introduced, hospital waiting lists longer, police numbers down, crime on the increase, class sizes larger, taxes increased by stealth, junior doctors' hours longer, no attempts to tackle the burden of red tape and bureaucracy on small businesses, and no let-up in the crusade against the motorist.

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): Will Mr Mundell give way?

David Mundell: I am in my last minute, Richard. I am sorry, but I will not give way.

People in Scotland—as Bristow Muldoon said—will judge the Parliament in general and the Executive in particular on what difference they make to their lives, and not on the content of documents such as this. It is the very production of a document such as this—all style and no substance, Iain—that compounds the Executive's difficulties. A presentation with no substance fuels the perception that this Parliament is not making a difference to the lives of ordinary people in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call John Swinney to wind up for the Scottish National party. You have up to 12 minutes.

16:02

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): This has been an interesting debate with many interesting speeches. We have heard members of the SNP reflecting on the contents of "Making it work together" and proposing ideas to hold the Executive to account. We have heard from members on the Labour back benches. Trish Godman in particular made very clear her determination to hold the Executive to account. I would have been delighted to witness the exchange that took place between her and the First Minister as he left the chamber, but I am sure that Trish will keep that for her private thoughts and reflect on it in the months to come as she harries the Labour Government.

Labour members have given varying degrees of support for many of the points in the programme for government. Some speeches from Labour members were refreshing—especially those from Janis Hughes and Elaine Smith, who considered some of the key aspects of the Government's policies on child care and the health service. The points they made are welcome.

In an intervention while John McAllion was speaking, I questioned the real value of having a day-long debate on this subject. The amendment whose proposer I am summing up on behalf of refers to the use of valuable parliamentary time to consider such issues. I know that the use of parliamentary time concerns the Minister for Parliament, whom I am glad to see here. On his behalf, people have been telling newspapers that we need to spend more time in the chamber.

If more time is needed, we will have more time, but we could have spent today a little bit more productively than in discussion of a document that, for all the joking about photographs, reveals only the development of new timetables for the implementation of the Government's previously announced proposals, and—as a number of my colleagues have said—the previously announced proposals of the previous Government.

I accept—I can see that the Minister for Finance cannot contain himself until I finish this sentence—that there is new material in the document and that there are new timetables. There are also different timetables—timetables that have slipped and have not been kept to from previous commitments. We should concentrate on that when measuring the Government's performance in the future.

Dr Simpson: At the outset of this debate, the First Minister asked a question of Mr Salmond that I hope will be addressed. What other Government in the past has produced 150 timetabled promises collected in one document? That is innovative. Please answer the question.

Mr Swinney: There are numerous examples of Governments, such as the US Government, that have come into power with timetables. It is important for us to judge the Government on the measures that it is introducing. I concede to Richard Simpson that it is helpful to have—not in black and white, more in pastel shades—a measurable timetable to which we can hold the Government accountable, so that we do not have a plethora of announcements of the same material with the only change being the timetable itself. The point that my colleagues have made throughout the debate is that the Government has been responsible for the slippage in its timetable.

It would have been more productive to have had a debate about some of the Government's specific policy initiatives. Before lunch, the Minister for Parliament told us that it would not be convenient to have a debate on the manufacturing sector in 10 days' time. We could have had that debate today, to drill into some of the detail that underpins the froth that has been put before Parliament in the form of the document, instead of returning to a debate that we had in June. We could have focused on the real policy questions that concern the public.

Much has been said about partnership. Sylvia Jackson talked about real partnership and the First Minister said that it was important to co-operate with policies pursued by the UK Government. Perhaps that explains Sarah Boyack's bewildering answers, given at yesterday's meeting of the Transport and the Environment Committee, about the fact that no representations about fuel prices had been made by this Administration to the UK Treasury. Perhaps what the Executive means by partnership is that the UK Government gives us the bad news about such issues.

Speaking of partnership, George Lyon—I am sorry that he is not here—opened his speech at the start of the debate by saying that he was speaking for the Liberal Democrats. I thought, "Well, here we go." I thought that we were going to get a formalisation of the points that Marilyne MacLaren has been raising during the Hamilton

South by-election campaign. She has not just complained about the Westminster Government, but declared her determination to vote for the abolition of tuition fees. In his speech for the Liberal Democrats, George Lyon made no mention of his party's varying, variable or completely dumped stance on tuition fees.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I want to make it unequivocally clear to the Parliament that the Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to the abolition of student tuition fees—full stop—and that we will all vote that way when appropriate.

Mr Swinney: I find that as bewildering an answer today as I found it when Mike Rumbles intervened on me in a previous debate, when there was a legitimate opportunity to vote in principle for the abolition of tuition fees. The timetable has slipped on that issue, too.

The issue of the private finance initiative, about which so much has been made, has also underpinned the debate. We have heard more and more about the matter from the Liberal Democrats. Before the election, a spokesman for the Liberal Democrats said in *The Scotsman* on 2 April 1999 that the party would

"press for the abolition of the Government's private finance initiative . . . The party is attracted by the Scottish National Party's plans for replacing PFI with Public Service Trusts".

There is no such argument in the programme for government.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie): Does Mr Swinney agree that substantial changes—in particular the Liberal Democrat pledge that assets would, if necessary, return to the public sector—have already been announced in the operation of PFI? Does that not go a long way to meet the Liberal Democrats' commitment on that issue?

Mr Swinney: The simple answer is no. John McAllion has made his position on PFI quite clear. He said:

"The Tories may have gone, but their ideas live on under the name PFI".

In response to Mr Finnie's point, Matt Smith, one of the critics of PFI in the public sector, has made a number of comments in his critique of the policy. Following Mr McConnell's announcements to Parliament about the supposed change of direction on this issue, Matt Smith said:

"PFI is still a bad way of financing public services. It will still cost the taxpayer more. It will still break up the team delivering Scotland's public services and there are still other, better ways of accessing public sector borrowing that could help".

The debate on that issue has not advanced much further as a result of the contribution made

by the Liberal Democrats.

In winding up, I want to concentrate on some remarks that were made earlier.

Iain Smith rose—

Mr Swinney: I am coming to a conclusion, Iain. I will begin to sum up. I must observe the time limits as well.

Hugh Henry attacked the Opposition for lacking ambition in what we have set out in this debate. I want to tackle his criticisms. He said that he was interested in holding the Executive to account—a comment that has been made by other members of the Executive and the Labour party—and made four criticisms. He said that we had no ambition to tackle poverty, no ambition to tackle the lack of opportunity, no ambition to tackle unemployment, and no ambition to raise ambitions in Scotland.

Is it not ambitious enough to demand a hard target on the number of people in Scotland who will be removed from poverty as a result of this programme? What is unambitious about that? A hard target does not appear in this programme, but soft measures for delivering it do.

How about testing the effectiveness of the Government's measures? There is nothing in this programme to test how effectively the Government changes the lives of people. What about the ambition to tackle the lack of opportunity? Is it not ambitious enough to demand the removal of obstacles to higher education by putting an end to tuition fees and by introducing student grants and sensible student maintenance? That is more ambitious than palming the problem off to a committee that does not immediately implement the priorities of the people of Scotland as expressed after the election campaign.

Is it not ambitious enough for all of us, regardless of our politics, to recognise, as numerous Scottish companies have recognised over the past 24 hours, that yesterday's rise in interest rates will be damaging to the productive capability of the Scottish economy and that we do not need those increases?

Is it not ambitious enough for all of us—the Liberal Democrat party, the Conservatives, the SNP and the Labour party—to make a representation to the monetary policy committee on behalf of the Scottish Parliament that says that that strategy is bad for Scotland?

Is it unambitious to desire to create the best economic conditions for Scotland? Instead, we are saying that we will take what we get because the priorities of the monetary policy committee suit the priorities of the south of England and the Labour Government at Westminster. How can we break out of that when it goes to the heart of the Scottish economy?

Is it not ambitious enough for one of my colleagues, Mr Neil, to compare the prospects for the Scottish economy and society with those of other small European countries? He should be able to do that in this chamber and not be laughed at by Labour members who are not prepared to see that we have the ability to raise sights, standards and expectations or that we can compare ourselves with other countries and have ambition to deliver a new and better society. That is what is lacking from this programme. It was lacking in June when we debated it, it is still lacking today, and I suspect that it will be lacking when we have the first debate on how effective this Government has been in changing the lives of people in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This debate will conclude at 16:30. I now call the Deputy First Minister to wind up for the Executive.

16:13

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): This has been a wide-ranging debate on a programme for government that sets timetables for the commitments that have been made by the Executive. It develops the partnership agreement that the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party entered into.

Mr Mundell complained that the programme added nothing new to the debate in June. My recollection of the debate on 16 June, which was on the legislative programme of the Government, is of numerous complaints that the legislative programme did not mention health, jobs or housing. It was explained that there is far more to a Government and the actions of an Executive than simply passing legislation. This programme refers to matters that are part of the legislative programme but it goes beyond that and sets out what the Executive plans to do, and is committed to doing, in tackling the range of responsibilities that have been given to this Parliament.

The Opposition has not been able to get past the pictures. I can understand that—the members of the Cabinet are a fairly photogenic lot. I thought that when David Mundell rose to speak he might have been able to introduce something novel and constructive from the Conservative party, but he complained about the pastel shades. That perhaps sums up how far the Conservative party has got with this document. If I may parody Mr Mundell's words, he delivered a speech that had no style and no substance. The problem faced by both Opposition parties is that they cannot see the bigger picture; they cannot acknowledge that the document contains details of commitments and a fixed timetable.

As Richard Simpson reminded John Swinney,

the First Minister challenged Alex Salmond, at the start of the debate, to say when any previous Government had set out a detailed timetable of commitments. Alex Salmond was unable to answer. No one has given any indication that such a timetable has been produced before. That is a challenge to the Executive to deliver, and I am confident that we can meet the challenge. We promised open, transparent and accountable government. This document is an important contribution to government in Scotland, which will be open, transparent and accountable.

Although Opposition members have trivialised the fact that dates have been set, I suspect that they will be very quick to latch on to them if—peradventure—any of those dates should slip. I do not expect a press release from Mr McLetchie or Mr Salmond to congratulate us when we hit or exceed our targets, but I am sure they will use the document to hold us to account in the weeks, months and years of this session. I do not complain about that; an important role for any Parliament is to hold the Executive to account. I do not expect only the Opposition parties to do so; we have had indications in the debate, from John McAllion, Trish Godman, Tavish Scott and Hugh Henry, that they will use this document to keep the Executive up to the mark.

The predictability of the Opposition attacks was one of the disappointing, although perhaps not surprising, aspects of the debate. The Opposition appears to believe in opposition for opposition's sake. Even in the final speech, Mr Swinney could not seem to get beyond suggesting that we should have included a commitment to write a letter to the monetary policy committee by the end of September. I do not know if the SNP policy is that high inflation throughout the UK is good for the Scottish economy; that is certainly not my policy. The SNP admitted during the election campaign that in an independent Scotland it would shadow what would then be the English pound, without any opportunity at all for influence. I do not understand how John Swinney can criticise as he has done today.

Mr Swinney: Does Mr Wallace believe that the economy of Scotland is overheating? I presume that that is what he means by high inflation throughout the UK. Does he believe that yesterday's announcement on interest rates was helpful to the Scottish economy?

Mr Wallace: I have indicated how well the Scottish economy is performing. I will return to that because it is an important part of the Government's work.

Members attacked the photos in the document because they cannot attack the text. It would have been interesting if Alex Salmond had told us which of the commitments on the back cover of the

document he supports and which ones he does not, rather than concentrating on the origin of those various commitments.

In spite of a lot of fury, froth and allegations of spin, it has been a feature of the debate that members have said precious little about whether they support any or all of the commitments. If they do not support them, what alternatives would they put in their place? With one or two honourable exceptions—

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I think that Mrs Scanlon was first.

Mary Scanlon: I support the progress of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Does the minister support it and what will he do to address the £4 million deficit at Inverness college, the lead college in the UHI network?

Mr Wallace: Not only do I support the UHI, but I can claim to be one of the first MPs to call for it to be established. The fact that the university has made much progress is a source of great satisfaction to me. The university is widely welcomed in the Highlands and Islands and I am pleased to have the opportunity to endorse that welcome.

On Inverness college, Mrs Scanlon probably knows that responsibility for the financial position of Scotland's further education colleges has, since 1 July, been a matter for the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. That council was informed last week of the financial situation faced by Inverness college, and I understand that the council engaged with the college as a matter of priority to consider what action is required to address the situation.

Mr Salmond: On the subject of support, the main point of the launch of the Liberal campaign in Hamilton seemed to be to oppose Labour's attacks on the poor and vulnerable. I know it is—to coin a phrase—devilishly difficult to oppose the Labour party in Hamilton and to support it in Edinburgh, but does the Deputy First Minister support his party's candidate in Hamilton?

Mr Wallace: As has been said, the Scottish National party seems to be incapable of understanding that the partnership is a coalition for the Scottish Parliament. In Westminster, I sit on the Opposition benches, as does Mr Salmond. It is not exactly the great secret of Scottish politics that, after the first Cabinet meeting that the Executive held, the First Minister and I travelled to London together and voted against each other in a debate on disability allowances, which are a Westminster responsibility. I disagreed with the

Labour Government's policy on them. There is nothing unconstitutional about that.

The important thing is that this Parliament should work in partnership with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mrs Margaret Ewing: If the minister is saying that there are times when he disagrees with Labour at Westminster, does he see there being occasions when he may disagree with them in Scotland?

Mr Wallace: There may well be disagreements, which is why we have Cabinet meetings to try to resolve them. Mrs Ewing fails to understand a fundamental constitutional position. Furthermore, we have still not heard which of our pledges the SNP would sign up to.

Mr McLetchie, predictably, made reference to the photographs in the document. We did not hear much about an alternative strategy for Scotland. Indeed, his biggest criticism of the Executive was that we were giving priority to legislation on fox hunting. There is no reference to fox hunting in the document, because the measures on fox hunting were proposed by an individual member. The Executive has indicated that there will be a free vote on the principle. Fox hunting is not an issue in the Executive's programme.

David McLetchie: Does the minister acknowledge that the Executive controls the parliamentary timetable through the Parliamentary Bureau? Therefore, the view that the Executive takes of the progress, timetabling and prioritisation of members' bills is germane to whether they are approved.

Mr Wallace: I am a democrat and I believe that if there is widespread support across all parties, including Mr McLetchie's, for the measure to be debated, the Parliament would not come out of it well if it tried to frustrate the debate.

Mr McLetchie exposed the Conservative party's weak flank—the damage that the previous Conservative Government did to rural Scotland through its mishandling of the BSE crisis. That can be contrasted with our setting up a rural affairs department, which was one of the first acts of this Government. The department, headed by Ross Finnie, was set up to ensure that the wide-ranging issues affecting rural Scotland—not only agriculture, fishing and forestry, but all the other issues germane to the well-being of rural Scotland—came together.

The minister is addressing some of the real problems that face Scottish agriculture by bringing forward the industry's marketing plans to stimulate the export market, by trying to secure a private storage scheme and by trying to establish a cull ewe scheme in Scotland.

Those initiatives have been widely welcomed by the industry and in the Highlands and Islands. Alex Johnstone, Convener of the Rural Affairs Committee, has also acknowledged the setting up of an independent appeals mechanism for farmers who have complaints or who feel that they have been unfairly penalised in their claims for European subsidies.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I have taken a number of interventions. I will come back to Mr Morgan later.

People have made claims of spin and presentation, but if one examines the programme in detail, it is not about spin and presentation, but about real issues. We have made a pledge on the rough sleepers initiative, mentioned by Keith Harding and Fiona Hyslop. A total of 138 extra hostel places have been or will be provided and, in the first year of the initiative, 1,200 people were taken in. The first evaluation report on the rough sleepers initiative came out relatively recently. It pointed out that the issue was one not only of hostel provision, but of being able to move on to the next stage and provide people with supported tenancies.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I will just finish this point.

In response to the evaluation report, Wendy Alexander, the Minister for Communities, has already indicated that we will provide support workers. This is not a question of spin or of presentation—we are taking action. The purpose of this commitment is to tackle real problems with real measures and to be held to account on the timetable that we have set out.

Tricia Marwick: If it is not a question of spin or of presentation, surely it is a question of timing. Will the minister explain why, only six months ago, Calum Macdonald said that there would be no one sleeping rough on the streets of Scotland by 2002, while the Executive's target is 2003? How much further back will the target go?

Mr Wallace: As I have said, the first evaluation report of the rough sleepers initiative indicated that the initiative should not be limited to the route that it had already been going down, such as building hostels and providing hostel places, but that it needed to be refocused in order to give more support to people who pass through the hostels. That is being done and the initiative has been refocused. The Executive gives a pledge in "Making it work together", a pledge that I am confident that we can meet, which links to our pledges on tackling poverty and promoting a social inclusion strategy.

John Swinney asked about targets. The document says:

"We will work in partnership with the UK Government to tackle child poverty and raise over 60,000 children out of poverty in Scotland by 2002."

The document also refers to the regeneration of Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods and to the healthy homes initiative, which will give priority to the elderly and those on low incomes.

As Duncan McNeil rightly observed, in an intervention during Alex Neil's speech, the most direct route out of poverty is a job. The document also refers to our intentions regarding the promotion of the enterprise culture in Scotland. There is no complacency on jobs and employment. This morning, the First Minister read out a long list of new jobs that have been announced in the past 10 days. The International Labour Organisation's unemployment rate for Scotland is well below the European Union average, and the claimant count is at its lowest since 1976.

We believe that an enterprise economy that focuses on the education and skills of our young people is the way forward, in order to ensure that those jobs exist in the future. Nursery places, investment in books and equipment and early intervention in primary schools to improve children's standards of literacy and numeracy all add up to ensuring that we have a well-skilled and educated young population that is able to contribute to Scotland's future prosperity.

Sylvia Jackson spoke about the importance of partnership. The document "Making it work together" reflects the partnership agreement between the Labour party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the partnership that we, as an Executive, want to have with this Parliament and with its committees in implementing many of those measures. We believe that the partnership is important within the United Kingdom in order to ensure that Scotland gets the best deal. Above all, the partnership is with the people of Scotland.

Many of us fought and worked for a Scottish Parliament because we believed that, when we had a Parliament that could determine Scotland's domestic agenda, we could make a difference to the lives of the people of Scotland. When the pledges in this document are implemented on the timetable that we have set, they will make a difference to the people of Scotland—a difference for the better.

I beg members to support the motion.

The Presiding Officer: The debate on the Government's programme is concluded. The amendment and the motion will be put to the vote at 5 o'clock.

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is the debate on motion S1M-131, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on time for reflection in the chamber. There is an amendment to the motion. It is a very short debate, and I ask members who wish to speak to keep their speeches as brief as possible.

16:24

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): Members will be aware that the first motion to be debated in this Parliament was on the subject of prayers, and that that motion led to the Parliament being called upon to make arrangements for the introduction of prayers. The motion before members today details those arrangements.

Careful consideration was given to the initial debate and that resulted in a wide-ranging consultation. Invitations were issued to representatives of a wide cross-section of beliefs in Scotland to come and discuss their views with the Parliamentary Bureau. That led to an extremely well-attended meeting on 6 July and that discussion proved positive and constructive.

The meeting greatly assisted the Parliamentary Bureau to draft this proposal, and on behalf of the bureau, and I think the whole Parliament, I want to put on record our appreciation to those who represented the various beliefs at that meeting. Members will know from their postbags that we have received substantial correspondence from organisations and from individuals, and members have my assurance that all that was taken into consideration during the formulation of the motion.

In essence, what is recommended is that time for reflection should comprise mainly Christian prayers, but the critical underlying principle is that it will allocate time to all the main beliefs held in Scotland. The aim is simply to reflect the diversity of our country as it is today.

No member of this Parliament will need to be reminded that our proceedings are reported widely. We have of necessity been required to discuss founding matters that make us easy targets for criticism. Today we are again discussing a founding principle, a convention that undoubtedly carries importance for many. For that reason, I plead with all members to remember that how we decide an issue can be as important as what we decide. Irrespective of individual views or beliefs, let us remember how readily and easily our new Parliament, our new institution, can be misjudged. We have a duty to show by example that we are a tolerant and open legislature that is content with the pursuit of social inclusion.

I will spend a few moments on the specifics of the motion. It is proposed that time for reflection be held as the first item of business at the start of our plenary week. It is also proposed, as an indication of the importance attached to this development, that time for reflection be included in the *Official Report*, to form part of the record of parliamentary proceedings.

The motion further advances the strong view that the people of Scotland should be able to share the time for reflection with members. In that spirit, those who lead reflection will be asked to address the whole of Scotland as well as members in the chamber. The motion seeks to reflect and respect the views and beliefs of as many of Scotland's citizens as possible. I am sure that it is there that some will disagree. I hope that we can debate any disagreement in a way that brings credit to our institution. I firmly believe that further credit will be given because time for reflection will be held in public, which is in keeping with the spirit and aspirations of our new Parliament.

The Parliamentary Bureau considered the procedures to be adopted during time for reflection. We were not minded to instruct members or the public not to enter or leave during reflection, but we hope that a convention can be established that encourages restraint during that time. Work will be done on the pattern to be followed by those coming to the chamber to lead reflection. As members will know, any non-member requires an invitation to address the Parliament and it is proposed that that be issued by the Presiding Officer following advice from the Parliamentary Bureau. If the motion is approved, the bureau will consider who should be among the first to lead reflection.

Before moving the motion, I will make a few brief remarks about Phil Gallie's amendment. It is recommended that time for reflection will comprise mainly Christian prayers. However, there is a responsibility on all of us to ensure that this Parliament is inclusive and that it represents all parts of Scotland. By approaching time for reflection in the way outlined in the motion, I firmly believe that we will achieve the balance between Scotland's traditional Christian culture, as outlined by Mr Gallie, and the reality of Scotland as it is today.

We have a duty to represent all our constituents of whatever faith and of none. I believe that the motion is the best way to achieve that.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, further to the decision on motion S1M-1 on Prayers, the provision of a Time for Reflection should be as outlined below—

Time for Reflection will be held in the Chamber in a

meeting of the Parliament normally as the first item of business each week;

Time for Reflection will be held in public and will be addressed both to Members and to the Scottish people;

Time for Reflection will last for a maximum of four minutes;

Time for Reflection will follow a pattern based on the balance of beliefs in Scotland; invitations to address the Parliament in leading Time for Reflection will be issued by the Presiding Officer on advice from the Parliamentary Bureau;

Time for Reflection will be recorded in the Official Report.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McCabe.

There is very little chance that I will be able to call everyone who wants to speak unless contributions are brief.

I call Mr Gallie to move his amendment.

16:35

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I would like to use the lectern. I usually speak without too many notes, but I have some today as the debate is very important.

My amendment deletes "the balance of beliefs" from Mr McCabe's motion, and calls on the Parliament to commence the week's meetings of the Parliament with a Christian thought and prayer. That is not through bigotry or intolerance, but through my firmly held view that it is everyone's right to follow their religious belief as they choose.

Scotland and the United Kingdom's records are exemplary. My wish is that the same religious tolerance be observed throughout the world. I can imagine the reaction in Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran or Jerusalem should it be suggested that Christian prayers be said before their Parliaments' business commenced.

I offer no criticism of those countries for treasuring their religious beliefs and practices. My amendment is based not on race but on Scotland's traditional culture and faith. Surely no one in the chamber will deny Scotland's place in the family of Christian nations or, indeed, the worldwide Christian community.

The reality of Scotland today is illustrated in the 1991 census, which shows that only 1.3 per cent of the Scottish population is made up of ethnic minorities. Within that, the Chinese community has a large proportion of Christians and there are a number of Asian Christian Churches throughout Scotland.

Scotland's Christian faith can be said to date back to the 1st century, when the Roman legions were here. It was not until early in the 5th century that the Celtic Church could be said to have

established firm foundations. Scotland's first bishop, St Ninian, established a church in Whithorn and St Mungo established his in Glasgow at that time—just before Columba arrived on Iona in 563.

The Celtic Church progressed into the medieval period, when a greater identification with western Christendom developed. That was almost certainly led by Queen Margaret, the wife of Malcolm Canmore of Dunfermline abbey fame.

The reformation saw Scotland revert to a more nationally aligned approach to religious observance and that, to an extent, remains today. However, it recognises broader Church interests and is inclusive as a result of the welcome ecumenical movement.

Perhaps an indication of the importance that we and other nations place on Christianity is the fact that our calendar is based on the date of Christ's birth. Our main holidays of Christmas and Easter relate to his birth and to his death on the cross.

Through the centuries, Scots have travelled the world doing good work and promoting Christ's name with great success. I think of Livingstone and Slessor and, in more recent times, Eric Liddle—who was certainly not prepared to compromise his Christianity.

As a Christian—albeit one whose commitment could at times be challenged—I am obliged to agree with the many who have written to me, and I am very thankful to those who wrote letters that I received today. They urge that we should not turn our back on Christian philosophy—that we should not turn our back on the commandments. Surely it must be wrong for any Christian to do other than promote his or her beliefs, and to cut across the very foundation of Christian belief by transgressing the first commandment:

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

I move, as an amendment to motion S1M-131, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to leave out from “the balance” to “Bureau” and insert

“the traditional Christian culture and faith of Scotland”.

The Presiding Officer: Before calling Brian Adam, I appeal for three-minute speeches so that I can include more members.

16:40

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I thank Phil Gallie and, in particular, Mr McCabe, given the reservations that he expressed at our first debate on this subject. The measured response that he delivered today was most welcome.

I understand Mr Gallie's point of view, but I do

not share it. It is difficult, given the correspondence that we have all had from people who hold views strongly and dearly, but the view which suggests that those not of the Christian faith would be welcome to offer prayers and thoughts somewhere other than in the chamber scarcely reflects the inclusive society that we are trying to foster. I do not want us to say to some segments of our society that their faiths are somehow lesser, or that they can express their view in some hole in the corner, somewhere other than in the chamber, while some privileged people are allowed to address the whole nation and the whole Parliament.

I regret that there has been such an approach. I know that Mr Gallie is not attempting to divide on sectarian or other grounds—I accept that. In my view, the only way that we can adopt a Christian outlook is to recognise that there are differences. We do not have to accept what others say to us as our own beliefs, but it is only reasonable that we include them and allow them the opportunity to share their beliefs. If we are occasionally called on to accept views that we do not like, we do not have to be present—it is not compulsory.

I welcome Mr McCabe's suggestion that we respect the time for reflection and do not walk in and out during it, although I understand the difficulty in enforcement.

I welcome Mr McCabe's motion and hope that, despite Mr Gallie's well-meaning personal beliefs, we do not support a view that could be seen as exclusive rather than inclusive.

16:43

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Although I voted against the original motion for prayers, I fully accept, as a democrat, that the majority voted that day for a time for reflection. I recollect that most speakers stressed the need for it to be multi-faith, including all the people of Scotland.

If we are to be inclusive, it is important that we recognise all the religions and none in present-day Scotland. In order fully to respect the diversity of belief in Scotland, it is important that the time for reflection reflects that, and I do not think that that could be the case if we accepted Phil Gallie's amendment.

16:44

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): As the member who lodged the original prayers motion, as it became known, I would like to commend the Parliamentary Bureau for coming up with a speedy and, as far as I am concerned, wholly acceptable solution to what must have been a difficult conundrum: how to balance the

requirement for what Donald Gorrie called proportional praying in the original debate with the quite understandable traditional desire for Christian-only prayers, as proposed by my colleague, Phil Gallie. I freely confess that that desire has dominated my mailbag by a ratio of some 70:1. I have read and replied to every one of those letters, and have had most of the Bible quoted at me in their text.

One quotation was not thrust in my direction. It is the one quotation that should most influence the decision that we are about to take, that we should "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". That is a maxim with which I can find no cause to disagree, and which we would do well to adopt as a Parliament. It is, above all, a maxim that promotes tolerance.

If we intend to be a tolerant Parliament, as I hope we do, we must allow MSPs who are not of a Christian persuasion a recognised moment of comfort alongside the rest of us before business begins. Whatever form of contemplation is held on a given day will not prevent me or anyone else, as a practising Christian, from finding comfort from my particular god. If there is no other Parliament in the world that has such a practice, I am sorry—so what? To my mind, that is a reason for us to adopt a new, open and welcoming procedure as we enter both a new phase of Scottish democracy and the new millennium. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you": that is not a bad way to live. I support the motion and commend it to the chamber.

16:46

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I support the motion in the name of Tom McCabe and oppose the amendment being proposed by Phil Gallie. I accept the view of Phil Gallie, that Christians have a duty to promote Christianity, but I do not agree with his amendment.

My view is based on acceptance and belief, and on the need to value and support all faiths throughout Scotland. When we reflect or pray, our prayers are about asking for wisdom, knowledge, support and encouragement in all that we do to help each other and for Scotland as a whole. That work brings shoulder to shoulder Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and members of all the other religions. We need to value and respect all the different cultures and religions that make up the Scotland of today and of tomorrow. Tonight at 6 pm I shall meet Dharmendra Kanani, the new senior officer for Scotland for the Commission for Racial Equality, and I shall take that message to him.

If Tom McCabe's motion is agreed to, as I hope it will be, I ask the Parliamentary Bureau to

consider including schoolchildren in leading the prayers at least some of the time. I ask that a different child be selected on each occasion, from different schools throughout Scotland. In that way, children of all races and religions will come to accept and understand that we believe in them, and that we value them as the flowers of our future.

16:47

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I support the motion. Like other members, I received many letters until it got to the point at which I had to give a standard reply. My suggestion was, and remains, that we should invite people with something to say to speak to us at the commencement of business on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. After those short talks, there should be a period for reflection and, on occasion and where appropriate, a Christian prayer or prayer from another religion, when MSPs can signify their inclusion in any way they see fit.

The motion in the name of Tom McCabe is close enough to my original ideas on the subject, and I enthusiastically recommend it to the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. Donald Gorrie, can you manage the same brevity?

16:48

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): That is a challenge. I strongly support the motion. It reflects the views that were put forward in the previous debate. I sympathise with the sincere people who somehow feel that we are deserting Christianity. Members and others who are Christians strongly believe that their views are correct: that theirs is the true God, that Christ is their redeemer, and so on. They must accept that other people believe equally strongly in their various faiths.

Recognising that does not mean that Christians surrender their faith and go along with the other faiths. People who belong to those other faiths are our fellow citizens and they deserve an opportunity for prayers in proportion to their number—which, as others have said, will arise on fewer occasions than for those from the Church of Scotland or the Roman Catholic faith. We are not deserting our faith; we are recognising their commitment to their faith. We can all learn from the wise statements, prayers and sentiments that are expressed by others. I listen to speeches by members of other parties with whom I strongly disagree, but they believe what they say and they have the right to say it. That is democracy. We are trying to introduce a kind of religious democracy, in which we do not desert our own belief but we recognise other people's beliefs. It is a remarkably civilised

concept and I very strongly commend it.

16:49

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): As a practising Christian I notice that no one has yet spoken of tolerance. If Christianity is about one thing, it is about tolerance. I agree with Donald Gorrie that there is no risk to anyone's own belief in the proposal. I feel that the Parliament must signal very clearly that we tolerate a broad spectrum of views in our society and that worship is to be encouraged. I support the motion.

16:50

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): It is with some trepidation that I rise to speak because, for me, religious practice is a private matter and I guard that privacy carefully. Nevertheless, since I have some concerns that I hope Mr McCabe will be able to answer, I feel compelled to contribute. I agree with the saying that the only difference between the sacrilegious and the sanctimonious is that at least the sacrilegious have a sense of humour. I hope my comments are not seen as either.

I hope that when we vote we do it for the right reasons. I agree that if prayers are to form part of the procedure of the Parliament, they must include all denominations in this country. If we are to be representative, so must the prayers. I am concerned, however, that the debate is more about gestures and perceptions than about the actual form of the prayers. If we are to pray together, it should be to our and the country's spiritual benefit; political perceptions must be set aside.

As a Christian I would like to refer to teachings of the Bible which guide my views. In Matthew, chapter 6, it says, do not

"parade your uprightness in public"

and

"when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers ... at the street corners for people to see them."

We are further told to:

"go to your private room".

I am also aware that the Bible teaches us not to judge and I am trying not to do so. If prayer is considered to be a private matter and one that should be left to the Churches, then the motion should be opposed. I do not want to do that, but I am concerned that we have here an attempt to posture and to gesture. I only ask that when we vote we do so for the right reasons and that we vote to make this an inclusive Parliament—I am concerned that that might not be the case. When

members vote, please be honest.

The Presiding Officer: I call on Michael Russell to wind up on behalf of the bureau.

16:53

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I appreciate Michael McMahon's point, which is valid. These prayers will be public, and, as Tom McCabe has said, they will be prayers for the whole of Scotland. We should focus upon the reflection and not on ourselves. It raises also the issue of television coverage and I hope that we do that in a way that focuses on the reflection itself rather than on the members' reflection on the reflection. The bureau has discussed the way in which the reflections might take place—

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I was interested in what Michael McMahon said and there is a case for private rather than public prayer. I am surprised to hear that this is going to be televised. Is that the implication of what is being said?

Michael Russell: That is an issue that has still to be resolved, but I would have thought that, if it is done, it cannot be in the conventional way with a wide picture. The reflection will be recorded in the *Official Report*. There is an argument for televising it, because in the motion we are saying that this is an event that would, we hope, lead the people of Scotland to reflect with the Parliament. If it is to be televised, it should be done in order to lead the people of Scotland.

That is an issue for another day. What we want to do here is begin the process. I say to Phil Gallie and two other Tory speakers that there is an issue of tolerance here. The ecclesiastical history of Scotland has been a move from toleration to tolerance. Toleration means saying that other people are entitled to their religious beliefs, but that that must not interfere with the primary position of a particular faith.

Phil Gallie rose—

Michael Russell: If Mr Gallie will let me finish my point, I will let him intervene.

There is a way to move from toleration to genuine tolerance, and that is to say that, while one may not share other people's views, they must be listened to. This motion is moving Scotland, at last, from a position of toleration to one of tolerance, and that is a position that most of us in this chamber would agree with. This is an inclusive matter. We should be tolerant of other faiths.

I will give way to Mr Morgan, because Mr Gallie seems to have given up.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): Mr McCabe said that it was necessary to recognise those of all faiths and of none. By definition, people who have a faith tend to be more organised than are those who have no faith. Is it the intention of the motion that on occasion, people from non-faith organisations, such as humanists, will be asked along?

Michael Russell: Yes, the Humanist Society of Scotland is on the list of organisations that have been consulted and it will be involved, and that is important.

Phil Gallie: Will Mr Russell concede that in my remarks I emphasised tolerance, and my acceptance that everyone in Scotland and the UK has the right to follow their own beliefs? I based my comments on those points.

Michael Russell: Absolutely, and that is the point that I am making, but there is a difference between toleration and tolerance, and I am asking this Parliament to show tolerance. Today, we can show an example of tolerance.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): This is more than a question of toleration: it is a matter of celebration of unity and diversity. We must not just tolerate: we should be proud of an inclusive approach that is different from that which many institutions have had in the past. It is vitally important that this Parliament supports the bureau's motion by acclamation.

Michael Russell: As ever, Mr Salmond has anticipated me, because I was going to say that in my last sentence. It makes a change for Mr Salmond to write for me. [*Laughter.*] When we move from toleration to tolerance, we end up with celebration. We should be saying to the people of Scotland that this is how we should celebrate our inclusiveness, our new nation and the way that we envision this country. I ask members to support the motion.

The Presiding Officer: Before we come to decision time there are three matters that we must dispose of without debate.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) to apply for admission to membership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, such membership to be effective immediately on approval of the application by the General Assembly of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;

(b) to abide by the provisions of the Constitution of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;

(c) the required membership fee be paid to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; and

(d) that this motion be communicated to the Secretariat of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association immediately following agreement.—[*Mr McNulty.*]

Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the following Orders be approved—

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/26) and,

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/27).—[*Mr McCabe.*]

Public Finance and Audit Bill (Lead Committee)

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Audit Committee is designated as Lead Committee in consideration of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill.—[*Mr McCabe.*]

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are seven questions that I must put to the chamber. The first is, that amendment S1M-127.1, in the name of Mr Alex Salmond, which seeks to amend motion S1M-127 on the Executive programme for government, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce JP (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)

Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Iain (Ayr) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 65, Abstentions 14.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S1M-127, in the name of the First Minister, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case there will be a division.

FOR

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)

(LD)

Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Ian (Ayr) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce JP (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is as follows: For 65, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament endorses the contents of *Making It Work Together: A Programme for Government*.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S1M-131.1, in the name of Phil Gallie, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case there will be a division.

FOR

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce JP (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)

Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Ian (Ayr) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 9, Against 99, Abstentions 3.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that S1M-131, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case there will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce JP (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Ian (Ayr) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 91, Against 7, Abstentions 13.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that, further to the decision on motion S1M-1 on Prayers, the provision of a Time for Reflection should be as outlined below—

Time for Reflection will be held in the Chamber in a meeting of the Parliament normally as the first item of business each week;

Time for Reflection will be held in public and will be addressed both to Members and to the Scottish people;

Time for Reflection will last for a maximum of four minutes;

Time for Reflection will follow a pattern based on the balance of beliefs in Scotland; invitations to address the

Parliament in leading Time for Reflection will be issued by the Presiding Officer on advice from the Parliamentary Bureau;

Time for Reflection will be recorded in the Official Report.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S1M-96, in the name of Des McNulty, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) to apply for admission to membership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, such membership to be effective immediately on approval of the application by the General Assembly of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;

(b) to abide by the provisions of the Constitution of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;

(c) the required membership fee be paid to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; and

(d) that this motion be communicated to the Secretariat of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association immediately following agreement.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S1M-134, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Orders be approved—

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/26) and,

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (Scotland) Order 1999 (SSI 1999/27).

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that motion S1M-139, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Audit Committee is designated as Lead Committee in consideration of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill.

Clackmannanshire and West Fife (Unemployment)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We move to the debate on members' business, on motion S1M-116, in the name of Mr Nick Johnston.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament calls the Scottish Ministers' attention to the problems of social and economic deprivation caused by escalating unemployment in Clackmannanshire and West Fife.

17:04

Mr Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to dedicate my first members' motion to highlighting the plight of the communities of west Fife and Clackmannanshire.

Clackmannanshire is the smallest unitary authority in the UK and has recently suffered a sequence of job losses. The loss of another 140 jobs with the closure of Patons mill in Alloa is the latest disaster to hit this small, compact and depressed area. Once the hunting grounds of Robert the Bruce, over the past century the wee county and its neighbours have, like the rest of Scotland, experienced a great change in the nature of their industries.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order. I am sorry, but I cannot hear.

Mr Johnston: I will give Mrs Scanlon a copy of my speech later.

The Presiding Officer: Will members who are leaving the chamber please do so as quietly as possible? Mr Johnston, you have the floor.

Mr Johnston: The area has lost brewing, mining and textiles. Patons, which used to employ 3,000 people, has now withdrawn, switching production to China—a sad reflection on Gordon Brown and his sterling policies, which have stopped exports and sucked in cheap imports. Yesterday's interest rate rise will be met with horror by the small businesses of Clackmannanshire.

During the past 10 years, more than 6,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost—350 in the past month and more than 1,100 in the past 12 months. However, the problem runs much deeper than that and the exact root causes need to be identified and dealt with.

In the recent spate of redundancies and closures, Clackmannanshire is not unique. Fife west of the M90 is another area that has suffered high unemployment and social deprivation,

especially in the former mining villages. The current rumours of threats to almost 1,000 jobs at Babcock Rosyth will inevitably inflict further hardship on that part of Scotland and along the north shore of the Forth estuary. Rosyth and Dunfermline are within the Clackmannanshire travel-to-work area, and a decrease in employment opportunities in those places will have a major impact in Clackmannanshire. Unemployment has already risen to nearly double the national average—to 11 per cent—and female unemployment has risen by 36 per cent.

The area's problems are well documented by the Henley Centre rankings. Despite that, it has initiated some very worthwhile projects, in conjunction with Forth Valley Enterprise and Fife Enterprise. I welcome the fact that the councils have made provision for small businesses and created opportunities for social technology partnerships, such as the Alloa SMART village and the exciting new Rosyth Europark project.

Ten days ago, following the announcement of the closure of Kilncraig mill with the loss of 240 jobs, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning attended a meeting in Alloa with local council officials, enterprise companies, councillors, the Westminster MP and the three local MSPs. As a result of that meeting, he agreed to the cross-party request for urgent action to provide aid to the area, for which the other MSPs and I are very grateful.

One heartening aspect of this situation has been the almost unanimous non-partisan approach to the problems of the area. I say almost, as I must make an exception for the MSP for Dunfermline West, who refused to support my motion on the ground that no problems exist. It is nice to know that Mr Barrie has his finger on the pulse.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Johnston: The member is down to speak, and he can do so later.

The package promised was for half a million quid, and it is surely not coincidental that it has grown as a result of this debate. I must lodge more motions if that is the sort of aid that can pop out of the Government's pocket.

We now know that the package adds up to about £1.5 million, to be given through Forth Valley Enterprise and targeted through the strategic alliance. I promise to raise with the minister the possibility of bringing forward the planning stage for the new Forth crossing, a commitment to the further training of redundant and unemployed workers, and the involvement of the Executive by way of civil service participation in the strategic alliance. All the MPs and MSPs for the area welcome that.

These moves are welcome, but against the background of unemployment levels twice the Scottish average and of a demoralised and dispirited local work force, are they enough? In my view, they are not. What Mr McLeish could do, however—at no cost to the Executive, but much to his credit—is initiate within the Executive a co-ordinated approach to the problems of Clackmannanshire and west Fife. We now need concentrated effort from the Executive to improve the transport infrastructure of the area: specifically, the expedition of the new Forth crossing; completion of the upgrading of the A907; a new link from Rosyth to Stirling; a push to reopen the railway between Stirling and Alloa; refinement of the map for assisted area status; and objective 2 status, to give fuller eligibility for European funds. That is not the full extent of my shopping list, but it will do for now because other members want to speak.

A full and frank appraisal of the role that Forth Valley Enterprise plays would be productive. There is a rising barrage of criticism in the business community about the role of the local enterprise companies, and I will be asking why the aid is being directed as it is.

Clackmannanshire is an ideal candidate for investigation of the roles played by local government, central Government and statutory bodies such as the enterprise companies and the tourist board. I will be asking the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to take the opportunity to pay close attention to the outcome of this aid and this approach. It is the responsibility of all those bodies to work together to encourage inward investment.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I have received Mr Johnston's request, and representations from other members about the role that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee can play in relation to the issues that he raises.

The points will be raised with the committee next Wednesday, when we will establish our work programme for the following year.

Mr Johnston: Thank you, John.

In a recent reply to a question, Sarah Boyack said that, providing everything goes to plan, work on a replacement for the Kincardine bridge could start in 2003. The bridge will take around four years to build and will be built only if the Government releases the money. In the current economic climate, there is no guarantee of that happening and no business will make plans for inward investment under such conditions. The policy puts in doubt the long-term future of Longannet power station, which depends on road-delivered coal, which it blends with the deep coal

from the Longannet complex.

The recent closure of Downie's Bridge showed how isolated Clackmannanshire is. Industry needs transport to bring raw materials in and take finished goods out. Alloa is the only town of its size in Scotland not to be served by rail. Several local industries could make good use of rail transport if it was available. The Forth was, for centuries, the major import and export route out of Stirling. The monopoly of Forth Ports must be removed and Alloa docks must be reopened to shipping from the continent. Improved road and rail transport on the north side of the Forth will enhance the prospects for the proposed roll-on roll-off ferry at Rosyth.

All those proposals were in the Government's promises on coming to power. Why are they not being implemented? Not only would they help to reduce unemployment in west Fife and Clackmannanshire, they would reduce traffic on the Forth and Kincardine bridges, which is part of the Government's policy.

We have the will, the expertise and the pool of labour to be retrained. We need the political will to invest in the infrastructure and an innovative approach to solving our problems. I hope that the minister will show that he has the political clout to deliver.

17:13

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to address the chamber on this matter. As Nick said, Clackmannanshire has suffered from the decline of traditional industries, although in the case of the mining industry the suffering was significantly exacerbated by his party's Government.

The most recent decline has been in the wool and textiles industry. That problem is not only local; all the developed world is suffering as the industry moves to developing countries. In the past 20 years, the Government has funded few—if any—manufacturing jobs in Clackmannanshire. Clackmannanshire has received only a small share of the funds that have been made available for job creation through bodies such as Locate in Scotland.

The recent announcement by the Coats Viyella group of the closure of its operations in Alloa is a particularly sad event. It severs a 200-year-old association between that employer—in the form of Patons—and the community. The people in the wee county have contributed much over many years to the profits of the company. The company owes a debt to those people. This week, the company was valued on the stock exchange at £350 million, so not only does it have a moral obligation, it has the funds to assist the county by

making available the sites that it occupies to other industries that might want to take up the opportunity for inward investment.

I call on the company, as the council has, to transfer the ownership of the factory sites to a mutually acceptable body—whether that be the council or a local enterprise company. The decision-making process of the Coats Viyella group and similar companies is extremely worrying and members should address it soon. The company closed three plants in one town during a five-month period without a word of warning to the employees, the unions, the council, the local enterprise companies or members of the Parliament.

I find that not just old-fashioned and out of date, but totally unacceptable and thoughtless. A previous Conservative Prime Minister said that the Rowlands companies were the unacceptable face of capitalism. To me, that is the unacceptable face of business today. It is not good practice and it is not acceptable.

I discovered the company shortly after I was elected and asked it about the effects of the minimum wage and the working time directive. Prior to the directive coming out, it was still paying its cleaning staff £2.60 per hour. We would not expect that, but I am proud of the fact that this Government has introduced a minimum wage to ensure that such things do not happen.

An issue for the future that I regard as important is the climate energy tax. The six plants in my constituency are all high energy users, but they are efficient high energy users, benchmarked against the rest of their own industry and theoretical minimum energy uses.

The energy tax that is proposed, but which has not yet been introduced, by the UK Government will disadvantage those companies against European and world competition. I urge the Scottish Executive—in discussions with our Westminster colleagues—to take great care with the jobs in my constituency and in the rest of Scotland. The tax should be about efficient energy use, not simple energy use. I support the tax in respect of its encouraging efficient energy use, but I am dismayed at the prospect of further job losses in my constituency resulting from a bludgeon tax, applied inappropriately. I therefore call for the tax to be reconsidered.

I welcome the Executive's efforts over the past few weeks. Although Nick feels that everything was produced from up our sleeves only in the past few days, some of us have been working on this with the Executive—and I know that members have been calling for it—for the past few months as the unemployment situation in the area began to deteriorate compared with the rest of Scotland.

Unemployment is still lower than it was when we came to power, but there is no doubt that it is deteriorating substantially against the rest of Scotland. That is extremely worrying.

The most important thing about the announcement is not the funds and how much money is involved initially, but the Scottish Executive's commitment to a partnership with the council, Forth Valley Enterprise and Clackmannanshire Enterprise, to ensure that there is progress over a sustained period. We can now get the direct ear of the minister without having to write or badger him daily. We can progress.

However, I appeal to the minister that we need to have adequate representation from Locate in Scotland on the committee. It must be at a level and of a nature that ensures that we obtain our share of the Locate in Scotland money. We need to have major industry, preferably in IT and biotechnology, to which the First Minister referred, and in which many jobs have been created over the past few weeks. We need them now in Clackmannanshire.

The Executive is doing its bit, with the creation of a number of jobs ranging from community police officers to child care providers. There are 194 18 to 24-year-olds on the new deal programme and 111 youngsters are involved in the modern apprenticeship programme. There is a commitment from the public sector in that area.

I have two final points. First, I welcome the initiative of the local Churches. Their support provides the moral leadership that is needed by the people of Clackmannanshire at this difficult time. Members would be welcome to come and see Clackmannanshire; it is a beautiful place to live and work. We have a backdrop of one of Scotland's most beautiful sites, the Ochil hills.

Secondly, we need good access, to which Nick referred. The A907 should be a trunk road and taken over by the Scottish Executive. We also need a date for the Clackmannanshire bridge and a rail link. Improved transport infrastructure would open up this beautiful part of the country to the job prospects that my constituents deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): Several members are indicating that they wish to speak. It is going to be impossible to accommodate everyone. I ask those who are called to keep their comments to a minimum so that we can squeeze in as many members as possible.

17:20

Mr George Reid (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As a Clackmannanshire man, I can say that the Executive has made a good start in

addressing the economic crisis in the wee county. I will confine my remarks to six matters, notice of which I have given the minister.

Although the additional funding is extremely welcome, is the minister aware that the strategic alliance action plan contains a £34 million programme, of which less than £10 million has secured commitment? Does he agree that there is therefore a demonstrable case for further funding from the Executive? Can he assure the chamber that such funding is forthcoming?

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has heard of, and often seen, many of the innovative projects that are being developed in Clackmannanshire, in particular, the SMART village in Alloa and the ambitious Clackmannanshire innovation project. Does he agree that those are nationally significant projects, which showcase Scotland as a leader in information technology and the knowledge economy? If that is recognised by the minister, will it also be recognised in Scottish Enterprise's funding criteria?

The minister has said that only 0.14 per cent of national regional selective assistance has gone into Clackmannanshire's economy; how can that be squared with Clackmannanshire's position as Scotland's unemployment black spot? Surely, as there is a need for an urgent review of Scottish manufacturing industry and the way in which it is supported, that should be considered further. Will the minister consider a manufacturing strategy, and an industrial diversification strategy, particularly for Alloa, where the decline of manufacturing has had a devastating effect on local communities?

European funds are clearly crucial to the economy. Can the minister confirm that the decisions by the Cabinet on Tuesday affirm support for objective 2 status for the whole of Clackmannanshire, and that that recommendation will be followed through with discussions in the UK Cabinet?

As there has been no inward investment in Clackmannanshire in the past 30 years, can the minister confirm that Locate in Scotland now sees Clackmannanshire as a priority, and that its newly appointed director, David Macdonald, will make an urgent visit there?

It is perfectly clear that good transport infrastructure and strategy is a critical element of a sustainable economy. Is the minister aware that Clackmannanshire is the only local authority area in Scotland that does not receive central Government subsidy for rail links and trunk road maintenance? Will he ensure that there is proper joined-up government by convincing his transport colleague, Sarah Boyack, to give

Clackmannanshire priority?

17:23

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Contrary to what Nick Johnston said, it is not true that I am not interested in the debate; rather, as I wrote to him by e-mail, I feel that the motion is factually incorrect as unemployment is not escalating in the west Fife villages.

As Richard Simpson said for Clackmannanshire, unemployment has declined dramatically in the west Fife villages over the past two or three years. That is not to say that there is not a problem in the west Fife villages, which have been ravaged by the rundown of our traditional industries in the past two or three decades.

The possibility of job losses at Babcock Rosyth, which was covered sensationally by the press last week, has been known about since the Tory Government cynically betrayed the Rosyth work force by awarding the refit contract to Devonport on political rather than financial grounds. It is nice to see Conservatives taking an interest in the west Fife economy at this late stage, but it is very much a Johnny-come-lately interest.

Over the past two decades, the people of Fife have learned to rely on themselves. They have worked closely with organisations such as West Fife Enterprise, which is based at Torryburn and Valleyfield. West Fife Enterprise has been immensely successful in driving forward job opportunities for a number of people in the villages. The recent developments of Lauder College are encouraging; its computer skills outpost at Valleyfield community centre has increased the skills base of the potential work force in the villages.

It is true that Dunfermline and west Fife have a fair number of social problems, but we should not run the area down. We should acknowledge the efforts of the local people over the years to improve their lot, and should acknowledge the fact that unemployment has declined dramatically in the past two years. The latest figures show that none of the four wards in the west Fife villages has an unemployment rate that is greater than the Fife average.

17:25

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am grateful to Nick Johnston for lodging today's motion. He has suggested a few solutions; I also welcome those of my colleague, George Reid. Most of the debate has centred on Clackmannanshire, as it should, but Scott Barrie should realise that the problems in west Fife affect places other than the villages.

Unemployment in Clackmannan and Fife is disgracefully high—almost double the UK average. If Scott can take comfort from that, he is probably the only one. The responsibility for structurally high unemployment rests with Nick Johnston and the Conservatives' scorched-earth policy in the coalfields. That is where our high unemployment came from, along with the discrimination against Rosyth. I accept that.

Scott Barrie: Will Tricia Marwick give way?

Tricia Marwick: No, I am not giving way, Scott.

Recent events have not covered the Executive in any glory. The Executive has sat back and allowed indigenous, well-run companies to go to the wall. It has invested all the enterprise eggs in Fife in the Hyundai basket. Hyundai has created few jobs apart from in construction, and most of them were not in Fife.

I give fair warning here and now on Rosyth. I accept that we have known about the problems of Rosyth and its contracts for a long time. However, it is the Labour Government that is responsible for allocating those contracts. Rosyth has the best workers in the United Kingdom, the most skilled and the most qualified. If Rosyth goes down the tubes, the Labour party in Fife will not be forgiven, in the same way that the SNP does not forgive Nick Johnston and the Conservatives for the years from 1979 to 1997.

Rosyth must stay. I want a commitment from the Scottish Executive that it will fight for Rosyth to ensure that those jobs are retained.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Brian Monteith as the last speaker before the minister sums up on behalf of the Executive.

17:27

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer—I did not think that I would be called at all.

I thank Nick Johnston for bringing the motion to everyone's attention. Because of the shortage of time, I will rattle through a number of points.

We should consider two aspects. The first is macro-economic policy—not just in the Scottish Parliament, but in other bodies—which would help Clackmannanshire and other areas that might become like it. We should work at all levels to encourage free trade to open up new markets that will allow the creation of new jobs.

Secondly, we should support the pound. We should reject the concepts of a "one-interest-rate-fixes-all" policy and the euro. If we were to join the euro, there would certainly be more problems like those in Clackmannanshire. We should also examine the issue of high social costs. There is

high unemployment in Germany.

We have heard that unemployment has been falling in Clackmannanshire, as indeed it has been in the rest of the UK. That fall in unemployment is a trend that was started by the Conservative Government and taken over by Labour, but I am beginning to suspect that what is now happening in Clackmannanshire represents the reversal of that trend. If we are to ensure that there is no such reversal, we must avoid high social costs, encourage free trade and keep the pound.

I also want to touch on micro-economic policy. It is important to bring particular help to Clackmannanshire to allow Forth Valley Enterprise and its partners to improve the transport infrastructure. That will help to bring new work to the area.

The Executive should also consider potential planning obstacles to entrepreneurs and businesses in setting up and expanding their ventures. It should consider what can be done to open up competition. Nick's idea about the monopoly of Forth Ports was good: we should consider how we can break down cartels and monopolies that prevent jobs from being created.

I thank Nick for bringing the issue to the Parliament's attention. We look forward to trying to do more as a Parliament to help the unemployed in Clackmannanshire.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Nicol Stephen to close the debate. You have five minutes, Mr Stephen.

17:31

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): I will do my best.

I thank Nick Johnston for initiating the debate and for raising some important issues. I hope that everyone will agree that the opportunity to discuss the issues so speedily following the unfortunate job losses in Clackmannanshire in recent weeks is one of the considerable benefits of having the Scottish Parliament.

I welcome John Swinney's speech, indicating that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee will be able to discuss the matter very soon.

I thank Nick Johnston for his support for the quick action that has been taken, and for saying that these matters should be advanced on a cross-party basis, an opinion with which I strongly agree. I also thank Richard Simpson for his contribution. I assure him that Forth Valley Enterprise is in discussion with Coats Viyella to secure the release of sites for future redevelopment, and that Henry

McLeish is writing to the United Kingdom Government about the climate change levy. No decision has been taken yet as to how that levy will be applied.

If I am to keep to time, I will have to rattle through several issues. I especially want to thank George Reid for giving me notice of his questions; I will take up some of them now, but I will try to respond separately in writing to the ones that I do not cover.

It is clear that there has been a considerable number of job losses—too many. However, it is important to remember that there have been some good-news stories as well: BSKyB has created over 600 jobs in Dunfermline; and even in Clackmannanshire, where the problems have been greater, there has been success in the retail and textile sectors.

I do not want to state whether the following represents good or bad news—the facts speak for themselves—but for the record, Clackmannanshire now has an unemployment rate of 9 per cent, which is down from 10.4 per cent last year and down from 12.8 per cent back in 1996. The Scottish average is down from 6 per cent to 5.7 per cent. In the Dunfermline travel-to-work area, the rate is down from 7.5 per cent to 6.2 per cent. We all agree that those figures are too high.

On infrastructure, I understand that representations have been made to try to bring forward, if possible, the publication of the orders for the Clackmannanshire bridge—the new crossing of the Forth. The time scale that is being talked about is spring 2001, and I know that Henry McLeish will be considering that.

Henry McLeish is aware of the disruption that was caused by the recent emergency work on the A907, and I can readily understand the desire to upgrade it. However, it is not a trunk road, and those decisions are a matter for Clackmannanshire Council.

In relation to the proposed Stirling-Alloa-Dunfermline rail link, the Executive is committed to getting more people on to public transport and is aware of Clackmannanshire Council's application for public transport fund support to reopen the link. We await the results with interest.

To make progress, I shall skip over some of my comments. The encouraging example that I referred to earlier is Castleblair, which has created 120 textile jobs at Alva. Henry McLeish visited the company, and a number of people from one of the earlier Coats Viyella closures have been re-employed there. Even in an industry such as textiles—although it is clearly in decline in Scotland—there are some positive prospects.

Henry McLeish visited Clackmannanshire and met councillors, MPs, MSPs and representatives from Forth Valley Enterprise, the Clackmannanshire strategic alliance and the business community to hear their concerns. It is important to recognise the lead role of local enterprise companies in promoting economic regeneration in partnership with the private sector and with other public sector bodies.

Henry McLeish has announced that Scottish Enterprise has awarded Forth Valley Enterprise an extra £500,000 for projects in Clackmannanshire and Falkirk. That has been matched by this morning's announcement by Forth Valley Enterprise that, as a result, it has leveraged extra funding into the Clackmannanshire area, which brings the total of additional funds for Clackmannanshire to £1.5 million. I am pleased to say that two office and industrial developments in the Alloa SMART village will be started as part of that package. I have to say to George Reid that that investment is very much welcomed and applauded by the Scottish Executive and will provide quality business space for new and expanding firms.

Locate in Scotland has met Clackmannanshire Council and Forth Valley Enterprise and has visited the area on several occasions to introduce it to potential clients and to brief interested parties. The organisation is also working on a number of possible clients who are considering Clackmannanshire as a potential location. Yesterday, officials from Locate in Scotland, Clackmannanshire Council, Forth Valley Enterprise and the Scottish Executive met a potential investor to discuss a possible investment for 2000.

West Fife has had some good news recently. Lexmark International has opened a second plant on its Rosyth site, creating 200 new jobs on top of the 500 existing jobs. There have been other examples of positive news in the area. Fife Enterprise and all the public and private sector agencies are supporting the Rosyth 2000 initiative. There are prospects, including the local enterprise company's work to encourage new developments such as the proposed roll-on, roll-off ferry from Rosyth to Europe.

The Scottish Executive is being kept aware of Babcock Rosyth's efforts to secure new commercial business and is in regular discussion with the company about possible financial support for projects. It has always been recognised that it would be difficult for the company to find enough commercial business to compensate for the loss of its core naval repair work, and the company has made no secret of the need for further redundancies. However, it is clearly for the company to decide when such announcements

will be made. Henry McLeish is writing to Margo MacDonald, following her question in Parliament last week, and to Scott Barrie to set out the Scottish Executive's position and role in supporting Babcock to identify new work.

Tricia Marwick: May I intervene?

Nicol Stephen: I have nearly finished.

Tricia Marwick: It is a matter of courtesy. It is perfectly proper for Henry McLeish to write to Margo MacDonald, because she asked a question, and to Scott Barrie, who is the constituency MSP. However, can the same courtesy be extended to all MSPs who represent Mid Scotland and Fife, not just to the constituency MSP?

Nicol Stephen: I see good sense in Tricia Marwick's suggestion and will be happy to raise the issue with the minister.

The Executive agrees with the suggestion of encouraging a greater take-up of regional selective assistance in the Clackmannanshire area, in particular. The level of RSA is too low in the area and we need to encourage greater use of that funding. It is a truism to say that both projects and momentum must be created before RSA can be released, but our partnership approach—with contributions from the Executive and from other sources—is the best way to stimulate the economy. I hope that the examples of potential inward investment that I mentioned come to fruition and that other projects will be created. We need to raise the level of RSA.

Finally, proposals for the new European funds map are still being considered by the UK Government. Obviously, that is a UK Government responsibility, but it is one of the issues that the First Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland will discuss. It is important that Clackmannanshire and other parts of Scotland still have access to support through objective 2 European funds.

The debate has been good and worth while. It has been held quickly after the recent spate of bad-news stories in the areas that we are discussing. The Scottish Executive wants to work with MPs, MSPs, the public sector and the private sector to address the problems there and in other areas in Scotland that are affected by job losses. I echo the sentiments expressed by Nick Johnston: I hope that this is one area where all parties can work together to secure more jobs for Scotland and for the areas that we discussed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before closing this evening's business, I have to state for the record that because of a technical difficulty with the voting system, there are some amendments to the votes.

On amendment SM-127.1, to the Executive's motion on the programme for government, the result was previously recorded as: For 31, Against 65, Abstentions 14. The number against must now be amended to 66.

On motion SM-127, the previous figures were: For 65, Against 46, Abstentions 0. The number for must now be amended to 66.

On amendment SM-131.1, to the motion on time for reflection, the votes were previously recorded as: For 9, Against 99, Abstentions 3. The number against must now be amended to 100.

On the substantive motion SM-131, the results were previously recorded as: For 91, Against 7, Abstentions 13. The number for must now be amended to 92.

I thank members for bearing with me.

Meeting closed at 17:42.

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