

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 2 December 1999

Volume 3 No 12

£5.00

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 2 December 1999

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:31*]

Pensioners

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Good morning. The first item of business is the non-Executive debate on motion S1M-327, in the name of Mr John Swinney, on the plight of Scottish pensioners, and amendments to that motion.

In spite of the rather thin attendance in the chamber, I have a long list of members who have indicated their desire to speak in this debate. I realise that there have been some hold-ups on the railways this morning, so I shall be tolerant about those members who are not yet in their places. However, I appeal for short speeches from all members, including the openers from each party, so that I can fit in all those who want to speak.

I call Alex Neil.

09:31

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): In speaking to the motion in the name of John Swinney, I extend a special welcome to the pensioners who are in the public gallery this morning and to those who are outside the chamber and will shortly be coming into the gallery.

Pensioners have come from all parts of Scotland today to hear what the Scottish Parliament is going to do for them, and to ensure that this Parliament uses its powers to the maximum to improve their standard of living. They also want to hear the Scottish Parliament demand from the Westminster Parliament a better deal for our pensioners, especially on the level of pensions.

For many pensioners in Scotland, the outcome of today's debate will be a litmus test of how worthwhile and worthy this Parliament is. If we fail to improve the standard and quality of pensioners' lives in Scotland, the Parliament will be seen as a damp squib. If we stand up and fight for the rights of our pensioners, the Parliament will be seen as a people's Parliament. We owe it to our pensioners to stand up and fight for them, to be counted on their behalf.

We are not concerned only about the level of pensions. Age discrimination, poor health services, crime, the fear of crime, transport, employment and many other issues outlined in the "Better Government for Older People" action plan,

copies of which are being distributed outside the chamber this morning, all affect our senior citizens and will be addressed in this debate.

Far too many pensioners in Scotland today live in poverty. The basic state pension is now worth only 15 per cent of average weekly income—a national disgrace. Because the state pension is so low, 48 per cent of pensioners in Scotland rely on income support or other benefits to top up their state pension to help make ends meet. According to Help the Aged, 70,000 pensioners in Scotland are currently living in severe poverty, one in three suffers from fuel poverty, and 103,000 households over 60 years of age have no central heating of any kind. According to the Registrar General for Scotland, there were 200,200 excess winter deaths among people over the age of 60 in 1997-98, the last year for which figures are available. By any standards, that is a damning indictment of how we treat our pensioners.

The report that was released yesterday, "The Widening Gap: Health Inequalities and Policy in Britain", highlights the north-south divide in health and wealth in Britain. People who live in Scotland, including pensioners, come off worse. There are 2.8 times as many people with a limiting long-term illness in Govan than in Wokingham. Eight of the 15 poorest constituencies in Britain, including that of the Deputy Minister for Local Government, are in Glasgow. Glasgow is the sick city of Britain. That is an indictment of 70 years of local Labour rule—or misrule—in Glasgow.

Despite the grinding level of pensioner poverty in Scotland, new Labour at Westminster and new Labour in the Scottish Executive have failed utterly to take the measures that are necessary to tackle the deep-rooted problem. More joint ministerial committees—more talking shops—between London and Edinburgh will not put money in the pockets of pensioners. We need action, not more committees and talking shops—especially not ones announced from London.

I will deal first with the causes of poverty. It is noticeable that neither of the amendments lodged by the Tories and the Labour Executive mention the need for a decent basic state retirement pension. Gordon Brown's announced increase in the basic state pension of a miserly 73p a week from next April is an insult to our pensioners, especially when one considers that in the same speech he announced big tax cuts for big business and his fat-cat pals in the City of London. The 73p increase would not buy even half a pint of beer. Indeed, it is such a pathetic amount that many pensioners wonder aloud whether it is worth collecting.

Every other Labour Government since the war has increased the state retirement pension significantly within weeks of coming to office,

despite dire financial situations. For example, in 1964 Harold Wilson increased the basic pension from 20.9 per cent to 22.1 per cent of average earnings within four weeks of coming to power. In 1974, when he was returned to power, the first thing he did was increase the pension by a whopping 17 per cent. New Labour has not done that.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I ask Mr Neil to cast his mind back to 1979. Was it not the Wilson/Callaghan Government that decreased the value of the pension with respect to real-terms increases in the economy?

Alex Neil: That is right. I remind Mr Gallie that two years later the Tory Government broke the link between pensions and earnings. The single pension would be higher by £26 a week if the Tories had not broken that link—or if new Labour had restored it—so we will not be taking any lessons from the Tories on pensions.

Phil Gallie rose—

Alex Neil: I am trying to abide by the Presiding Officer's ruling that speeches must be brief, but I will let Phil intervene one more time.

Phil Gallie: Does Alex Neil agree that the link between pensions and earnings was broken because an election promise was meant to ensure that pensions stayed ahead of increases in inflation?

Alex Neil: That is twisting logic beyond belief. Phil has lost that point, so I will carry on.

Both the Tories and new Labour have betrayed our pensioners, yet the money to give them a decent increase exists. For example, the 1p cut in the standard rate of income tax from next April that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced will cost the Inland Revenue £3 billion. If that money had been spent on pensioners, it would have lifted the pension to £75 a week for a single pensioner and £119.50 for a pensioner couple. Surely that should have been a Labour Government's priority.

It is bad enough that the Tories abolished the link with earnings, which cost single pensioners £26 a week and pensioner couples £41 a week, but it is a national disgrace that a Labour Government—a Labour Government—refuses to restore it, despite the fact that, according to Alistair Darling, the national insurance fund has a surplus of £5 billion.

Labour cannot say that the money to give our pensioners a decent rise and to restore the link between pensions and earnings does not exist. That is what a real Labour Government would do.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does Alex agree that it is astonishing that not one Labour member has

sought to intervene to defend their party's appalling record on pensions?

The Presiding Officer: Let us not encourage more interventions.

Phil Gallie: On a point of order. Why should interventions be discouraged? They are part of healthy debate.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gallie, you have had two interventions already. I asked Mr Neil to keep the length of his speech down because of the number of members who want to speak. There is no need to promote interventions artificially.

Alex Neil: I agree with Mr Ewing.

Our pensioners are among the poorest in Europe. The average German male pensioner gets £181 a week. The national association of senior civil servants has announced a survey that shows that while our pensioners get 15 per cent of average national earnings, pensioners in Belgium—a small country—get 60 per cent, in small Denmark 40 per cent, in small Greece 80 per cent and in tinier Luxembourg 83 per cent of average earnings. Our pensioners are the poor cousins of their European counterparts.

This is not just about the level of pensions and the failure to restore the link with earnings. If the £10 Christmas bonus, which was introduced by Ted Heath in 1972, was upgraded to reflect what could be bought with £10 then, our pensioners would not get a £10 Christmas bonus, they would get a £126 Christmas bonus.

The Government has got its priorities upside down when hundreds of millions of pounds are spent on a useless dome in London. Why not use that money to give our pensioners a millennium bonus that they have long deserved?

The flat rate winter fuel payment of £100 is only one fifth of an average pensioner fuel bill. Scotland's warm deal is a raw deal for our pensioners. It is the poor relation of the home energy efficiency scheme in England and Wales, which gives pensioners £700 instead of £500 in grant. Unlike in Scotland, pensioners there qualify for up to £1,800 to put in gas central heating. In damper, colder Scotland, pensioners are denied the £1,800 that they can get in sunny Surrey.

Given the level of grinding poverty among pensioners, we would have thought the Minister for Communities would make more than a passing reference to the plight of our pensioners in last week's debate on social justice. I agreed with one statement she made. She talked about 20 years of broken promises—I take it that she meant 17½ years of broken Tory promises and 2½ years of broken Labour promises.

The broken promises have resulted in our

pensioners becoming increasingly worse off. They include abolition of the link between pensions and earnings and Labour's failure to restore it and the 1,000 per cent reduction in value of the Christmas bonus. Nearly 40 per cent of Scotland's pensioners are now living on or near the poverty line.

Ending pensioner poverty cannot wait for another 20 years, as the Minister for Communities suggested last week. For people aged 60 and over who are approaching retirement—I will not look at you when I am making this point, Presiding Officer, and I certainly will not look at Phil Gallie—waiting another 20 years would condemn our elderly people to living the rest of their lives in poverty. Our pensioners do not need platitudes about what might happen in 20 years' time. They need action today. They need action to increase their pension by much more than a miserable 73p a week.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I am winding up, Des; I have obviously wound you up, too.

Our pensioners need action to restore the link between pensions and earnings; to end fuel poverty once and for all; to abolish means-testing for long-term residential care; and to abolish the inequitable standing charges imposed by the private utility companies for gas, electricity and telephones.

We are prevented from doing the right thing for our pensioners not by lack of money, but by lack of political will on the part of new Labour. If Labour and Gordon Brown refuse to provide our pensioners with a decent standard of living, the Scottish Parliament must break with London. The time has long come for the Scottish Parliament to take an independent stance and demand justice for our pensioners. Let the word go out from the Scottish Parliament today to every pensioner in Scotland: we are on your side. We are determined that justice will be done for our pensioners. Let us prove to them that this is not a damp-squib Parliament. Let us show that it is a people's Parliament—a pensioners' Parliament. Let us do that for our senior citizens today.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the plight of our pensioners, many of whom are living on or near the poverty line; condemns the lack of action by both the Scottish Executive and Her Majesty's Government to bring about a significant increase in the standard and quality of living of pensioners, and calls upon both the Scottish Executive and Her Majesty's Government to implement a comprehensive action plan to rectify this situation, the top priority of which should be a substantial increase in the basic state retirement pension and the re-establishment of the link with earnings for future pension increases.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Neil for taking much less than the allotted time and setting a good example. I call Iain Gray to move the Executive amendment.

09:47

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): The Executive believes that Scotland must value and support its older people. I am happy to begin with a point on which I agree with Alex Neil's remarks, because I fear that there will be little more that I agree with.

We believe that we must value and support our older people. That is exactly why the "Social Justice" report, launched last week, pledged that we will tackle poverty and injustice for older people; why yesterday a joint ministerial action committee on pensioner poverty was announced; and why, as lead minister for older people, I have been attending—with Westminster colleagues—the inter-ministerial group on older people. Honestly addressing the needs of older people demands co-ordination across Parliaments and across Administrations. It is too important a matter for us not to do that.

That co-ordination is the way in which we can build, for example, on the national minimum income guarantee that addresses the needs of the poorest pensioners and will benefit 125,000 people in Scotland when it rises next April, in line with the increase in earnings. We can build on initiatives such as the winter fuel payment for all pensioners, which is rising from £20 to £100, free eye tests for the over-60s and free television licences for the over-75s. Such initiatives are making the new politics work, not for politicians—there is more to the new politics than us addressing one other by name—but for our people, by adding value to the efforts of each Administration. To do that, the Scottish Parliament must strive to maximise the impact on older people's quality of life of those policy areas for which we have full responsibility. That is an honest approach, and we intend to take it.

I was glad to hear Alex Neil say that this is not just about pensions. I was surprised, however, that he found very little to say about anything else. The Scottish Executive is devoting significant energy and resources to the needs of older people—by, for example, investing millions of pounds in the warm deal to upgrade 100,000 Scottish homes. Half the social work budget of £1.1 billion and nearly 40 per cent of the health budget—some £2 billion—is being spent on older people. We are determined to increase the effectiveness as well as the amount of those resources, to get away from the never-mind-the-quality-feel-the-width approach to the issue that is taken by so many others.

We can do that only by listening to older people to identify their priorities. We can do that through initiatives such as the better government for older people network and the recent listening event in Aberdeen. We have to listen to older people and to respond honestly.

Alex Neil: Is it not the case that all the organisations that represent older people have made it clear to the Government that their two priorities are a decent pension and the re-establishment of the link with earnings? If Iain Gray is going to listen, why does he not listen to those calls and back them?

Iain Gray: If Mr Neil had genuinely listened to organisations that represent pensioners and older people, he would have found that older people—which means people more than 50 years old, an age that I rapidly approach, never mind the Presiding Officer—do not view this issue as being solely about pensions. On every occasion that I have spoken to older people, I have found that they mention the report of the Royal Commission on Long-Term Care, which got a passing reference at the end of Mr Neil's speech. It seems appropriate to respond to it in this debate on older people.

Sir Stewart Sutherland's report ably analyses the problem that he and the other members of the commission identified. He powerfully expresses the views of older people over the funding of long-term care and he defuses the mythical demographic time bomb that is so often a feature of the debate around old people.

When I took up this post, I asked what older people wanted. I was told that they wanted to stay in their own homes and be independent as long as possible. I asked for the evidence and I was shown it. Better still, I asked older people themselves. They all said the same thing. I asked myself what I would want, and the answer was the same. We all want to live in our own homes for as long as possible, perhaps moving to more suitable homes. One of Sutherland's recommendations is that more people should be able to receive high-quality care that allows them to stay in their own homes.

There are proportionately fewer people in care homes in Scotland than in the UK as a whole. There are over 340,000 people over the age of 75 in this country, 33,000 of whom are in care homes. If we are to benefit older people—both those who need care towards the end of their lives and those who do not—we must ensure access to flexible and imaginative home-care services should they need them. Those services should enable them to get up or go to bed when they want and should be available seven days a week, not just Monday to Friday.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): We all agree with the concept of independent living, but if it is to be achieved there will have to be an injection of capital into community care services and an eradication of the bureaucracy that families face when trying to ensure that care is available.

Iain Gray: As we have discussed, the financial resources that are going into community care will rise this year, next year and the year after. I accept the important point that Mrs Ewing makes: this debate is not just about the scale of resources, it is about how we spend them in order to get the maximum benefit for our older people. That will mean addressing bureaucracy and systems.

People expect personal care delivered in a person-centred way, not in a bureaucratic way and they expect that care to be of a consistent, guaranteed standard. One of the royal commission's two main recommendations is that there should be a national care commission to ensure national standards of care, monitor trends, represent the consumer and encourage the development of better services. We already have in preparation specific Scottish legislation to meet those aims.

As was promised in our programme for government, we will legislate for two new bodies. The first will register the social care work force, regulate its training and produce codes of conduct to provide assurances on quality. The second—the Scottish commission for the regulation of care—will regulate the care that is provided. For the first time ever, home care, delivered to so many of our older people, as well as residential care, will be regulated. All providers, including local authorities, will be covered and there will be national standards drafted from the perspective of the person using the service.

The commission will be responsible for ensuring that all social care is provided to national standards. It will create a national database of care services and use that and demographic and resource data collected by the Scottish Executive to advise on trends into the future. It will have the power to investigate complaints about care services and report on them. It will advise us on changes needed to the care standards and provide advice on how those standards should be met and improved. National care standards are already under development, and the establishment of the commission will meet the royal commission's recommendation.

Sir Stewart Sutherland's commission made two further recommendations regarding carers: better services for people with carers and a national support package. He recognised that many older people depend on informal carers and that many are themselves informal carers. What was

recommended is exactly what we announced last week: a doubling of resources earmarked for carers services and setting in train new carers legislation.

The royal commission specifically identified direct payment schemes whereby users are able to purchase care packages to match their needs as a way of increasing flexibility for older people and cutting through the bureaucracy. It recommends that older people who wish it, should have access to direct payments. We have commissioned research on the present use of direct payments and the barriers to them and we expect to implement that recommendation for older people next year.

At least four recommendations of the royal commission demand for older people more joint working and more pooling of resources by local authorities and the national health service. We are already promoting those measures through implementation of the modernising community care action plan. However, the Minister for Health and Community Care and I agree that that is not happening quickly enough for our older people, as well as others who need those services.

Following a seminar with local authority and health service leaders last month, we are setting up a joint future working group—chaired by me—by the end of the year, to begin work in January, to address a range of joint working and funding issues in community care. All of its work will be of direct relevance to older people and the recommendations of the commission.

I want the group to do two further things that relate to the royal commission report. First, I want it to come to an agreement over what the balance should be between residential and home-based care; secondly—and crucially—I want it to address another point that received a passing reference from Mr Neil: charging for personal care delivered at home.

As Sir Stewart Sutherland said, the present system is perceived as unfair and inconsistent and it can cost a good deal to administer. It is a perverse disincentive to local authorities that provide intensive packages of care to people at home and a real obstacle to services being provided jointly with the NHS, which of course does not charge. I am determined to address that. The joint future group will tackle that and come up with proposals in time for them to be considered during the next spending review, which will begin early in the new year, and will reach its conclusions by the autumn.

Those are all measures that will benefit hundreds of thousands of older Scots. However, I am not forgetting the 8,000 or so people in care homes in Scotland who are contributing to the cost

of their care at present. To benefit that group, Sir Stewart recommends changes to the funding system that would cost about £1.1 billion per annum for the UK, rising to £6 billion by the middle of the century, and suggests various intermediate steps along the way.

As I have said, we want gradually to reduce the proportion of people in traditional care homes and to use the resources thus made available to support people more effectively at home. However, I know that there are real concerns about the present funding system for residential care. The needs of older people—including those funding their own care—and the way in which residential care is funded, will be key issues to resolve during the forthcoming spending review.

I have taken the opportunity presented by today's debate to address one of the key priorities for older people in Scotland—long-term care. Building a Scotland where every older person matters means ensuring that all older people are financially secure and that they can lead active, independent and healthy lives. Alex Neil is right—it is not just about pensions. What a pity that he did not address any of the other issues relating to older people in Scotland.

Alex Neil said that he was sending his words out to our pensioners, but words are not enough. We are taking action—now, next year and into the next century—to build a Scotland where every older person matters. The Executive will use the power of the Parliament to pursue relentlessly pensioners' issues. We will not use our pensioners to pursue the issue of the Scottish Parliament's powers.

I move amendment S1M-327.1, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"notes the Executive's vision of a Scotland in which every older person matters and every person beyond working age has a decent quality of life, and welcomes the measures the Executive has already taken and has planned to support older people in line with its Programme for Government commitment to deliver person centred health and community care."

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gray, for concluding before the end of your time limit. Let us keep up the momentum.

10:01

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I would like to join the previous two speakers in welcoming the pensioners who have come to listen to today's debate.

I am happy to move the Conservative amendment to the SNP motion on the elderly. There are many areas where we can agree with the SNP, particularly in relation to Labour's record. In the run-up to the previous election, Labour

made great promises to the elderly and built up their expectations about what Labour would do for them when it came to power. The reality has been rather different—yet another in a series of Labour letdowns.

The most damaging action of the Labour Government was the decision to abolish dividend tax credits. As former pensions minister Frank Field has admitted, that decision wiped more than £2 billion off the value of pension funds in one year. At least he has been prepared to admit how much damage has been done by that move. I will be interested to hear if the ministers of the Scottish Executive will defend that decision. Sadly, I fear that we will be treated to the usual litany of lies about Labour's record.

However, the facts speak for themselves. Despite being elected on the back of Tony Blair's promise not to increase tax at all—his words, not mine—taxes will increase by £40 billion over the Parliament, which is the equivalent of £1,500 for everyone in the country. The announcements on pensioners' TV licences and winter fuel allowances are very welcome, particularly for those people who are already pensioners. However, new pensioners will still be £500 worse off, as a result of the abolition of the age-related married couples allowance. Once again, Gordon Brown is giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

Labour did not have the courage to increase income tax; instead it has increased taxes by stealth, hoping that no one will notice. The abolition of dividend tax credits is the most despicable stealth tax of all. Labour is relying on the fact that people will realise what they have lost only when they retire and it is too late. This is the first time that people's pension savings have been taxed since 1921 and is a direct contradiction of Labour's manifesto pledge to

"support and strengthen the framework for occupational pensions".

That short-sighted policy will have far-reaching consequences. Unless people up their contributions now, they will find that their retirement incomes are lower than they expected. That will leave far more people dependent on the state and is typical of Labour's bungled welfare reform. Labour boasts about adopting joined-up government, but the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

Labour has presided over a shocking level of agism in the national health service. A recent Age Concern survey highlighted the fact that one in 20 people over the age of 65 has been refused treatment by the NHS. Elderly patients are often forced to go private, experience longer waiting times and are not treated with the respect that

they deserve. That backs up earlier evidence that women over the age of 65 are not routinely invited for breast screening, despite the fact that 63 per cent of all deaths from breast cancer occur in women in that age group. People over the age of 60 are also refused heart transplants as a matter of national policy.

That is all typical of Labour, which says one thing and does another. It promised to conduct an audit of national health service policies and priorities that discriminated against older people, but that was yet another example of Labour pretending to care about the plight of the elderly, then doing nothing once it got into power. We would end discrimination and ensure that all patients were treated according to clinical need.

Those are just two examples of the way in which Labour has failed the elderly. Before we are accused of not addressing the other issues, my Conservative colleagues will later address the points that the minister raised.

Alex Neil: I agree with Mr Harding about annuities. The value of annuities has fallen by about 50 per cent in the past two or three years. However, he has not mentioned any commitment on the basic state retirement pension. At the pensioners rally last week, his colleague Alex Fergusson made a tremendous speech demanding a substantial increase in the pension for senior citizens.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): No, he did not.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): On a point of order.

Alex Neil: Does Mr Harding agree with his colleague?

Mr Harding: I agree with what he said, and it was not a big increase in—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Harding, there is a point of order.

Alex Fergusson: On a point of order. Am I allowed to defend myself from what is an untrue statement?

The Presiding Officer: Not on a point of order, but if you want to intervene on Mr Harding's speech—

Alex Fergusson: May I intervene?

Mr Harding: Please, yes.

Alex Fergusson: I agree absolutely with Mr Neil. I did make a tremendous speech. *[Laughter.]* But at no point during that magnificent piece of oratory did I commit my party to a substantial increase in the state pension.

Alex Neil: He said that he was in favour.

Mr Harding: As I was not present, I do not think that I can comment, but I thank Mr Fergusson for the intervention.

I gave two examples of the ways in which we feel that Labour has failed the elderly. Although we agree with the Scottish National party on this, our means of addressing the problems of the elderly are different. Our aim in government was to achieve higher living standards for pensioners by maintaining the value of the state pension at the same time as encouraging greater take-up of occupational or private pensions.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mr Harding: Is it going to be a reasonable question?

Paul Martin: I wonder whether the member will confirm that eye test charges were introduced during the years of Tory rule. Can he give me a yes or no answer—did his party introduce those charges?

Mr Harding: What I will say to that is that Labour also stopped the Christmas bonus.

If I may carry on, our policies led to an increase in the proportion of people who had an occupational pension: in 1979, the figure was 43 per cent; in 1997, it was 62 per cent. More than 5 million people took out personal pensions in that period.

Those reforms mean that, unlike other European countries, we are not liable for a huge increase in public sector pensions. Those pensions are funded up front, whereas our European counterparts have a demographic time bomb on their hands. With an aging population, those countries will have to bankrupt themselves to pay for the provision, or else remove universality.

I remind Alex Neil that it was the Conservative party's brave decision to cut the link with earnings that saved Britain from that fate, and that it is folly for the SNP to suggest that we return to such a system now.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD) rose—

Mr Harding: No, thank you.

We believe that there are specific areas of policy for which this Parliament is responsible, where our policies would improve the quality of life for the elderly.

One is the introduction of an integrated national concessionary fares system. At present, concessionary fares are applied in a very haphazard way. It is time that the Scottish Executive ministers stopped punishing the motorist and got some of their council colleagues

to come together with the bus and rail companies to introduce an equitable system. Here in Edinburgh there are good concessions, and in Fife there are free fares. Where I come from, in Stirling, there are no rail concessions but there are some bus concessions; in Falkirk there are both. It is time that we had an integrated system for the whole of Scotland.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I would like to ask a straightforward question. Can Mr Harding tell me of one attempt, during the 18 years of Conservative rule, to bring in a concessionary fares scheme that was uniform across Scotland?

Mr Harding: I agree with the point of Mr Crawford's question. However, my point is that policies have since developed.

In local government, Labour has failed the council tenant. Much of Scotland's council housing stock is crumbling and new investment is desperately needed. The standard of housing for everyone in Scotland would be improved by transferring control of housing from councils to local communities, which would give tenants a real choice of landlords and a real say in the management of their homes. Furthermore, such a measure would bring in private sector investment to assist necessary repair and renovation projects.

Local housing providers would have to adapt houses specifically for the elderly and disabled. Grants would be given on the condition that any new development provided a minimum of 5 per cent of sheltered housing, which would ensure that elderly and disabled people were included in mainstream housing, creating real communities.

To match our tough policies on zero tolerance of crime, we must ensure that once an offender is caught, the sentence properly matches the crime. Only by reducing crime—as the Conservatives did in Government, through measures such as honesty in sentencing—will we create a decent, civilised society. Our goal is a society in which everyone, including the elderly, can go about their everyday lives without fear and can feel secure in their homes. The Scottish Executive will never achieve that with its current policies of falling police numbers, prison closures, and keeping more criminals on the street.

Although the SNP is right to point out that the Executive's concern for the elderly is no more than skin deep, its solutions are wrong. Those solutions are unaffordable, unnecessary for the majority and would not provide the same long-term benefit as encouraging individuals who work hard and save hard for the future.

Many pensioners in Scotland are reasonably well-off because of reforms implemented during the years of Conservative Government. Such

reforms allowed Scots to save and invest in their own future and provided them with much better pensions than the state could ever afford. We can increase elderly people's incomes in the long run only by targeting state help on those who remain in real need and by assisting others to continue to make provision for their future. Labour has attacked that principle by breaking such election promises.

Our amendment sets out practical ways of improving the quality of life of older people in Scotland. Those measures, combined with an end to Labour's scandalous tax on people's future welfare, would bring great benefit to the people of Scotland. I commend them to the chamber.

I move amendment S1M-327.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"regards care and concern for Scotland's elderly as a major priority; recognises that the measures necessary to achieve this must include a reversal of Her Majesty's Government's decision to tax pension funds, which will cut retirement incomes, healthcare provision without fear of discrimination on the grounds of age and the introduction of an integrated concessionary fares system enabling the elderly to maintain contact with friends and family on an affordable basis; further recognises that the transfer of council housing stock would enable better housing provision to be made for the elderly, particularly those in need of sheltered accommodation, and that the rising crime rate has resulted in an increased number of elderly people, particularly those living alone, being afraid for their personal safety and the security of their homes, and undertakes to take the appropriate steps to provide reassurance and improve the quality of life for our elderly population."

The Presiding Officer: As far as the occupants of the chair are concerned, this debate has set a new record, as all three speakers have used less than their allotted time. That is a welcome change in practice. I call Robert Brown to speak for the Liberal Democrats.

10:13

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I also welcome the older people in the visitors gallery. One of the advantages of a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh is that our citizens can come and be involved in debates on such important issues. Furthermore, I sympathise with the people who stood out in the biting weather this morning to hand out the leaflets that members received as we came in.

This debate on older people is very worth while and the SNP should be congratulated on its pertinent choice of subject, particularly as winter weather sets in and Christmas approaches. However, I was rather struck by the oddity of an SNP motion calling for a joint action plan between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive at the same time that the party is castigating left, right and centre the very idea of joint consultation between the two Governments. I want to take this

opportunity on behalf of the Liberal Democrats to welcome proposals for better liaison between London and Edinburgh which help to harness the resources available at UK level to the best interests of Scotland. That is not a concept that finds favour with the Opposition in this chamber.

Alex Neil: There is no contradiction. We want action, not words or committees. The point about committees is that they take minutes and waste years. Our pensioners do not have years to waste.

Robert Brown: That is a very modest debating point. The fact is that effective action on this issue depends on effective liaison between London and Edinburgh with the various resources available across the whole of the UK. The SNP is fundamentally unable to appreciate or recognise that point.

I am also a little surprised by the SNP's terminology. As the minister said, rightly, the debate should be about older people, as it says in the Executive amendment. Pensions are not the only issue, important though financial matters are. Whether or not older people receive pensions from the state is not the issue either. The debate should be about the value of individuals, who in this instance happen to be older people, in our society.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: No, thank you.

The Liberal Democrat theme, people count, to which I referred in the social inclusion debate is germane today also. Older people have much to give to our society. Many voluntary groups would fold without them. The service and experience that they bring is of enormous value to our communities and is vital in enhancing the sense of value and self-worth of individual volunteers.

I remember my grandfather, aged 90, helping out at social events, moving chairs or pouring tea, at the pensioners club in his vicinity. He used to say, "The old people really enjoyed themselves today," quite unconscious of the fact that most of the old people to whom he referred were younger than him. He did not identify himself as an older person, which is true of many of the people that I and other members come across in our local communities. People find it satisfying to do their bit to help. We must emphasise that side of the coin.

Some older people need a degree of help and support. Older people are more likely to need health care; a certain proportion will need to be looked after either by carers or in a home; there are issues to do with transport, sporting activity and social life and the problems of bereavement and loneliness. The objectives of ensuring reasonable comfort in the home and an adequate diet must be met. Government policy must aim to

enhance lifestyle, support individual independence and increase personal choice.

Another issue is the need for access to advice and information. Almost 300,000 people aged 60 or over rely on council tax benefit. It is high time that we were able to move towards a proper national network of funded, independent advice centres so that people in all parts of the country can be helped by citizens advice bureaux or similar agencies.

Some people despair at the demographic trends identified by earlier speakers—more older people, more people on pensions, more people needing care, more people in residential homes and more calls being made on the health service. However, the situation is nothing new. In 1911, when the Liberal Government was preparing its national insurance act, civil servants went on about the potential increase in the number of old people. The Government had introduced the first old-age pensions in 1908 at the rate of 5 shillings. Dire prognostications were made about national bankruptcy, which, of course, did not happen.

There is an astonishing reluctance on the part of the Labour Government at Westminster to take significant action on crucial social issues. In the pre-budget statement, a great flourish was made of the 75p pension increase, which Alex Neil touched on. The truth is, however, that pensioners under Labour will be worse off in real terms than they were last year. The 75p pension increase will go little way towards enabling pensioners to pay the increased council tax and water bills that will result from decisions and assumptions in the comprehensive spending review that was carried out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at UK level.

Pensioners in every Scottish region will be worse off. In Highland, they will be worse off by £42.63; in Perth, by £41.27; in City of Glasgow by £11.15; and in South Lanarkshire by £4.68. Only in the Scottish Borders, where the projected increase in water bills is less, will pensioners benefit—to the tune of 67p year. I can assume only that that largesse is due to the higher volume of rainfall in the Borders region.

Thirty-one per cent of Scottish pensioners live in poverty. Against that background, the chancellor's continued amassing of an election war chest is nothing short of an outrage. A fair deal for pensioners would be right, it would be socially just and it would be the Liberal Democrat alternative to the tax-cutting agenda of central Government at Westminster under new Labour.

I understand that there will be an announcement today on the response to the Sutherland report on long-term care. If so, it will not be before time. At national level, the air of expectation that greeted

the report has faded to an irritated frustration at the lack of progress on its implementation. I therefore welcome the minister's earlier comments about the proposed reaction of the Scottish Executive to the Sutherland commission, in so far as its recommendations fall within our remit.

We should not underestimate public opinion on the issue. More than 30,000 people live in residential or nursing homes; 61,000 people suffer from dementia; more than 500,000 adults provide some level of care for older people. Many more fear the prospect of ending their days in poverty and hardship, a burden to their children, the savings that they hoped to pass on to their families taken by the state. There is a significant feeling of outrage at that prospect in the hearts of many people who have worked all their lives.

I respectfully suggest to the SNP that it might be better off backing the Liberal Democrats and arguing the case for dealing with pensioner poverty in this Parliament, which has the power and resources to tackle it, rather than yelling from a distance, over the border, on the matter.

Mrs Margaret Ewing: I have worked on this issue in the Westminster Parliament and still do so. Why have the Liberal Democrats not been much more supportive of arguments propounded by the SNP on issues such as the cold climate allowance for pensioners in Scotland?

Robert Brown: I thank Mrs Ewing for her intervention, but ask her why the SNP in Westminster did not see fit to give its backing to the various early-day motions tabled by the Liberal Democrats on such matters.

SNP members identify, for example, the £8.43 billion surplus on the balance of the national insurance fund. We urge that that should be used to restore the link between the basic pension and average earnings for the remaining years of this Parliament. That is a practical solution to what is a crucial problem, but it is not being supported as yet, as I understand, by a single SNP member. Social issues such as the plight of pensioners define the party battle at Westminster and the alternatives that the parties offer.

I return to my earlier point: it is the individual quality of life in our society that counts. It is in health care, community care, housing, social services and community facilities where the responsibilities of this Parliament lie, responsibilities which are gradually being met by the Scottish Executive through the programme for government.

In health—Alex Neil touched on this point earlier—the report published by the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research yesterday shows the extent of the challenge, with six of Glasgow's 10 constituencies holding a top

10 position in the list of the least healthy places in Britain.

The Executive's targeted strategy to make measurable progress on reducing rates of mortality due to cancer and coronary heart disease is the right way forward, because of this Parliament's crucial ability to take a holistic, cross-cutting approach to such matters.

As part of the recent warm homes week, I was privileged to attend a house in Rutherglen, in my regional constituency, which happened to belong to an old acquaintance. The house was undergoing a package of work under the arrangements with Heatwise, which involved high-quality insulation work, including wall cavity insulation, work on windows and doors and advice. The heating system had been installed by the lady herself, but, in that scheme, many of the heating systems had been installed under the leasing arrangement with Scottish Power, which John Young will remember from his days on the City of Glasgow District Council. That was an excellent initiative, which was a cost-effective way of improving heating standards and reducing heating costs.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will Robert Brown give way?

Robert Brown: No thank you, I think I have given way sufficiently for the moment.

What impressed me about the initiative was the technical sophistication of what was on offer. It was a far cry from the days when we used to put wee bits of latex around doors and Sellotape up the letterbox to prevent draughts. The programme for Government commits us to improving 100,000 houses suffering from dampness and condensation by 2003, targeted on people with low incomes and on the elderly, as part of the healthy homes initiative. That is an ambitious target, but would not be ambitious enough were there the resources to do more.

I hope that, during the course of this Parliament, there will be further measures beyond what the Government has managed to achieve so far to tackle the scourge of fuel poverty, to deal with unnecessary associated deaths and ill health from hypothermia and finally to eliminate fuel poverty in this country.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will Robert Brown give way?

Robert Brown: No, thank you.

The commitment announced by the Deputy Minister for Communities this morning to make progress on home care payments is a significant response, albeit only a beginning, to the Sutherland commission's report.

Older people are a crucial part of our society. They do not want to be dependent, they want to play their full part, and it is the job of this Parliament to concentrate all its efforts in supporting them with all the resources and tools that we have at our disposal here in Scotland.

I support Iain Gray's amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Before we move into open debate, I advise members that there will be a four-minute time limit on speeches.

10:25

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): As it appears that we are having to testify to our ages this morning, I am very much afraid that I have to declare an interest when it comes to being in the over-50 age group.

We heard Iain Gray speak to the Executive amendment. What a rosy picture he painted. It seems that it is great—or going to be great—in new Labour's brave new world. I have listened to the spin, but for the next few minutes I will speak about the realities, particularly the reality of access to the health service and to care in the community for those over pensionable age in Scotland today.

From the outset, it is important to recognise that today's elderly population are those same people who were starting their working lives when the national health service was introduced. Many of them were returning to work and establishing families after the long years of the second world war. They were delighted to enter into a contract with the then Labour Government, which told them that, if they worked hard and put their bit into the public kitty, they would be looked after when their working lives were over. What have today's pensioners received in return for keeping their part of the contract? A health service that discriminates on the grounds of age and a community care system that is driven by the lack of resources, rather than services that meet the needs of the growing elderly population.

I want to examine the evidence that age is used as a discriminatory factor in the health service. The Executive claims that the treatment and prevention of cancer is a No 1 priority—but not, it seems, if one is over 65 years of age. As has been said already, 63 per cent of all deaths from breast cancer occur in women aged 65 or over; yet women aged over 65 are not routinely invited for breast cancer screening. The same is true of lung cancer. Although more than half of all patients with inoperable lung cancer are over 65, palliative chemotherapy to relieve the symptoms is reserved entirely for younger age groups.

Coronary heart disease is another stated priority

area for the Executive, but not, I am afraid, if one is of a certain age. For example, there is a national policy to refuse heart transplants to people aged over 60, and we know for a fact that 20 per cent of coronary care units operate age-related admissions policies, while 40 per cent attach age restrictions on clot-busting drug therapy after heart attacks. As with those who are diagnosed with cancer, 66 per cent of all heart attack patients are over the age of 65. While I could go on and on, I ask the minister to address the rationing of health care to the elderly population when he sums up.

I have spoken on numerous occasions in this chamber about the need to implement the recommendations of the Sutherland report. Quite frankly, unless steps—of which there were hopeful signs today—are taken soon by this Executive to address the current crisis in community care, the system will go into meltdown, believe you me.

This Parliament has the power to ensure that the value of a family home and, indeed, of a person's savings, can be disregarded for up to 12 months after admission to a residential care setting.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please wind up.

Kay Ullrich: As I am aware of the time, I will cut to the chase. We talk about person-centred health and community care. Try telling that to one of the 2,000 elderly people who, while lying in acute hospital beds, await funding for residential or nursing care, or to the elderly people who have their home help hours cut and charges raised because of cutbacks in local authority funding.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a close, please.

Kay Ullrich: In spite of the soothing words and platitudes of its amendment, this Executive and its pals at Westminster stand accused of a breach of faith with an entire generation.

I urge members to support the motion.

10:30

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): The background to all debates about pensioner poverty, or any kind of poverty, must be the stark fact that between 1979 and 1997 the proportion of people in Scotland who were living on less than 50 per cent of the mean GB income—which is the official definition of poverty—rose from 10 per cent to 26 per cent. That problem could never be addressed overnight. All members should welcome the fact that, last week, the Executive made an undertaking to reduce that figure over the next few years. That was a significant development.

I agree with Alex Neil that pensioner groups want a restoration of the link between pensions

and earnings. What Alex Neil did not say is that pensioner groups and individual pensioners, whom we all meet every day in our constituencies, also welcome some of the changes that the Government has made. Such changes include the £100 fuel allowance; the fact that 300,000 Scottish pensioners will receive a free television licence next year; the extra £300 million for community care; the free eye tests; and, for the younger range of older people—and here, like Kay Ullrich, I must declare an interest—the new deal for the over-50s.

Alex Neil: Is Malcolm Chisholm aware that the average life expectancy of the Scottish male is 74, but that a person does not qualify for the free television licence until they are 75?

Malcolm Chisholm: There are many pensioners—300,000 was the figure that I cited—who will benefit in Scotland. There is also the minimum income guarantee, which means that, since 1997, the lowest pension that someone can receive will by next April have risen by £15 for a single pensioner and by £20 for a couple.

That said, there is a problem in means-testing pensioners. In the welfare reform debate, a balance must be struck between universal and targeted benefits. The problem is greater for pensioners than for families. The working families tax credit will work well, as it involves targeting and a taper. The fundamental problem in applying the same model to pensioners is that hundreds of thousands of pensioners throughout the United Kingdom do not claim income support.

A further problem—one that we all encounter regularly in our constituencies—is that many pensioners live just above the income support level. I do not think that it is right to continue with pension increases of 75p, or thereabouts, for pensioners in that group. That is a challenge for the Government, as it recognises. The pension increase last year was combined with the £100 fuel allowance and the pension increase this year is combined with the free television licences.

Many of the Executive's initiatives are welcome and within the power of this Parliament. The warm deal is one such initiative. Like many members, I visited a pensioners' home this week. The £37 million for the warm deal, over the next three years, will be welcomed. However, one of the people in the home brought to my attention the fact that, unless a pensioner is claiming income support, they do not receive that money, which excludes a lot of people. We must investigate the implementation of a taper for that provision.

The minister mentioned many of the other initiatives that the Executive is implementing, particularly in relation to community care. There is the money that I have mentioned and the welcome

regulation. We debated the carers strategy last week, which is an important development. I also welcome what the minister said today about long-term care, although I hope that the Sutherland report will be implemented in full, as it proposes the right balance between universal and targeted benefits.

Time is out, so I cannot go on to talk about transport and crime. However, the fact that I even mention those subjects illustrates the many areas over which this Parliament has control, which will benefit pensioners. I urge the Minister for Transport and the Environment—who was sitting near to me a minute ago—to investigate a national concessionary travel scheme for pensioners.

10:34

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Malcolm Chisholm opened his remarks by putting this discussion into the context of the disgraceful rise in poverty between 1979 and 1997, using the figures that are available to us.

As a socialist, I would like to put the discussion in another context. I ask: what type of country do we live in? Do we live in a poor country, an undeveloped country, or do we live in a rich country? Do we live in a country that is rich in natural resources and physical resources in the form of oil, gas, electricity, land and water? If the answer to that question is yes, why—according to the report on poverty in Scotland by the Scottish Poverty Information Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University—are 320,000 pensioners in Scotland living on or below the income support poverty line? Why, in a country that is so rich in all those resources, are there 320,000 poor pensioners?

As a socialist, I argue that, far from deserving congratulations, the UK Government, in the two and a half years that it has been in power, has not begun in a significant or fundamental way to address the real problem in this country. That problem is the distribution of wealth and power. The recent report from Bristol University says it in black and white—regardless of the laudable aims of the Government, unless it is willing fundamentally to redistribute wealth in Britain, it will not be able to tackle poverty. That is the problem that confronts us in Parliament today, and that is why I support the SNP motion.

That motion makes it clear that the real problem for the majority of pensioners is their income. That income was severely reduced in the dark years under the Tories, who, in 1980, made the disgraceful decision to break the earnings link for pension uprating. That has left single pensioners some £27 a week worse off and pensioner couples some £41 a week worse off. Is it too much to ask the national Government at least to restore

that link for basic state pensions in order to give our pensioners a wee bit of dignity?

Malcolm Chisholm and others have mentioned the winter fuel allowance and the free television licences. I am against means-testing—pensioners should qualify for a range of benefits because they are pensioners, not because they are poor pensioners. Free television licences are not means-tested—they are age-tested. They go only to those aged more than 75 years. That is a ridiculous decision. Why should not all pensioners get a free television licence, given that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has a £12 billion surplus and there is an £8 billion surplus through national insurance?

I ask Parliament to support the motion that has been moved by Alex Neil because it makes the point that what is required is an increase in the basic state pension. To deliver that, the Parliament will have to return time and again to those who really run this country. Perhaps the pensioners who are here have come to the wrong building. If they wanted to go to the building in which the real power is wielded and where the men and women of real power sit, they should have gone across the road to the Bank of Scotland. That is where the real power lies in this country. It is time for the Parliament to question whether we should own and control democratically the resources in our country.

10:39

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): As someone who is barely out of his twenties, I cannot declare a personal interest in the debate. [MEMBERS: "Ah."] According to the Benefits Agency, almost 259,000 people over the age of 60 in Scotland were, in May this year, entitled to income support but fewer than 163,000 were in receipt of it. That means that almost 100,000 pensioners—a massive 37 per cent of those who are entitled to income support—do not receive it. It is thought that an even higher number of pensioners entitled to housing and council tax benefits do not claim them—that is borne out by research that my office has carried out.

Iain Gray: Mr Gibson raises an important point, but does he recognise that the chancellor made exactly the same point yesterday? The chancellor also said that, by co-ordinating action, we could do something about that situation.

Mr Gibson: I wonder why the Executive has made no effort to bring together the information needed to address the problem. In September, because I was unable to get the information from the Scottish Executive, as it does not record it, I wrote to the 32 Scottish local authorities asking them to give the number of people of pensionable

age in their area and the number receiving full or partial council tax benefit.

There are alarming variations: for example, the income support claimant rate in the Highland Council area is 32 per cent, whereas the full council tax benefit claimant rate is only 15 per cent. That low council tax claimant rate is reflected across Scotland: in Edinburgh, 17 per cent of pensioners receive a full council tax rebate; in East Renfrewshire, the figure is 16 per cent; and in the Scottish Borders it is 24 per cent. That compares with an overall income support claimant rate of just under 40 per cent of Scottish pensioners. While those figures are based only on the information that is available, they show alarming levels of under-claiming. I appeal to the Scottish Executive to obtain the facts needed to assess and address pensioner poverty.

The issue is wider than unclaimed benefits. Those who claim everything to which they are entitled are punished as well. Mr Alexander lives in my constituency, in a typical Glasgow council house. He is charged £42 rent and £15 a week council tax, which takes into account his single person discount. Because he has a war pension of £41 a week on top of his state pension, he has to pay £21 of his weekly rent bill himself and £7 towards his council tax, leaving him a net income of £80 a week—only £5 above the income support level. From Mr Alexander's occupational pension of £41 per week, the Government clawback is £28 of the £33 differential between the income support level and his income, equivalent to a marginal rate of taxation of 85 per cent—a new Labour poverty trap.

Two things need to be done to end that deplorable situation. One is a reserved matter; the other can be addressed by the Parliament. The first is that the taper of reduction for pensioners on housing benefit must be changed—a change of 20p in the taper would leave Mr Alexander, for example, £6 per week better off. The second is council tax: it is ridiculous that hundreds and thousands of Scottish pensioners are paying it. Moving to a system of local income tax and away from the discriminatory council tax system would take an estimated 578,000 Scottish pensioners out of local taxation. Only those eligible for income tax would have to pay and only those with substantial private incomes would find themselves paying more. I am sure that my Liberal Democrat colleagues will agree, as local income tax is part of their policy. Mr Alexander and hundreds of thousands of pensioners like him would be approximately £7 per week better off.

Pensioners deserve a better deal. We need a proper increase in the state pension, the restoration of the link with earnings, a real campaign to ensure that all pensioners who are

entitled to income support receive it, and a commitment to reduce the clawback on housing benefit. Pensioners who have occupational pensions deserve to be able to enjoy that modest income without feeling Big Brother's hand in their pocket. It is time that the Government gave something back to the generations who sacrificed so much in the past and still have so much to offer in the future. I support the motion.

10:44

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): During yesterday's time for reflection, the minister read out a list of people whom he thought the Parliament should keep at the forefront of concern. It included the homeless, rough sleepers, alcoholics, drug addicts, victims of crime and, incongruously, the elderly. It was as though we now accept as a matter of fact—in this market-driven, capitalist society—that to be old is to be at risk and vulnerable.

That should worry everyone, because it is not the case in every society that to be old is to be at risk. The Government's publication "Social Trends 28", for 1998, contains a chapter that compares Britain with France, drawing together all the social statistics that Governments have at their disposal. It shows that expenditure per head on social protection—pensions, looking after the elderly and so on—in the UK is only 87 per cent of what it is in France. That has been the case for a long time, because we persistently underspend on the protection that we give to the vulnerable in our society. The study also shows that there are 100,000 more deaths every year in Britain than in France.

Those statistics are backed up by statistics from elsewhere. During the 1997 general election, the Campaign for Warm Homes produced statistics for every constituency in the United Kingdom on the number of excess deaths each year between November and March arising from the cold. When I added up the total for all the Scottish constituencies, I found that more than 10,000 people died every winter in Scotland because of the cold and their inability to keep their homes warm. Today in the press, we see a report on health inequalities between Glasgow and other parts of the United Kingdom. It shows that in Shettleston, for example, 71 per cent of all recorded deaths were avoidable. How many of those were old people who died when they did not have to, because we did not do enough for them?

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McAllion: I have not got time. If I had more than four minutes, I would give way.

The question is, what do we do about the facts

to which I have referred? The Parliament is united in saying that a serious problem confronts elderly people in our society. I am not convinced that the answer is for the Parliament to debate whether there should be more or fewer constitutional changes. We already know that pensioner poverty has persisted into a devolved Scotland inside the UK and within the European Union. I am not convinced that moving to an independent Scotland outside the UK but inside the European Union—and, more significant, inside the single currency—would make any great difference to pensioner poverty in this country. At heart, I believe that the problem is not down to constitutional structures; what really matters is the political will of the people who are elected to the different Assemblies in our country and what we decide.

It is wrong for the Opposition in this Parliament to deride the changes that have been introduced by the Labour Government since 1997. Many pensioners across Scotland and Britain have welcomed those changes, which have made a big difference. A winter fuel payment of £100 makes a difference to all pensioners in Scotland, as does the reduction of VAT on fuel.

Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the warm homes deal and complained about the fact that it was targeted. One could complain that it is not targeted enough, because the maximum grant that is available under the warm homes deal in Scotland is £500. In England and Wales, a new system has been introduced, targeted on the over-60s, who are vulnerable. Under the home energy efficiency scheme plus, from next April pensioners can get £1,800 to install a new central heating system in their homes. People in Scotland will not be able to do that. Why does not this Parliament debate that issue? I understand that Energy Action Scotland is asking for a review of the warm homes deal. There should be such a review, to ensure that the money that is available is targeted at the right places.

I thought that I had just started, but I notice that I have almost finished. It is always the same when I get to my feet—there is never enough time. Let us forget our party political differences, unite around the issues that matter to old people and try to reach a consensus in this Parliament. Most Labour members agree that pensions should be linked to earnings rather than to inflation. That was always our position and it remains our position. Let us find a way of achieving that goal, instead of calling one another names because our party leaderships say something different. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I remind spectators in the public gallery that they must be silent and may not participate in applause.

10:49

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I look forward to John McAllion and those of his colleagues who applauded his speech joining the SNP in supporting the motion.

In his opening statement, the minister said that pensioners wanted to stay in their own homes. He is absolutely right. He did not address the fact that 119,000 pensioners in Scotland live in cold, damp homes. It is a pity that he is leaving—he could learn something if he stayed.

Iain Gray: I am not leaving.

Tricia Marwick: Fuel poverty is a particular problem for elderly people. According to the Scottish Poverty Information Unit, Scottish pensioners make up almost half the fuel poor. The reasons are twofold: first, household incomes are not enough to pay for adequate heating; secondly, the condition of houses means that they are almost impossible to heat.

Elderly people die of cold in winter in Scotland; every year, more people die in winter than in summer. A glance at the columns of death notices in local newspapers between November and March reminds us of that. We seem to accept that, somehow, it is inevitable. The annual cull of people in Scotland is something like 2,500, most of whom are pensioners. That does not have to happen. In places with colder climates, such as Scandinavia or Siberia, those excess winter deaths do not occur.

Energy Action Scotland reported that in Siberia, despite an outside temperature of minus 25 deg, there is no increase in winter mortality rates, because indoor temperatures are kept at a consistent level. In Scotland, more than 100,000 pensioner households have no form of central heating. Fuel-poor families spend a higher than average proportion of their household income on fuel, but the heat goes out the doors, windows and roofs—that makes for nicely warmed pigeons but freezing cold pensioners.

Fuel poverty must be tackled on two fronts: first, housing must be improved, so that it is energy efficient; secondly, incomes must be increased to make fuel affordable. The Executive has paid little more than lip service to the first issue. Its warm deal programme is inflexible; it allows expenditure on insulation, but not to tackle problems such as dampness. As John McAllion and others have said, that is in contrast to the situation in England, where the home energy scheme allows for grants for central heating.

Until the basic problem of inadequate pensions is tackled, any measure to provide a winter heating allowance will be undermined. An increase in investment in housing is necessary to tackle fuel

poverty.

Given the number of people who live in fuel poverty in Scotland, it is hardly surprising that last week the Executive disgracefully refused to set a target for tackling fuel poverty in Scotland. It recognised that, if it set a target, it might have to do something about it, which would cost money—God forbid, it might mean opening Gordon Brown's war chest.

We need to raise our ambitions and Scotland's horizons. We need to raise our pensioners out of poverty.

10:53

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I am pleased that the SNP is making such extensive use of the excellent report by the Scottish Poverty Information Unit. I am sure that my former colleagues at Glasgow Caledonian University will be pleased to have their work recognised. That report and the responses from pensioners last week make it clear that the position of older people should be a priority for this Parliament and Executive.

Scottish pensioners deserve better than the empty rhetoric that has been served up by SNP members. Over the past few weeks, every SNP front bench has promised more money for every possible cause. Three weeks ago, Kenny MacAskill backed a comprehensive road-building package for Scotland with an estimated price tag of £900 million. When Nicola Sturgeon's commitments to education, and the commitments to health, local government and the voluntary sector are considered as well, the SNP's strategy becomes clear: blank cheques and empty promises. The SNP refuses to take seriously the choice of priorities that confronts every Government.

At least David McLetchie made it clear last week that he would have spent the money that the Executive, in establishing the coalition, set aside for schools, health and anti-poverty measures, on prisons, more police officers and the removal of tuition fees for better-off students. At least one can have a meaningful debate with the Tories. They recognise that there are choices to be made, but with the SNP all we get is a Dutch auction with funny money to cover the costs.

Many pensioners, because of their financial situation, appreciate the bankruptcy of that approach. They make choices themselves and they know that Government has to do the same. In that context, and not in the unreal world in which the SNP lives, the commitment of the UK Government and the Scottish Executive to tackling pensioner poverty as one of three joint priority tasks is welcome.

As Alex Neil pointed out in his speech, Labour has a proud record on pensions. Successive Labour Governments have consistently done more for pensioners than anybody else has, and this Government has continued that tradition. For the first time, a minimum income guarantee has been introduced, giving a minimum weekly income of £78 to a single pensioner and nearly £122 to a couple. Winter fuel payments have increased fivefold, and £10.5 million has been made available under the warm deal.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Des McNulty: I will not give way, but in a moment I shall comment on what Tommy Sheridan said.

Those initiatives are substantial changes. Simply talking about other things that might be done if the money were available misses the point. The UK Government now spends more than £4 billion on Scottish pensioners; by 2001, the support will have risen by 25 per cent, or a further £1 billion, from what we inherited from the Conservative Administration.

Real changes, real money and real benefits are being given to pensioners, and it is important that we should put that on record. Things still need to be done. I accept, and my party accepts, the need to increase the basic pension.

We will achieve a significant increase in income levels in the coming years, building on the improvements that have already been made by Labour since 1997. That process needs to be supplemented by co-ordinated action to tackle such issues as benefits take-up, which John McAllion mentioned.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will Mr McNulty give way?

Des McNulty: No, I will not.

With the needs of pensioners in mind, Labour will introduce measures to improve health care, transportation and a host of other services. The Government is making a positive intervention on behalf of pensioners. That is significant and must not be swept away.

I agree with Tommy Sheridan that pensioners deserve a dignified life. As he said, pensioners require more money from society—I think that there is consensus on that. However, money is not the only thing that we must deliver to pensioners. Our society must incorporate pensioners more; they deserve greater respect and we must involve them in the whole thrust of community life in Scotland. Pensioners already make a contribution in many ways, and there are many ways in which we can extend their contribution by empowering them and giving them opportunities to participate more fully. That should be the focus of the joint

action committees; I look forward to reading their reports in due course.

10:58

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Sitting beside a pensioner—my colleague, John Young—gives me an interesting perspective on the debate. I commend the Scottish National party on the motion. It is a privilege for us to be able to raise awareness about the needs of the elderly.

When I was younger, 60 seemed to be really, really old. However, when one reaches 50 and considers that Tina Turner is now eligible for her old-age pension and bus pass and that Scotland's James Bond is nearer 70 than 60, it brings a new dimension to consideration of what it means to be elderly.

Today's new pensioners were born as the war broke out, and older pensioners fought in and endured the hardships of the second world war. Many of them are the most vulnerable people in our society. That background is important to our understanding of the elderly. All too often, applying for income support is perceived as asking for charity and, in some cases, defies a fiercely independent nature. My mother is certainly someone for whom any mention of income support is a non-starter.

For once, I am inclined to agree with Des McNulty that care of the elderly is not just the responsibility of Governments. We should not look to the Government to provide all the answers to the problems of the elderly; we should look to ourselves. Responsibility for the elderly is a responsibility for all of us.

Against that background, many middle-aged women have given up jobs to care for elderly parents. As was mentioned in the carers debate last week, the welfare bill that was announced by Tony Blair will introduce a second pension and will secure pension entitlement. The aim to eradicate child poverty in 20 years can be criticised because that must be the longest time for the implementation of any policy. Carers can look forward to their pension in 50 years' time. That is ridiculous.

Yesterday's report from the University of Bristol, entitled "The Widening Gap: Health Inequalities and Policy in Britain", stated that the poverty gap in Scotland is widening. Alex Neil pointed out the comparison between Govan and Wokingham. As one of the authors of the book said:

"Despite pledging to reduce poverty the current Labour administration have clearly reneged on both their commitments regarding health made before the election as well as reneging on much of what key cabinet ministers wrote and said in the past."

The Tories can be blamed for the period from

1979 to 1997, but they cannot be blamed for not fulfilling Labour promises in the past two years.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab) rose—

Mary Scanlon: I will not give way because I have less than one minute left.

A recent Age Concern survey pointed out that people over 65 in Britain are being refused treatment; they are being forced to use private health care; they are being refused referrals to consultants and physiotherapists; they are being refused referrals for scans; and they are waiting months and years for operations. That is discrimination against the elderly.

As Kay Ullrich pointed out, bed blocking in Scotland cannot be mentioned enough, because bed blocking means that we are not looking after our elderly as we should. More than 2,000 patients deemed medically fit for discharge cannot leave hospital because of problems with social work funding. Not only are those patients not receiving appropriate health care, but because of bed blocking, other patients are prevented from receiving health care.

When in opposition, Labour criticised the Conservatives for tying pension increases to the rate of inflation. Now is the Government's opportunity, with wages and earnings having risen by 4.6 per cent in the past 12 months, to fulfil its promises.

A recent report from Energy Action Scotland stated that results

"suggest that heart disorders are aggravated by frequent exposure to cold. Indoor temperatures below 16°C increase respiratory problems and below 5°C involve a serious risk of hypothermia."

I support John McAllion in his call for a full review of the warm homes initiative. It was promised when Labour was in opposition. Now that it is in government, it should have the review.

11:03

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I wish to deal with the transport aspect of the debate. I am conscious of the time limitation and the breadth of the subject. I will make some general comments, but my fundamental aim is to call for a national concessionary fare scheme for buses.

The transport problems that face the elderly are affordability, availability and accessibility. The lamentable pension entitlement after a lifetime's work has been dealt with by my colleagues already; the pension—or the lack of it—affects the mobility of the elderly. Those who are limited to a state pension are curfewed by cost. The average pensioner who is dependent on a state pension spends, on average, 6 per cent of his income on

travel. That is an expenditure of £5 per week. Around half of pensioner households fall into that category. The average retired person whose main income is from sources other than a state pension can afford to spend 10 per cent of their income on travel. That is an average expenditure of £16 per week. Expenditure of £5 to £16 is hardly a king's ransom, but it is not enough to meet the fares so that people can remain actively involved socially and economically in our society, or maintain contact with friends and relatives either near or far.

Obviously, part of the problem for many is the cost of fuel. We in the Scottish National party are conscious that notwithstanding our proposal, access to the motor car will remain vital for many urban and rural pensioners although, as I have said previously, that is a matter for another day.

There is a multitude of schemes for providing concessionary transport. Some are good, some are not so good and some are downright deficient. The problem is that they are diverse, diffuse and unco-ordinated. We need a national scheme. We must put an end to the national shame of older people having to hop on and off buses, in and out of various schemes, to visit a friend or relative several counties away.

We must have a national lead. The Executive is to be applauded for supporting a national concessionary fares scheme for the blind. It stands condemned for leaving local authorities to foot the bill, as a national scheme is a national obligation and should be funded as such. Now that the Executive has paved the way and proved that a national concessionary scheme is possible, there is neither rhyme nor reason why such a scheme should not be extended to other groups of people, especially pensioners, sooner rather than later.

The Scottish National party proposes a national concessionary fares scheme for older people, which would provide them with benefits and entitlement anywhere in our nation. We propose to build on the best practices of the best local authorities and to top up the existing benefits that many receive. Our proposal would not replace or supplant concessionary fares, or the absence of fares, operating in many authorities. It meets the criteria of added value and additionality. We propose a scheme of half fares nationally. In areas where a better deal is on offer, that will remain. For example, in Fife, pensioners travel for free. Unless Fife Council changes its policy, that will remain the position. We propose to extend the scheme by allowing access to all points beyond the county boundary, at no extra cost to the local authority.

How do we propose to fund that? I note that Mr McNulty is not here with his so-called wish list. The answer is simple. We will fund it through the

fuel duty rebate scheme that is in operation. I will digress to remind the chamber of the operation and history of that method of supporting public transport. The fuel duty escalator has driven up the price of diesel to one of the highest rates in Europe. However, the fuel duty rebate has not kept pace. Although last year an increase was made to compensate, there is still a considerable gap between the rebate and the fuel duty escalator. The rebate is 35p per litre, compared with 50p of duty per litre. Thus, the rebate covers only 69 per cent of the duty.

If the fuel duty escalator is wrong and the fuel duty rebate is right, surely now is the time to right the wrong and level up the rebate to meet the real cost of fuel. The maximum cost of that would be £19 million. That is small change in comparison with the bounty that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has obtained through fuel duty, VAT and petroleum revenue tax. It is affordable, practical and essential. It is only one aspect of transport policy for older people, but it would go a long way to lifting the financial curfew and breaking the transport chains that imprison many in the older generation.

The problem in the chamber is not only the poverty of pensioners; it is the poverty of aspiration of the likes of Mr McNulty.

11:08

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I am pleased that the issue of older people has been raised in the Scottish Parliament today. We all recognise the importance of older people in our society and the value of their experience and knowledge. Our elderly population is increasing dramatically and we have heard today about some of the issues that we still have to tackle.

I am less happy with the Scottish National party motion. It indicates, wrongly, that the Government at Westminster and the coalition Government in Edinburgh have no comprehensive action plan on the issue.

I will begin by showing that there is considerable commitment at UK level, and here in Edinburgh, to put in place the structures and policies for effecting real change. They include the proposal, outlined yesterday, for joint action committees between Westminster and the Scottish Executive, which we have heard about already. One task force will examine pensioner poverty.

Let us consider some of the things that the Westminster Government has done. Iain Gray and Malcolm Chisholm have already listed many of them. Examples are the introduction of the minimum income guarantee, free eye tests and free television licences—albeit with the proviso that has been mentioned; there are many other

things.

We should be constructive and willing to move forward on issues such as claiming income support, mentioned by Malcolm Chisholm, and the review of the warm home deal, mentioned by John McAllion and others.

The "Better Government for Older People" initiative—a Cabinet office proposal launched in 1998—aims

"to improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views, and encouraging and recognising their contribution."

Of 28 pilot projects, three are in Scotland. One of the Scottish projects, in my constituency in Stirling, concentrates on promoting active citizenship. One of that project's initiatives is called, aptly, One Foot in the Web; it enables older people's communication and information skills to be passed on to other older people. Another initiative brings together social work and health services, including the setting up of mobile rural care services. Those initiatives represent action, not just words. The SNP seems to disregard all the activities that are beginning in Scotland.

Kenny MacAskill raised an important point about concessionary fares. I would very much welcome a comprehensive Scotland-wide concessionary fares scheme. Transport is critical for the elderly and, for many people, public transport is the only option. Without an effective and affordable public transport system, many older people are socially isolated. The partnership agreement recognised that we must encourage the improvement and integration of concessionary fares and public transport for pensioners and those with special needs.

I would like such a scheme to be phased in gradually. I realise that costs are involved, but a phased-in system could be managed. Today I lodged a motion calling for a Scotland-wide concessionary fares scheme and I hope that it will receive widespread support. We need a commitment, in principle, and then a detailed implementation plan. Such a scheme would benefit hundreds of thousands of pensioners in Scotland and would show people the real benefits that the Scottish Parliament can bring.

Last week, Wendy Alexander introduced the document "Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters", which was a bold attempt to look at social inclusion in the round. The document makes specific recommendations for older people. That visionary document, together with the recent proposals for a joint Westminster-Scottish Executive task force to look at pensioner poverty, provides the type of action plan that the SNP asks for in its motion. I beg members to reject the motion and support the Government's

amendment.

11:13

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): We have heard far too little talk of real money from the Scottish Executive today. We have had one reference to "funny money", as proposed—allegedly—by the Scottish National party. Real funny money means wasting £1.5 billion a year running Trident at Faslane.

By coincidence, £1.5 billion is the precise sum that Mr Darling is cutting from benefits. Imagine what that money could do for our pensioners and how much they deserve it. Imagine how much £30 billion—the whole cost of Trident—could do for Scotland. What could it do for Glasgow, where, to our shame, we learned today that six out of 10 constituencies are the poorest and most unhealthy in Britain? That includes Glasgow Anniesland, the constituency of the First Minister, who has been there since Adam was a boy. What has he done, and what has Labour done? It is clear that Labour is bad for people's health.

I will turn to the subject of outright age discrimination. We are all in this together; we are becoming older and older in this particular year, and with greater rapidity than ever before. We are within a month of people being able to say to all of us, even to the youngest member in the Parliament, "You are last century's people. You are last millennium's people." The age of Grecian 2000 has actually arrived—we will probably have to call it Grecian 3000 to make it seem more new.

The new millennium calls for a change in our aged way of thinking of older and senior citizens. It calls for tough action against the pervasive cancer of age discrimination, for where does the plight of pensioners begin? It begins with people being denied work in middle age so that they have no savings left by the time they become pensioners. It begins with the same sort of odious discrimination that we had to legislate against, with racism and sexism. Why should we not legislate against age discrimination?

As we have heard today, age discrimination kills. We have heard how it kills women, but it also kills men. A man thrown out of his job for being more than 50 years old is 50 per cent more likely to die prematurely. Shame on us all if we continue to allow that to happen. We know that hospitals refuse transplants to people who are more than 60 years old. That is sheer wickedness.

Iain Gray: The issue of heart transplants has come up a couple of times today, but I think that it was addressed recently in a parliamentary question. There is a balance to be struck between the benefit of a transplant and the risk that the patient might not survive such invasive surgery.

Judgments about when to conduct surgery are based on clinical assessments. It is not true that there is a ban on transplants for the over-60s.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: The minister is not a surgeon and neither am I, so I will continue.

To back my call for legislation against age discrimination, I will quote from a letter from Tony Blair. He wrote to the Campaign against Age Discrimination in Employment in July 1996:

"It is a tragedy that in Tory Britain millions of people are denied the opportunity to work. Older workers have a wealth of accumulated experience. It is economic nonsense to waste this experience."

That is quite right. He then made a promise:

"Since there are still those employers who wish to continue with a blinkered attitude, Labour will introduce legislation against age discrimination."

However, his promises went in one year and out the other. He broke that promise as soon as he was elected: no age legislation was introduced. The European Union has issued a directive, however, and I believe that Scotland should lead the way and that this Parliament should legislate on discrimination. I urge members to support the motion.

11:18

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): This debate is serious as it concerns the broad issues of poverty among pensioners and the health and well-being of older people.

I was disappointed that the motion in the name of John Swinney condemned the lack of action by the Scottish Executive and focused so specifically on an area in which the Parliament has no power. I was equally disappointed to see the response of Scottish National party members—particularly Alex Neil—to the report that came out today about the health of the people of Glasgow. On a day that we were shown a horrific picture of inequality in Glasgow, it is a disgrace that he should suggest that all the responsibility lies with the Labour councils of the past 70 years. To suggest that is to ignore the structural and economic problems that Glasgow has faced.

I was brought up in a poor part of Glasgow. A Labour council and a Labour Government ensured that we got a good education. My generation and my mother's generation aspired to the council housing that the Labour councils delivered because of the problems of living in the private rented sector.

Everyone recognises that the Labour council has protected Glasgow. The Parliament has to take ownership of Glasgow's problems and work with the local council and the people of Glasgow. Members of this Parliament should not take the

opportunity to make cheap political points, but it should not surprise us that the SNP has done that: it always picks the wrong targets and, consequently, finds the wrong solutions. The idea that constitutional change will deliver for the pensioners of this country is an absolute nonsense.

I want to talk—

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: I have heard Ms Elder talking about Grecian 2000 already and I was not impressed.

I want to talk about the cross-party group on older people, which I was privileged to attend recently. It was a valued initiative by organisations representing and campaigning on behalf of older people. An important point was made there about not separating off older people. Michael Hare Duke said that we are all aging and that perhaps we should welcome it, because if we were not, we would be dead. It is a significant point to make, that when we tackle issues that matter to older people, we benefit the broader community. Equally, if we tackle the economy and issues of social inclusion and talk about poverty, pensioners will benefit. Pensioners are concerned about issues to do with drugs, and I have to say to Tommy Sheridan that his party's policy to decriminalise heroin will hardly make them feel safer in their homes.

Because older people rely on public services disproportionately, any commitment to delivering high-quality public services will impact on them. I would like to locate areas where the Parliament can have an impact. Our committees can have an impact. I cannot believe that Alex Neil said that we do not need committees and that we do not need to talk. We need to listen to people and work with them, and our committees are a key place in which to do that.

On transport, we should be talking to the bus operators about what they are doing on sensitive areas of bus service, such as routes to hospitals, for example, in Glasgow. The operators have a responsibility in that area. The Health and Community Care Committee should be discussing the importance of supporting older people to stay in their own homes. We should be talking about the rights of carers and the importance of assessing the needs of carers in their own right.

On crime, we need to acknowledge the impact of the fear of crime on the lives and well-being of many older people. We have to consider the opportunity to bring old and young people together to challenge the stereotypes that each group has about the other. Within pensioner groups, we need to recognise the diversity of needs. We are

debating equalities this afternoon. I hope that the minimum income guarantee will address the important inequality for pensioners and will give particular support to women, who, as we know, are among the poorest of pensioners.

At a lobby that I attended last week, it was clear that pensioners are demanding that we address the problems that too many of them face. One woman there said to me that she got annoyed at those who said that this Government was doing nothing and that it was as bad as the last lot; she said that we must give it a chance. The Scottish Executive must recognise that we have been given an opportunity to tackle pensioner poverty and to address questions beyond income, such as agism and so on. We have to identify the issues that exclude people and limit their lives. It is an opportunity that we must take fearlessly, without closing off options or refusing to consider any available alternatives.

We should be serious about monitoring progress, so that that particular woman's willingness to give us a chance will be rewarded with real change in her life and that of all older people.

11:23

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): My colleague, Robert Brown, spelled out the Liberal Democrat position extremely well.

I would like to concentrate on a few points. First, I think that I am the first genuine pensioner to speak in the debate; it shows that pensioners can make a contribution. That is being recognised gradually, but not nearly enough. Many people of pensionable age can make a huge contribution in many different ways and can enjoy doing so. I enjoy putting the boot into the establishment; by doing what they enjoy, pensioners can make a real contribution to the community.

I am happy to support Iain Gray's amendment. He is a minister in whom I have confidence, and I felt that he and some of the other Labour speakers, both old colleagues such as Malcolm Chisholm and John McAllion, and people whom I have started getting to know in committees, such as Sylvia Jackson and—I have lost the name. *[Laughter.]* One of the difficulties of being old is that I am not good on names.

I am beginning to value new colleagues on committees as well. We have a great chance to develop a Labour party in Scotland that is distinctively Scottish and unlike the Labour party in London. I have serious reservations about many aspects of that Labour party. I feel that its failure to reverse the Tories' consistent attack on the poor and the pensioners is unacceptable. The gulf between the rich and the poor is widening, and

pensioners are among the poorest in the community. Labour in London has not done nearly enough about that; it has sold out to the capitalist system in a disgraceful manner.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Given that the member has such an interest in providing advocacy services and supporting the rights of young people, does he welcome the commitment in the Scottish Labour party manifesto to set up similar systems and organisations to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of older people?

Donald Gorrie: Yes. I am very happy with many of the things that the partnership Executive is pursuing—that is an excellent initiative. However, there is a fundamental flaw in the United Kingdom Government's attitude towards poverty and its eradication, which we must address. Westminster also fails to understand that in Scotland we have a partnership agreement. Without any consultation, Gordon Brown swans up and suggests various committees. Those committees may be a good idea—it depends how they work out—but the whole thing was done in a totally unacceptable way. The partnership Government is not like a Victorian marriage, in which one partner does what the other one tells them. There are some lessons to be learned if people wish the partnership Government to continue.

My main point is that we should approach the issue of improving pensioners' lives from the bottom up, not the top down. There is too much bureaucracy and well-intentioned regulation. We should help communities and the older people within them. Older people can contribute a huge amount to their communities. Grandparents are often the rock on which communities are built. If we help communities to develop, to provide services for the old people who need them and to enlist the support of the old people who can contribute, that will be a better approach than the top-down one that is often taken. The key is to help people to help themselves. It is easy to invent lots of bureaucracy—ticking boxes and so on—but we must help people to help themselves in their communities. Older people can make a significant contribution.

11:27

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I wondered when the consensus politics was going to end. I think that we just saw a fine example: Johann Lamont, with her socialist background, trying to stick up for new Labour policies—I congratulate her on doing that so well.

We have already heard about the problems faced by the elderly because of fuel poverty. It must be recognised that a major contributory

factor to fuel poverty is the imposition of standing charges by the utility companies. The Scottish National party believes that removing standing charges for electricity, gas and telephone bills would enhance pensioners' lives and give them a higher standard of living. It may be that that is a reserved matter, but as members of the Parliament, MSPs take on board everything that our constituents and the pensioners up in the visitors gallery say to us. If we had the will, we could go to Westminster and suggest that the standing charges should be abolished.

The plight of the poor was highlighted in a report by the Consumers Association, which said that the poor were suffering from the severe tactics of the gas and electricity companies, with gas suppliers cutting off 30,000 homes last year. For the elderly in Scotland, living on pensions of only £66.25 for a single person or £106.70 for a couple—one of the lowest pensions in Europe—standing charges are a major burden. That is evident from the tragic statistics—there were 2,200 excess deaths of people over the age of 60 in Scotland in the winter of 1997-98. We should not allow that to happen in a civilised society. It is obvious that there is a particular problem in Scotland that must be addressed.

There is no reason why Scotland should not follow the example of Ireland, where standing charges for pensioners have been abolished. If Scottish pensioners did not have to pay standing charges, but paid only for the fuel that they had used, it would go some way towards alleviating the problem of fuel poverty in our elderly population.

Research reveals that poor pensioners are less likely to own a telephone than better-off pensioners. In 1996-97, 12 per cent of single pensioners and 3 per cent of pensioner couples, who were mainly dependent on state pensions, had no telephone at all. Furthermore, single pensioners who were mainly dependent on state benefits were three times more likely not to have a telephone than single pensioners who had greater access to income, and 10 times more likely not to have a telephone than couples who had greater access to income.

It would greatly enhance pensioners' quality of life if standing charges were abolished and they had to pay only for the telephone calls that they actually made. It is clear that the current system of standing charges penalises the poorest and most vulnerable people, and especially the elderly. What is required from the Government is action. If Ireland can abolish standing charges, I do not see why we cannot.

We have heard many fine words from those on the Labour benches. We have not heard anything about Gordon Brown sitting on his £12 billion war chest. What about that? Why not release some of

that money for the pensioners?

Words from the Executive do not heat homes, and do not buy food to put on the table. What is required is action. Removing standing charges now would be a step in the right direction.

11:31

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I think that I am the youngest contributor to this debate, and I very much welcome the idea of the Parliament being able to address the needs of our older population. I believe that a society can be judged on how it treats its older people—people who have worked for their country and community, who in many cases have cared for their family for many years and who now need their family and their community to care for them. I would like to associate myself with the comments of Johann Lamont, Malcolm Chisholm and John McAllion.

I am glad that Tricia Marwick has come in. I would like to tell her why I am not going to vote for the SNP motion—not simply because it is an SNP motion, but because it lies, it lies, it lies. I read John Swinney's motion before I came into the chamber, and it left a very bitter taste in my mouth. To try to hoodwink this country's older people into believing that neither the United Kingdom Government nor the Scottish Executive had taken any action—that is what the motion says—to help pensioners is going a step too far, even for the SNP.

Yes, I would like to see the link restored between pensions and earnings, and I know that many of my colleagues on the Labour benches have fought for that for many years. I have stood beside pensioners and trade unionists fighting and arguing for it. We are now in a position in Government—not in Opposition—where I believe that we will be able to deliver it in future, and not just give people empty rhetoric.

Let me address the motion, which claims that the Executive has taken no action to help pensioners. Cutting the price of fuel by slashing value added tax from 8 per cent to 5 per cent is not lack of action. To the pensioners in Forth in my constituency who were not able to afford their heating bills last year but will be able to afford them this year, a minimum pension guarantee that provides a minimum income for pensioners in the same way as a minimum income is provided for those in work is not lack of action.

Providing free eye tests is not lack of action. A pensioner with bad eyes, who has suffered as a result of not getting an eye test, now knows that eye tests are free, appreciates that, and will go for one. A free TV licence is hardly lack of action for the older person who wants to be involved in the world out there, who wants to keep in touch, but

was not able to because he or she was not able to afford the licence.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: No, Fergus. You didn't take us, we'll not take you. Sit down. We will get on with our contribution and you get on with yours. I am in the business of delivering for pensioners, not of delivering the empty rhetoric that Fergus Ewing's party, far too often, seems to produce.

The warm deal for pensioners will deliver warmth to homes where ice inside the window was far too common during our cold Scottish winter months. However, John McAllion is right: we need to look again at the warm deal, and we need to look again at whether we need to target the money at those who need it most. That is what we are about. It is not about giving more to those who already have it; it is about taking money and giving it to those who need it most.

How dare the SNP accuse this Government and this Executive of lack of action, when they have increased winter fuel payments fivefold from £20 to £100. The pensioners of this country will know the actions of this Government when they see cheques for £100 falling through the letterbox this winter.

The SNP's contribution to this debate has not centred on what the Parliament can do for pensioners, but on how the Parliament can criticise the Westminster Government. The people of Scotland spoke loud and clear on 6 May 1999. They want the Scottish Parliament and Westminster to get on with their own business, but to work together on important issues. Quite frankly, the ideological blinkers that prevent the SNP from recognising the benefits of a joint ministerial committee to tackle pensioner poverty result in a true disservice to our pensioners.

If SNP members believe that committees only waste time and money, why do they take part in them? Committees are effective and will do their best for pensioners. With our colleagues in Westminster, we—not the SNP with its ideological blinkers—will deliver the better Scotland that our pensioners want.

11:36

Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Much has been said about the level of state pension and many arguments have been constructed around the validity of directly comparing our state pension to the pensions of European neighbours.

However, one premise that cannot be challenged is the appalling level of poverty prevalent among our older generation. As we have already heard, about half of our pensioner

households are dependent on state benefits for at least 75 per cent of their income—an income which is only around a fifth of the UK average.

As the state pension is the biggest factor that governs older people's income in Scotland, it is only right that we should examine that payment if we are to reduce poverty. Perhaps the most regressive step to date has been the Labour Government's abandonment of a state pension that can be relied on to provide a decent standard of living. That was proved by its decision to award pensioners an increase of a mere 75p per week, claiming that the move to a guaranteed minimum income was a better use of finance. I am sure that pensioners will more than welcome Gordon Brown's generous budget increase. It will buy half a box of cornflakes, two pints of milk or a broadsheet newspaper such as *The Herald*, but not the *Daily Record* or *The Sun* as well.

Let us examine Gordon Brown's much-trumpeted minimum income for pensioners. He heralded the fact that there would be a minimum of £75 for pensioners. However, that is dependent on pensioners claiming income support to top up their inadequate state pension of £66.75. Quite aside from the 70,000 pensioners living in extreme poverty because they did not pass the means test by a few pennies, it is surely a damning admission of the inadequacy of the UK state pension that the Benefits Agency has to shore up pensions to the poverty line.

However, the story does not end there. The system that pays out benefits is grossly inefficient, particularly when it relies on vulnerable people in the later years of their lives going cap in hand to the benefits office. Many pensioners do not claim benefits because they are unable to wade through the forms or are unaware that they have a right to this money.

Furthermore, people who have worked all their lives often do not want to be treated as charity cases by the Government and certainly do not want to endure the indignity of a means test. The Government's own statistics, although available only on a UK-wide basis, bear that out. Although, in 1997-98, the average pensioner claimed £31.50 each week in benefits, an average £18.80 of benefits payable to pensioners remained unclaimed. It is just like the lottery money that lies unclaimed every week.

That means that almost 40 per cent of benefits to which pensioners are entitled are simply not claimed, which, in Scotland, represents about £100 million of unclaimed benefits each year. It is little wonder that the Government prefers the indignity of the means test to a straightforward increase in pensions which are an automatic right and do not involve a fight with bureaucracy.

This Parliament can take steps to counter poverty among older people: tackling fuel poverty, improving housing and supporting concessionary transport are all important. However, the single most important basic item that governs the welfare—or otherwise—of our elderly is the pension rate. After all, the pension is older people's wage. Until the Parliament is able to set the state pension level, we will always be fighting the battle against pensioner poverty with both hands tied behind our backs.

11:40

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): It is a matter of regret that the only pensioner to take part in this debate, Donald Gorrie, used the debate for other motives.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): What happened to the partnership?

Mr McNeil: I have been heckled by boilermakers, sir, and you ain't no boilermaker.

Before Donald Gorrie makes such statements in the chamber, he should ask his Cabinet colleagues who attended and who chaired the meeting that day.

There has been much talk this morning about poor pensioners. Unfortunately, some members raise their eyes to the public gallery and see votes rather than pensioners.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Shame.

Mr McNeil: It is a shame.

When we talk about poor pensioners, I see parents, relatives and friends, all on low pensions and without any additional income. That is my experience of poor pensioners. It is wrong to suggest that we should treat all pensioners the same. There is a difference between pensioners living on the margins and pensioners living in Marbella.

Ms White: For goodness' sake.

Mr McNeil: That is the truth. We must make the distinction. I want pensioners on the margins to benefit from the Parliament's work. To suggest that we do not care about the lives of our pensioners, given Labour Governments' long record of commitment to pensioners over the years, is complete and utter nonsense. We are delivering and will continue to deliver across the board for our pensioners. We deliver warm homes while the Opposition delivers warm words. We offer a stable economy, low inflation and a growing income; the Opposition offers boom and bust and increased taxes for pensioners. We offer safer communities; the Opposition opposes our measures to tackle crime.

The Opposition's description of the lives of pensioners is a patronising insult to pensioners who have campaigned for years for some of the things that we have delivered. There has been no mention today of the work of those campaigners or of the issues on which they have won. There has been no recognition of the minimum income guarantee for pensioners to tackle pensioner poverty.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Mr McNeil: No, thank you.

There has been no mention of the campaign against fuel poverty. The pensioners who campaigned against it should be given credit. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Order.

Mr McNeil: Those pensioners are winning their campaign because we are delivering on their calls to tackle fuel poverty through winter fuel payments, cuts in VAT and the warm deal programme, as well as providing free eye tests and free TV licences—all measures which the Opposition has spat on this morning.

Mr Quinan: What about the 75p?

Ms White rose—

Mr McNeil: The measures that I mentioned are in place because we have a Labour Government at Westminster and a Labour partnership Executive in Edinburgh. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr McNeil: We will continue—*[Interruption.]* I am nearly home, I think.

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

Mr McNeil: Go on.

Iain Gray: Mr McNeil has pointed out that he has been heckled by boilermakers. Does he agree that that heckling was almost certainly of a higher quality than the heckling that we are hearing now?

Mr McNeil: Absolutely. I can confirm that.

We will continue to work in this Parliament for our pensioners. I look forward to working with pensioners and campaign groups, particularly on the issue of concessionary travel where this Parliament can make a difference.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

11:44

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I have a number of years to wait before I reach retiral age. I do not know whether I am the youngest contributor to the debate as I do not

know what age Karen Gillon is.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am the youngest.

Richard Lochhead: Is it you, Tricia?

I am delighted to participate in this debate, which is a great chance for the Parliament to discuss the key concerns of older people in Scotland. My generation knows that we owe those people a tremendous debt. That is why I am determined that this Parliament should do its utmost to deliver for them. Older people's expectations of the Parliament are high. They have been disappointed time and time again by successive Westminster Governments that have failed to show any political will or determination to help older people in Scotland.

Many people are familiar with an SNP slogan which says that Scotland is the only country to discover oil and get poorer. It is clear from a report in today's press that Scotland has continued to get poorer, and it is an indictment of Westminster rule of Scotland over the decades—and, in particular, of the Labour party's rule of Glasgow—that the same report says that elderly people in Scotland are dying sooner than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. One reason for that is that, not only is Scotland the only country to discover oil and get poorer, but it is the only country to discover oil and gas and still allow old people to live in conditions in which they cannot heat their homes properly.

We have heard many statistics today: more than 100,000 households in Scotland headed by people over 60 are without central heating; in 18 per cent of cases, single pensioners do not heat their main living rooms on a regular basis. We are told that one in three pensioners lives in fuel poverty and spends 20 per cent of his or her income on trying to keep warm.

Yet Scotland is Europe's energy capital. Here we are in 1999: production of North sea oil and gas is at record levels for the past 25 years of production. One of the cruellest ironies must be that, although revenues are up 62 per cent from the same time last year, and despite all the natural resources under Scottish waters and the wells that produce that most precious natural resource in the world, there are people living on the land adjacent to those oilfields, within sight of the oil rigs, who cannot afford to heat their homes. Surely that is a scandal, and one that successive Westminster Governments of all political shades have allowed to continue.

We all know that we get the harshest of winters in Scotland, yet we hear that our old people will get £100 of winter fuel payments and a 75p increase in their pensions. They have a wholly inadequate severe weather payment scheme, run by Westminster. A payment of £100 for fuel in

winter only costs £50 million a year. Are we saying that £50 is adequate to heat the homes of the 900,000 pensioners in Scotland? Surely the fact that the excess winter mortality rate among old people in Finland is less than half that of Scotland tells us that the policies coming out of Westminster simply do not work for old folk in Scotland.

As was mentioned earlier in the debate, it is the same old story from Westminster. Yes, Westminster has delivered the £100 winter payment, but what else is happening? New Labour in Scotland is cutting back on local authority budgets, which means that it is giving that £100 with one hand but taking money away with the other. There have been protests and demonstrations by old people around Scotland in recent months and years, because of increased charges for wardens, for home help and for visits to day care centres. Old folk even have to pay more in shops for their food in rural areas: that means more money taken from their budget because of the rise in fuel duty, which has a particularly bad impact in rural areas.

A significant step forward needs to be taken, with proper, adequately resourced and structured severe weather payments in Scotland. The current scheme is completely unsatisfactory; it does not take into account different climatic conditions around the country. The trigger is set at an inadequate level. There has to be an ice age before our old folk are helped.

In conclusion, the Executive does have a big challenge before it to deliver a better Scotland for our old people, but if it does not meet it, it should have the guts to return to this chamber in two years' time and admit that only in an independent Scotland will we have access to the resources that will deliver a better quality of life for old people in this country.

11:49

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): While I welcome the SNP's putting the issue of older people on today's agenda, I would point out that one aspect of its motion is not dealt with by this Parliament, but at Westminster. On this momentous day, the first on which there has been a truly federal situation among the Parliaments and Assemblies in the United Kingdom, I want to focus on the issues which this Parliament can tackle.

How we treat our older people is a prime indicator of where we stand as a society, as a country and a Parliament. None of us doubt, particularly after hearing Donald Gorrie's speech, that older members of our community have much to offer Scotland. Members who have had dealings with the voluntary sector know the

desperate state that this country would be in were it not for the extra work that older people put into the voluntary sector. Yet 31 per cent of our pensioners live in poverty. No member of this chamber finds that statistic acceptable or believes that we should not tackle the problem, although we may have different views on how to do so.

I said that, in summing up for the Liberal Democrats, I would concentrate on the issues that this Parliament is able to tackle, but I must talk about pensions first. Our pensioners want better pensions and the Liberal Democrats urge Gordon Brown to open his war chest and to give them just that. We want money from the national insurance fund to give our pensioners a better deal. Pensioners have consistently had a raw deal—the Conservatives' VAT on fuel and the removal of the link between pensions and earnings have contributed to the stage that we have reached. The latest increase in the pension is appalling. I acknowledge the initiatives mentioned by my Labour colleagues, such as the £100 winter fuel payment, free TV licences and free eye tests, which no one would say are not good initiatives. However, they amount only to inadequate steps on the way to tackling pensioner poverty.

People want decent homes. On the brink of the millennium, 25 per cent of Scotland's homes are damp or affected by condensation, which means that 4,000 Scots will face death this winter as a result of poor housing and the cold. Hundreds of thousands of others suffer from cold and damp-related illnesses, such as respiratory disease, heart disease, stroke and the general depression that comes from living in poverty and dampness. Every year, there are 70,000 emergency admissions to our hospitals of people suffering respiratory problems, and that figure does not include those suffering from flu.

Tricia Marwick: Will Margaret Smith join me in condemning the Executive for not setting a target to deal with fuel poverty in Scotland?

Mrs Smith: I do not have a problem with setting such a target. At present, four out of 10 houses in Scotland are failing fuel efficiency targets. Last week, the partnership set targets for a number of social problems.

Tricia Marwick: But what about fuel poverty?

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): It is a fact that such a target is contained within our programme for government and will affect 100,000 households by 2003 at a cost of about £40 million. Perhaps the SNP should read the programme for government.

Mrs Smith: I was about to come to that point. Against the background of Scotland's housing stock, we should tackle fuel poverty, which is exactly what the Executive is beginning to do.

While the death toll rises in Scotland during the winter months, Sweden, Norway, Finland and similar countries, which have worse winters than Scotland has, have a better record of addressing that—that is a salutary lesson. [MEMBERS: "They are independent."] Members may say that, but it is simply a mantra. Independence alone will not tackle the poverty and the problems faced by Scotland's pensioners. I gave up believing in Santa Claus and fairies at the bottom of my garden a long time ago and, quite frankly, the SNP and the independence money tree are on the same level as Santa Claus and the fairies.

The Executive's warm deal is the first part of a healthy homes initiative that, by 2003, aims to improve 100,000 houses that are affected by dampness and condensation. With an annual budget of £12 million, the warm deal is merely the first step on the road to achieving warmer homes. Targeting lower-income groups for the £500 grants for insulation will also target many pensioner households and is welcome. However, if we are serious about tackling poverty, we must tackle fuel poverty and energy-inefficient homes.

We must also consider how to give our GPs more leeway. They should have the power to think laterally on the issue of patients with respiratory problems who live in damp homes. Would it not be more effective to allow GPs to write prescriptions for home insulation, rather than sending people home to suffer in damp and cold homes? Such action would mean savings for our pensioners and for the NHS and improved health for our people.

There are other issues that are also of interest to our older people. Many of us, including Scotland's pensioners, want a clear message from the UK Government that it will accept all the recommendations of the Sutherland report into long-term care. Many of our older people live in fear of having to sell their homes to pay for long-term care. We welcome the minister's announcement today that he will chair a new group that will examine the balance between residential and home-based care—and, crucially, the charging for personal care that is delivered at home—and produce proposals in time for the next spending review.

We also welcome the extra £300 million that is being made available to local authorities for community care. The Health and Community Care Committee has decided to examine the issue of community care and focus partly on long-term care of the elderly as one of its main issues of inquiry early in the new year.

Older people want the unfair system, in which people must pay for care at home or in a hospital, to be scrapped. That system is partly why we are bedblocking in our hospitals, at a cost of millions of pounds to the NHS and at a much greater cost

to older people, who are receiving inappropriate care. This Parliament must tackle issues such as community care and transport. We must also address the fact that, throughout Scotland, several thousand people, as Gil Paterson said, are entitled to benefits but do not claim them. Both our Parliaments, in the UK and in Scotland, must address that right now.

11:56

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): Donald Gorrie and I must declare an interest, as we are the only genuine pensioners who have spoken, out of 24 speakers of whom I shall be the 24th.

On 1 January 2000, there will be a celebration: it will be 91 years since the first pension was introduced in this country. Robert Brown made reference to that. On 1 January 1909, the pension was 5 shillings and life expectancy was, on average, between 47 and 50 years. That does not bode well, when one thinks of the 73p increase in the state pension that was reported the other day. What could someone buy in a week for 73p? They could buy *The Herald* and a small bag of crisps, or they could buy a cheaper newspaper and one and a half bags of crisps. That puts the matter into a simplistic context, but that is the reality of what 73p could buy.

Thirty years ago, it was estimated that 500 people in this country—and by this country, for the benefit of my friends in the SNP, I am talking about the United Kingdom—had reached 100. Today, it is estimated that more than 6,000 people are 100 or older. That shows how ages are increasing, and how the older population is increasing. The other day, Wendy Alexander announced a 20-year programme of intent, which met with mixed reactions. However, no Parliament can afford not to look to the future and plan accordingly.

On 27 April, the Government actuary's department produced a series of projections that were based on figures that had been issued by the Registrar General for Scotland. By 2021, Scotland's population is expected to fall from its 1998 level of 5.12 million to 5.06 million. During that period, the number of children under 16 is set to fall to 85 per cent of its present level. However, the number of Scots who are older than the pensionable age is set to rise by 8 per cent, which will bring that section of the population to just fewer than 1 million, after taking into account the change in the retirement age for women, from 60 to 65. Without that change, the rise would have been 28 per cent, according to the statisticians.

Tony Blair and Donald Dewar claim that their priority is the poorest pensioner. One must say that, at times, they plead like a pair of Pharisees.

What is the reality? The European Commission has adopted a working definition, which states that people face social exclusion if their income is less than half the national average. The Government's own sources suggested that, in 1997, a single person without a car, who lived in rented accommodation modestly but adequately, needed a gross weekly income of £137.34. A married couple, who were similarly placed but who owned a car, needed £267.58. How many pensioners today receive those incomes? It should also be remembered that those figures were published in 1997 and were derived from 1996 data.

Mr Rumbles: John Young rightly mentioned the 75p increase in pensions and the fact that it would buy *The Herald* and a bag of crisps. The Liberal Democrats 10 days ago tabled an early-day motion in the House of Commons that said that the 75p increase would be inadequate. Bearing in mind his comments, will Mr Young explain to the chamber why not a single Conservative member of the UK Parliament wants to support that motion?

John Young: As Mike Rumbles knows, that is a matter for Westminster. What are the Liberals here going to do? Will they lodge a motion of that type in this chamber?

Tommy Sheridan rose—

John Young: I am sorry, but I am pressed for time.

The figures that I have quoted are taken from data from 1996. If they were updated, there would be another £25 for single people and £40 for couples to be included.

Age Concern commissioned a Gallup survey earlier this year and that survey found that one in 20 people older than 65 in the UK had been refused medical treatment. Kay Ullrich and others have touched on that. The majority of people who are treated in NHS hospitals for heart attacks are more than 65 years of age, but one in five coronary care units operates an age-related admissions policy. Clinical trials on cancers similarly exclude or under-represent older people, despite the fact that many cancers are age-related. That was touched on by a number of speakers.

Announcements on free television licences and winter fuel allowances are welcome to existing pensioners, but new pensioners will still be £500 worse off as a result of the abolition of the age-related married couples allowance. Once again, Labour is giving with one hand, but taking away with the other. Three million households in the UK that have a television include at least one pensioner older than 75 years. The cost to the Department of Social Security of free licences will be £300 million. While the Conservatives support

that move, it will not offset the problems that have been imposed on pensioners through the ending of the married couples allowance for those aged more than 65. There are higher council tax bills, and £40 billion of extra taxes have been imposed since this Government came to power.

Speakers have touched on age discrimination, which is—make no mistake—rampant against the elderly in relation to employment. Men and women experience such discrimination. Other generations suffer from age discrimination. Those between 35 and 50 suffer considerable age discrimination, so perhaps some thought should be given to introducing appropriate legislation, although that would be difficult to enforce. When one refers to the elderly, the picture that is painted is usually of someone who has grey hair, who stoops and who uses a walking-stick. That description is by no means applicable throughout that group, in which I include myself.

There are affluent elements among the elderly and they should not be disregarded. There is considerable purchasing power among them. That section of the community is very important. I think that Robert Brown mentioned earlier that we should try to harness the talents of that group. The Americans call it grey power. They use that term in a political sense, but it also means people's talents.

On 30 November—some 48 hours ago—the all-party group on aging and older people met in committee room 2 in the House of Commons. Jeff Rooker, the Minister of State, Department of Social Security, and the chairman of the interministerial group on older people, was a guest speaker. I hope that that gathering was well attended by MPs of all parties. There is something to be learned from it.

There is an issue that I think is of supreme importance—the gap that often exists between youth and the elderly. There are various reasons for that gap. First, many of our younger populations have, as a result of unemployment, no opportunity to work alongside older colleagues. I am not suggesting that it be brought back, but in the days of national service many thousands benefited from links between people in their 20s, their 30s and their 40s. Large sections of the media are heavily geared towards youth, and there is nothing wrong with that, but there is sometimes a considerable imbalance against the aged.

Care must be taken not only over the design of housing for the elderly, but over whether a family mix should be included in such housing. That has been touched on already. When I was a councillor, there was resistance to family mixes among certain elderly people. They did not like 12-year olds kicking a ball against their walls, and other

things of that nature.

Gil Paterson and others have mentioned transport. The design of vehicles is crucial to allow the elderly ease of access to them. Johann Lamont mentioned transport routes to hospitals. They are crucially important, as a number of us are well aware in terms of the south side of Glasgow and the Southern general hospital. Many elderly people are terrified to leave their homes in the evenings. In some areas there is considerable fear of burglary and attack, so many of our older citizens live like hermits.

I believe all members are concerned about these things, although we may differ, on occasion, on how to approach them. There are pensioners in the gallery today, and pensioners came to the Parliament last week. I agreed with a lot of what Iain Gray said then, but a number of people I spoke to were from Clydebanks and Knightswoods—two very strong Labour areas—and they felt that they were not getting the considerable input that Iain spoke about. A possible coalition has been mentioned; a politicians coalition is needed. People in the gallery and throughout Scotland are not interested in us arguing away in this chamber. They want a combined force. Yes, we will have our differences, but let us come together in some form of pensioners coalition.

12:06

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): A great deal has been said today about pensioners' standard of living—but only statements from the opposition parties that add up to a shameful litany of fine words and no policies. No action was proposed by the SNP—its promises hold no water and are guaranteed to create uncertainty and insecurity.

We witness an unholy alliance between the Tories, with their dismal legacy, and the SNP. It is an alliance that offers nothing for our pensioners in the future. Neither Alex Neil nor any other SNP member proposed one policy; they just criticised and made promises—after 18 years of Tory Governments that widened the gap between the richest and poorest pensioners to the extent that one in five pensioners lives in a household with half the national average income.

I shall return to the essence of the debate and remind members what the Scottish Executive and the Government are doing to tackle the economic, health and care needs of older people. The minimum income guarantee recognises that the gap between rich and poor pensioners has widened dramatically since 1979 and gives most money to help those most in need. Every pensioner will get a guaranteed income—

Tommy Sheridan: I am grateful to the minister

for giving way as that is the point I most wanted to intervene on. What does the Scottish Executive see as the poverty line and how does that relate to the minimum income guarantee?

Jackie Baillie: If I may finish, I will get to that point. Tommy mentioned the link to earnings. The minimum income guarantee restores that link for the 125,000 poorest pensioners in Scotland. I hope that Tommy will welcome that. As a showbiz socialist he will appreciate that, in the words of Ronan Keating from Boyzone,

"you say it best when you say nothing at all".

Winter fuel payments are up from £20 to £100, a fivefold increase to tackle the Tory legacy that meant that a third of single pensioners were living in fuel poverty in 1997.

Mrs Margaret Ewing *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: We have cut the price of fuel by cutting VAT from 8 per cent to 5 per cent, so our pensioners' money goes further. There is warm deal investment of more than £10 million this year and a further £28 million over the next two years, so 100,000 homes will be upgraded by 2003. A high proportion will be the homes of pensioners as older people suffer most from the effects of cold housing.

Mrs Ewing *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: I will give way shortly. Free eye tests for all pensioners and free TV licences for over-75s mean that pensioners' money goes further. In Scotland, an extra £300 million is going into community care, half of which will go on older people's services, with £10 million specifically earmarked for the delivery of carers' needs and services.

What of the Tories?

Mrs Ewing *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: We already know that they oppose everything we want to do to make pensioners better off. I will give members a flavour of how they would do that. They introduced VAT on fuel and tried to increase it to 17.5 per cent. They introduced eye test charges for pensioners. They would not have given pensioner households the extra winter fuel allowance, and they would not support the minimum income guarantee.

What about the SNP? Fourteen key promises were made in its manifesto, but not one referred to pensioners.

Mary Scanlon *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: In fact, the SNP manifesto for this Parliament was a pensioner-free zone—no figures, no costs, no ideas, no policies.

Mrs Ewing: I have been trying for some time to

persuade the minister to give way. Leaving aside the fact that our manifesto contained a clear pensioners package, may I remind the minister of the fact that, when the SNP group in the House of Commons tabled an amendment to reduce VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent, no less a person than Alistair Darling said that it was a cynical ploy?

Jackie Baillie: I am one of those people who suffers from a lack of sleep, so I have read the SNP manifesto. I can tell the chamber that there was not one item that referred to pensioners.

Alex Neil: On a point of order. I have the manifesto here—

Richard Lochhead *rose*—

Alex Neil: The minister may take a copy.

Jackie Baillie: Perhaps we should search for the SNP's proposals for pensioners in the infamous economic strategy for independence. Were they in there? Nope, the strategy contained nothing extra for pensioners—only forecasts that copy the policies of the Department of Social Security and the Treasury. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: Why does the SNP not give any costed pledges now? The answer is that it has given up its claims of a fiscal surplus of billions and admitted a deficit of billions. That is why it can promise nothing and deliver nothing for pensioners.

Mary Scanlon: Does the minister agree with the study that was issued yesterday by the University of Bristol, which indicated that in the past two and half years the poverty gap in the eight Labour-controlled constituencies in Glasgow has widened? Will she and the Labour Administration accept some responsibility for that?

Jackie Baillie: The figures in that study are for the period up to 1994. Earlier, Mary Scanlon said that she readily accepts blame for the period 1979 to 1997, when the Conservatives built up child poverty and pensioner poverty. That is why I will not take lectures from her.

The SNP has no idea how it would deliver existing levels of pensions and benefits. If that seems reckless to members, it gets worse. Let us not forget, as Des McNulty helpfully reminded us, that, just a few weeks ago, Kenny MacAskill made the staggering suggestion that we should spend £900 million on roads—policies on the hoof from a party on the run. How would the SNP do that? By raising income tax—again? By cutting benefits and pensions? Who would pay for the SNP's proposals? We know who would pay for them—ordinary Scots. Scottish pensioners would pay the price.

Some time ago, Margo MacDonald was quoted

in *The Express (Scotland)* as saying in response to the SNP's proposed tax hike that people on low incomes would lose out.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Jackie Baillie: In terms of policies for pensioners, the SNP had nothing to offer at the election and it has had absolutely nothing to offer since. No policies, but lots of pointless press releases—the poor journalists' fax machines are collapsing under the weight of SNP rant and rhetoric. The latest offering was a press release announcing the need for a shadow minister. It is a shame that the SNP did not discover that need earlier. However, far be it from me to suggest that this is just cheap political point-scoring; not even the SNP could sink that low.

What about Tommy Sheridan, who strikes poses but whose party's manifesto does not offer any commitment to restoring the link between pensions and earnings?

Tommy Sheridan: One of our promises was to restore that link.

Jackie Baillie: I have read the whole of the manifesto, and not one of Tommy's promises—

Tommy Sheridan: Did the minister enjoy it?

Jackie Baillie: I did, actually—it was a bit like fantasy football.

We have linked the minimum income guarantee to earnings to help the poorest pensioners in society. That is our key priority. It is about targeting our resources on the poorest pensioners.

The Executive is clear that older people matter. "Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters", which was launched last week, sets out our targets and milestones in respect of our older people and shows that they are at the heart of government in Scotland. Unlike the SNP and the Tories, not only will we tackle pensioner poverty and quality of life, we will be held accountable to the people of Scotland

Disappointingly, the usual attacks were made on the chancellor's announcement yesterday that Scottish Executive ministers are to sit with their counterparts from across Britain on joint ministerial committees to co-ordinate and develop joint working to tackle pensioner poverty.

Alex Neil rose—

Jackie Baillie: I welcome that initiative. We know the importance of working together on matters of shared concern and do not adopt an isolationist position. Bringing together ministers, exchanging information and developing co-ordinated policy strategies will deliver the real benefits that we want for our older people. We will have a greater voice in those areas to ensure that

the policies that the Scottish Executive and the Government develop achieve maximum results for our pensioners.

Far be it from me to remind Donald Gorrie that his leader, Jim Wallace, supports the establishment of joint ministerial committees. I recognise that memory lapses do occasionally occur.

The programme for government, which was produced by Labour and the Liberal Democrats working together, was based on listening to the people of Scotland and delivering what they want.

Mr Rumbles: On a point of information, the Liberal Democrat group has yet to comment on joint ministerial committees. We will address that issue on Tuesday evening.

Jackie Baillie: I thank Mike Rumbles for that intervention. Families need to talk to each other, so I suggest that he talks to his leader.

Mrs Ewing: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Following what Mike Rumbles has said, will the minister withdraw her rather insulting remark about Donald Gorrie?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. The minister will continue her speech and wind up.

Jackie Baillie: For far too long, the skills, experiences and insights of Scotland's older people have been ignored. We will invite, value and act on their contributions.

Let no one be in any doubt that the Executive is committed to listening to older people, to valuing their contribution and to supporting their needs. The vision outlined in the section entitled "Every older person matters" in our report, "Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters" shows that we want older people to be financially secure and to enjoy active, independent and healthy lives.

Alex Neil rose—

Jackie Baillie: That is our goal. We have started to deliver on it. We are the only party that will do so. I would like to believe that everyone in the chamber, including the SNP, shares that goal, but would members trust it with their pension? The SNP has never said how it would pay for a separate social security department in Scotland. It has said nothing about the enormous set-up costs or the running costs and it has given no details about the different types and levels of benefit or about how they would be uprated.

Alex Neil rose—

Jackie Baillie: The SNP will get its chance to reply on those issues. Of course, they are not easy, which is precisely why the SNP avoids them. Let us see whether, in the next 10 minutes, the

SNP will address those issues. We all want security in retirement, but the SNP offers pensioners only incompetence and insecurity.

12:20

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Jackie Baillie seemed to be enjoying herself during her speech, but she is on a different planet entirely from Scotland's pensioners. Last week, pensioners who want a decent state pension were demonstrating outside the Parliament, but I did not see a single new Labour face there. [MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] If Labour members were there, the pensioners did not seem very pleased to see them.

I do not know what Jackie Baillie was doing during the debate, but if she had been listening she would have heard Alex Neil explain how the SNP would increase pensions and how Labour could do so with Westminster's various kitties.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: Just give me a moment; after listening to the debate for three hours, I have only just got up.

I am not prepared to admit my age, but I shall start with a general observation or two about the attitude to older people outside this chamber—and sometimes inside it. There must be a change in Scottish society's attitude to older people. They are not a problem to be solved by dealing out piecemeal financial and social packages. I can assure members that I will not stand here spouting the motherhood-and-apple-pie platitudes that seem to be the diet of this Parliament 99 per cent of the time. Older people are not passive recipients, nor are they a homogenous group of people; we are all individuals. Older people are certainly not incapacitated, befuddled or redundant, although that often appears to be the baseline from which assessments are made.

As has been said, ours is an agist society, perhaps more so in respect of women, for whom not only beauty, but worth, is skin deep. Contempt for and fear of aging are rife, and plastic surgery rules okay. Even the language of politics in which Labour indulges seems to endorse those prejudices. Everything must always be new, young, modernising. Well, I have news for the Executive: the older people in society are as individualistic as the young, and just as diverse in their personalities, talents and requirements, as Donald Gorrie was right to point out. They have skills and aspirations and that most valuable of life's commodities: experience. They are an asset to their families and communities, not a liability. I have two of my assets here today; my parents are in the public gallery. Aged 84 and 77, they are feisty people who have no time for Labour's

platitudes.

We need to educate the young and middle generations before the politics and the priorities can be righted. The Labour party wants to dole out packages, but it offers nothing that will give dignity, independence or choice to our pensioners. Let us consider the pension, which is at the root of the problem. The issue of pensions may not be devolved, but so what? We can talk about anything we like in this Parliament and that is what pensioners want us to do. If that upsets Johann Lamont, that is too bad.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I do not want to hear from Johann Lamont; I have heard enough from her already.

Pensions in other countries have been mentioned. The pension represents 60 per cent of average earnings in Belgium, and 40 per cent in Denmark. Margaret Smith, who has now left the chamber, said that independence alone would not solve the problems of Scotland's pensioners. Why is it a fairy story for Scotland but not for other countries that offer a decent pension?

Because of fuel poverty, 2,000 people die every year in Scotland who would not otherwise have died. Many die of hypothermia. That is a disgrace, when, as Tommy Sheridan said, we have oil and gas revenues. The Labour party claims to have set targets for solving fuel poverty by 2003, but I would like to know the source of that claim. Delaying until 2003 will mean another 6,000 deaths, but that seems to be okay by Labour. It is essential that we reinstate the link between pensions and average earnings. I repeat that that is what pensioners want. If Labour is the listening party, it should start listening.

I do not know where Keith Harding was digressing to when he was going on about dividend tax credits. The number of pensioners affected by that would be in the minority. The vast majority of pensioners live, as my parents do, on the state pension and on very small and shrinking occupational pensions. Having paid taxes and national insurance, the pensioners out there thought that they were providing for their older years, but they were not. The kitty has been spent, or Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling are sitting on it.

As for committees and task forces, I am falling over them. How do joint committees in Westminster compare with joint committees here? They are a different breed from the cross-party committees of this Parliament. The former are tame pets—and I know who the owner is who is in charge of taming them—and the latter are free-roaming animals which, fortunately, are beginning to display minds of their own.

How far would a Scottish minister get on the Great British state pension of £66.75 per week? They should put their answers on a postcard—a cheap one, please. What can they buy for 73p? Packets of crisps were mentioned. The Government could issue another shiny brochure. We have loads of them. Pensioners who are sitting close to their one-bar electric fires or who are wrapped up in bed early to keep warm could spend many an idle hour reading a Government brochure on how to spend their 73p.

Would the Scottish people rather see money being spent on their pensioners than on that gross London executive toy the millennium dome? Why not get a focus group working on that question? How many pensioners will be travelling from Scotland to marvel at the millennium dome? Not many, because I have costed it. It would cost them £49 for the round trip and entry to the dome, leaving them with £18 from their weekly pension. The issue is one of priorities for Westminster, and Westminster's priorities are not Scotland's.

On the matter of the Royal Commission on Long Term Care, I was pleased to see movement on Sir Stewart Sutherland's findings. That has been long awaited; the commission's report was published in March. It is important that a commission was set up and that small things are being done to help pensioners remain in their homes, but I am sceptical—I wonder why—about community care because the facts are not dinging right.

I asked the Deputy Minister for Community Care, Iain Gray, about social work cuts in East Lothian Council, which caused a home to close down, people to be dispersed, meals on wheels to be stopped and pensioners to be given two week's supply of frozen food. I await an answer. I asked the Deputy Minister for Communities, Jackie Baillie, about the funding of day care centres, particularly Broomhill day centre at Penicuik, which provides elderly respite care and needs a little bit of money compared with what is being splashed out on shiny brochures, for example. I have still not received an answer. Those matters show what is happening on the ground.

Kay Ullrich dealt with age discrimination in regard to breast cancer. That discrimination is a fact. Elderly women are not invited back for breast screening automatically, although the incidence is high.

Other things are wrong. With regard to benefits, disability living allowance is not available if the applicant does not apply before they are 65 years old. If a carer does not apply for invalid care allowance before they are 65, they do not get it. As has been said, in our generation, people in their middle to late 60s are, thankfully, growing older with their parents. Those issues must be addressed, because although they are not big

issues, they are big issues for the people who are involved.

Kenny MacAskill dealt with the matter of transport. The three important words in relation to transport and pensioners are: available, accessible and affordable. Of course it is right that we have a national concessionary fare scheme in Scotland—and it is my party's policy. Sylvia Jackson referred to such a scheme, but the issue is when it will be introduced. People who are old will not be around for ever, waiting for promises down the line.

We need single ticketing initiatives so that people can buy a ticket and travel great distances without having to change their ticket. We need co-ordinated timetables, which would benefit all society, not just old people. We need integrated transport, for example buses that run to hospitals and libraries. The infrequency of public transport in rural areas does not make it an alternative form of transport for those who live there and have special concerns.

Many houses are poorly insulated and in need of repair. Often, older housing is designed badly. The warm deal does not address damp homes. That requires to be addressed. I have already said that it would be appropriate—it is mentioned in Sir Stewart Sutherland's report—to introduce small initiatives to enable older people to stay in their own homes. Measures such as handrails and walk-in seated showers are small, practical improvements with substantial outcomes for individuals, but they are not being taken.

On community care, we should have integrated services with one-stop access to information. I think that it was Margaret Smith who mentioned the GP not only writing a prescription for medicine but completing a form for housing insulation. That is essential to assist elderly people, because health difficulties are related to housing problems and other matters.

Iain Gray: There is no difference between us on those points. I said earlier that those initiatives are being taken forward. As I said, the Minister for Health and Community Care and I agree that those are not being taken forward quickly enough, so I have announced today how we intend to do so.

Christine Grahame: When will those initiatives be implemented? Does the minister have a target? I love that word. I would like to know when those initiatives will be implemented. There is enough jaw in this Parliament.

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): Will Christine Grahame give way?

Christine Grahame: No, I will proceed.

The cusp of the new century is the time to act, as the Sutherland report states, "With Respect To Old Age". There are some items on the shopping list. We should have a respectable state pension; erode agism; have integrated services for transport, social and health purposes; have warm and secure homes; consult not insult; and educate ourselves and our children of the value of older people. We should demonstrate that value by our deeds, here in this Parliament and in that other, less worthy, place.

I am pleased—it has already been announced—that I have been made my party's shadow deputy minister for older people. That is not a cheap political position. I did not know that the Executive had a deputy minister for older people; I thought that Mr Gray was the Deputy Minister for Community Care. I will deal specifically with issues relating to older people. I know that that is welcomed by Better Government for Older People, many representatives of which are here today.

My job is to listen, to take account of what people say and to shadow Mr Gray. I will be watching you, Mr Gray.

Mr McAveety: Will Christine Grahame give way?

Christine Grahame: I will not give way.

Mr McAveety: Does Christine Grahame not want to listen—

Christine Grahame: I do not want to listen to Mr McAveety.

Jackie Baillie: I do not doubt the sentiments that Christine Grahame expresses, but what actions does she propose to take? Let us hear what SNP policies are, how much they cost and when they will be introduced.

Christine Grahame: The Scottish National party would link the increase in pensions back to average earnings, and we would introduce a national concessionary fare and other initiatives. I will give Jackie Baillie a copy of our manifesto to make it easy for her. She could also read the *Official Report* of this debate.

Karen Gillon: Will Christine Grahame give way?

Christine Grahame: I took an intervention from the Deputy Minister for Communities, who was responding to the debate. I have only a couple of other sentences to say.

Older people do not go away; we all become one. Scottish pensioners want a decent state pension so that they can exercise choice and be independent. Margaret Smith found that an offensive word. Independence is a fine word and, by the way, according to a recent survey we will be independent in 20 years' time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on older people. Before we move to the next item of business, I apologise to members who were not called in the debate, which was considerably oversubscribed. We attempted to fit in as many members as possible.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-340, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 8 December 1999

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Ministerial Statement on Local Government Finance

followed by Debate on Executive Motion on Sea Fisheries

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive motion on Sea Fishing Grants (Charges) Bill

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—Debate on the subject of S1M-319 Mr Euan Robson: Hawick

Thursday 9 December 1999

9.30 am Ministerial Statement on National Waste Strategy

10.00 am Ministerial Statement

10.30 am Debate on a motion on a Procedures Committee Report

followed by, no later than 11.30 am Stage 1 Debate on the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no later than 3.15 pm Continuation of Stage 1 Debate on the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—Debate on the subject of S1M-275 Nicola Sturgeon: Pollokshaws Sports Centre

Wednesday 15 December 1999

9.30 am Debate on a motion on a Standards Committee report on Cross Party Groups

10.00 am Debate on draft 2000-2001 budget—level 2 figures

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Stage 1 Debate—Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 December 1999

9.30 am Non-Executive Business—Scottish National Party motion

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Question Time

3.00 pm Open Question Time

followed by, no later than 3.15 pm Debate on Executive motion on Health

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—[Mr McCabe.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No member has asked to speak against the motion. [Interruption.] Order. We are still discussing business.

The question is, that business motion S1M-340 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Lead Committee

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committee—

The Local Government Committee to consider The Non-domestic Rating Contributions (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1999, SSI 1999/153.—[Mr McCabe.]

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

Question, That the meeting be now adjourned until 2.30 pm today, *put and agreed to.*—[Iain Smith.]

Meeting adjourned at 12:35.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first business this afternoon is question time. I remind members that, following last week's point of order from the convener of the Procedures Committee, supplementary questions have to relate specifically to the original question.

Compulsory Purchase

1. Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has reviewed the powers of private companies, public sector organisations and other entities in relation to compulsory purchase in the light of the incorporation into Scots law of the European convention on human rights. (S1O-746)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): We are reviewing compulsory purchase powers as part of our commitment to modernise the planning system. Any legislation that we bring before the Scottish Parliament will need to be compatible with the convention.

Alex Fergusson: Will the adoption of the ECHR be taken into account in the event of the compulsory purchase of land in connection with the Scotland to Northern Ireland interconnector?

Sarah Boyack: Every decision that we make will have to be in line with the European convention on human rights. It is important to state that decisions on compulsory purchase orders involve weighing up the public and private interests. All those issues have to be taken into account.

Alex Fergusson: Given the adoption of the ECHR, will the Executive instruct district valuers to take into account the commercial payments for the erection of telecommunications masts when assessing payments to facilitate the erection of pylons in rural areas?

Sarah Boyack: I would be quite happy to provide a written answer to Mr Fergusson on that question. He has raised about four issues, all of which are complex, and I do not want to give an answer that might miss out a legal issue that ought to be brought to his attention.

Offender Rehabilitation

2. Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to provide rehabilitation for offenders with drug abuse problems within prisons. (S1O-771)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): All prisons in Scotland offer drugs rehabilitation measures ranging from intensive rehabilitation programmes through to continuing support programmes for former users.

Mr Quinan: Given that the prison population in Scotland in any year normally rises to around 30,000, and given the fact that—according to the Scottish Prison Service—5,000 places are available in Scottish prisons for drug rehabilitation, does the minister agree that our prisons have inadequate provision to deal properly with the rehabilitation of drug abusers?

Angus MacKay: The capacity of the Scottish Prison Service to provide rehabilitation measures has been expanded. Around 5,300 prisoners will access services in this financial year; that figure is up from 1,656 in 1997-98. In addition, the SPS is examining how existing services might be expanded in the future.

Mr Quinan: Will Mr MacKay tell me what measures—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Quinan—I am sorry, but I did not call you.

International Criminal Court

3. Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has held with Her Majesty's Government about the ratification of the treaty on the international criminal court and whether it has identified any amendments to Scots law which may be necessary as a result of this ratification. (S1O-734)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): The Scottish Executive has been involved in regular discussions with Her Majesty's Government about the statute of the international criminal court. Domestic legislation will be needed before the United Kingdom can ratify the statute. We envisage modifications to Scottish criminal law, procedure and jurisdiction.

Margaret Jamieson: Will separate legislation be required in order to comply with the treaty?

Mr Wallace: Yes. I should explain to the Parliament that this is an important piece of legislation. It is a major advance in international justice to deter potential dictators and war criminals and to bring justice for victims, even

across international borders. Observation of those international obligations is a devolved matter. As it will involve changes to Scottish law, procedure and jurisdiction, it is the intention of the Executive to bring forward legislation in this Parliament to parallel legislation that will be brought forward at Westminster for England and Wales.

Women's Aid Refuges

4. Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive to detail the financial assistance available to women living in women's aid refuge homes. (S10-770)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): The Scottish Executive and local authorities fund voluntary bodies that provide support and accommodation. The payment of social security benefits to individuals is the responsibility of the Benefits Agency.

Mr Hamilton: Is the minister aware of the plight of women in rural communities, who often have to raise a court action in one location, are forced to move to another location and then have to return to the first location to pursue the action? Furthermore, is she aware of the additional cost of travelling in rural communities and of the frequent necessity to stay overnight? If so, will she commit the Executive to further funding to ensure that those women are properly catered for?

Jackie Baillie: The Executive already recognises that fact, which is why we established the domestic abuse service development fund a few weeks ago. That fund will provide an eightfold increase in the amount that the Executive gives to refuges.

Hepatitis C

5. Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive by how much the incidence of hepatitis C has increased in the past five years, how many of the cases are estimated to be as a result of drug injecting, what measures the Executive is taking to prevent the further spread of hepatitis C and what the cost implications are for the national health service in Scotland of any increase in the incidence of hepatitis C. (S10-750)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): It is estimated that there has been an increase in diagnosed cases from some 1,200 in 1995 to 8,500 in 1999. Approximately 50 per cent of diagnosed cases are injecting drug users. The Scottish Executive is awaiting a report on the implications of hepatitis C, including on how to prevent transmission.

Mr Raffan: Has the minister seen the July report from the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health, which estimated the figure

of known diagnosed cases of hepatitis C at 6,367, but, more important, stated that the number of unknown cases exceeded that known figure severalfold? What are the implications of that for health treatment throughout the country? Furthermore, does she agree that we urgently need national treatment guidelines and far more research on the prevalence of this exceedingly serious disease?

Susan Deacon: I have seen the report to which Keith Raffan refers and agree that it is important to study the available research into how hepatitis C is transmitted and can be prevented. That is why the Scottish Office commissioned a report from the Scottish needs assessment programme earlier this year. We expect a working group that is examining the issue to report early in 2000; I will want to consider those findings very carefully.

Maternity Services (Greater Glasgow)

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what account will be taken of geographical location in the review of maternity services within the greater Glasgow area. (S10-779)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): That is a matter for the Greater Glasgow Health Board. I expect local health boards to engage in full discussion with local communities and service users in reaching decisions regarding future service provision.

Pauline McNeill: Does the minister agree that there is bound to be concern in Glasgow over the proposal to reduce the number of maternity units from three to two? Does she recognise that that could threaten the future of the Queen Mother's maternity hospital at Yorkhill, which has an excellent reputation for serving the west of Scotland? Scotland has had the good fortune of offering women the chance to have their children at maternity hospitals. Given the number of low-birth-weight babies that has been announced this week, will the minister ensure that that choice remains available to the women of Scotland?

Susan Deacon: The provision of health services to meet local needs in the greater Glasgow area is a matter for Greater Glasgow Health Board. That said, I understand that many people will be very concerned about the future of maternity services in that area and elsewhere in the country. I can assure members that I am firmly committed to providing the best possible quality of maternity services, which means not only maternity services in hospitals but services provided in the community. Many current changes in provision across the country reflect a shift in balance towards community provision, which improves the service provided for women.

Frail Elderly People

7. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making in building closer co-operation between local authorities and the national health service in the delivery of services to frail elderly people. (S10-775)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): Our monitoring of the implementation of "Modernising Community Care: An Action Plan" indicates good progress in many areas. As I said to Parliament this morning, I will be chairing a working group to take forward the views expressed at last month's seminar for health and local authority leaders on joint working in community care.

Bristow Muldoon: Is the minister aware of initiatives such as the close co-operation between Lothian Health Board and West Lothian Council to put additional resources into care of the elderly? Does he see that as a model, greater use of which should be encouraged throughout Scotland?

Iain Gray: Joint working of the kind to which Mr Muldoon refers is exactly the sort of thing that we want to see. There was another recent example of such joint working in Aberdeen, where the local authority and the health board worked together to spend resources where they could best be used. I know that recently there have been some problems with joint working in West Lothian. However, senior staff from my department have met health board and local authority officials; Mr Muldoon quite properly—as the local member—took an interest in those meetings. I am pleased that the difficulties have started to be overcome and that joint working is allowing issues to be moved forward.

Textile Industry

8. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will encourage Scottish Enterprise to develop a national strategy for the textile industry. (S10-769)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): The Scottish textile network, a Scottish Enterprise-funded forum for the exchange of information between industry and support agencies, was launched in March this year. The network is to develop a strategy for the Scottish textile industry, taking into consideration the strategy—due to be published around the end of this year—that was drawn up by the UK textiles and clothing strategy group.

Dr Murray: Is the minister aware of the recent successes of some textile companies in the Langholm area of my Dumfries constituency, which have overcome many problems to capture niche markets for quality products in Italy and

other parts of Europe? Is he aware that, despite that success, the directors of those companies believe that the Scottish textile industry would benefit from the development of a cluster strategy and from a move to address training problems to equip textile workers with skills in modern technology to ensure continued success?

Henry McLeish: I want to associate myself with the successes in the textile industry. Despite the fact that there have been nearly 5,000 publicly announced job losses since 1997, there have been enormous successes in significant niche markets such as technical textiles, cashmere and leather. In January, I will chair a working group that aims to examine the cluster issue. Despite the problems that the industry faces, it has a huge future. We want to work with employees, trade unions, managers and owners to ensure that success is achieved not only in the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, but the length and breadth of the country.

Housing Associations

9. Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations regarding the promotion of community-based and tenant-controlled housing associations. (S10-765)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): I met the council of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations on 4 October. The SFHA is also an active participant in the Scottish housing interest group, which I met as recently as Monday of this week.

Mr McAllion: The last Scottish housing minister at Westminster promised to set up a partnership code of practice for all housing providers, with a definition of community ownership as, for example, a locally controlled organisation with a maximum number of housing units. Will the minister tell us what progress has been made towards making good that promise, or has the promise been dropped as a consequence of devolution?

Ms Alexander: I know that Mr McAllion has a particular interest in whether there should be a size limit on community-based housing associations. In his constituency, the plan is to have an organisation that will manage 2,000 units. The largest number of units in Scotland is 3,000. The member will be able to take up the matter during committee consideration of the forthcoming housing bill. We expect the bill to be with the committee by the summer.

Consultative Steering Group Report

10. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it continues to

endorse section 3.5, paragraph 5 of the report of the consultative steering group on the Scottish Parliament. (S10-757)

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): Yes.

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank the minister for that very full answer. The section requires bills to complete a consultative process before being presented to Parliament. Will the minister comment on the adequacy of the consultation on the Executive's decision to include in the forthcoming education bill a section to abolish the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee? In particular, will he comment on the fact that the consultation consisted of issuing a letter to nine organisations giving them 10 working days to comment not on the policy content, but on the technical provisions of the bill? I know the Executive's arguments in favour of abolishing the SJNC—

The Presiding Officer: Have we had the question?

Nicola Sturgeon: Does the minister think that that constitutes adequate consultation?

Mr McCabe: As I have previously indicated, the Executive is committed to the principle of consultation. All the bills that the First Minister announced in June have been or will be consulted on. It is for a committee to consider and comment on any consultation that has taken place. It is also within the gift of a committee, if it felt that any consultation was inadequate, to take further evidence and perhaps take the matter further.

Pre-school Education

11. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many (a) males and (b) people from ethnic minorities are employed in pre-school education in Scotland. (S10-741)

The Presiding Officer: I call Peter Peacock to answer—and there has been a request that you should speak up, Mr Peacock.

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): I am delighted that so many people want to hear what I have to say. [MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Thank you very much.

An estimated 1 per cent of the total staff working in centres providing pre-school education in February 1999 were male. Information on ethnicity is not currently held centrally.

Maureen Macmillan: That is a worrying statistic. It is vital to have a balanced work force, especially in early education, when role models are particularly important to the development of young children. Can the deputy minister tell me

whether there are any plans to have more men and people from ethnic minorities working in pre-school education? Will they be employed by the local authorities?

Peter Peacock: We very much share Maureen Macmillan's concern about trying to find the right balance between male and female teachers at all levels of education. I am glad to say that the national training organisation for early years is about to commission work to see how we can promote further the employment of males in that sector, and encourage more people from ethnic minorities to participate in training.

I noticed that reference was made at the weekend to a group at Robert Gordon University that was postulating the privatisation of some Scottish schools. I am happy to take this opportunity to say that the Executive has never considered privatising Scottish schools. It has no plans to do so and I cannot envisage any circumstances under which it ever would. The teachers to whom Maureen Macmillan refers will therefore continue to be employed in the public sector.

School Closures (Cumbernauld)

12. Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has received on the issue of the proposed school closures in Cumbernauld. (S10-747)

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): To date, we have received letters from 23 individuals.

Andrew Wilson: Will the minister join me in congratulating the Cumbernauld Save Our Schools campaign on gathering 20,000 signatures? A huge proportion of the community is affected. Will he join me in condemning Councillor Charles Gray for dismissing, in the *Cumbernauld News and Kilsyth Chronicle*, that number of people as insignificant?

Peter Peacock: I am well aware of what is happening there, through the good work of my colleague, Cathie Craigie, who is the constituency member for the area. [Applause.] The matter is for the local council, which is currently considering the outcome of an open consultation process with parents. I urge Mr Wilson and his colleagues not to mislead parents into thinking that this Parliament has a direct role in this matter. I also urge parents in Cumbernauld not to allow themselves to be manipulated by people who see the issue simply in terms of political gain.

Andrew Wilson: I remind the minister that he has a statutory duty with regard to school closures and that the member for the area is not opposing the school closures.

The Presiding Officer: Order. You cannot remind the minister of anything, but you can ask him questions.

Andrew Wilson: I therefore ask the minister whether he will join SNP members next week in receiving parents' signatures on the petition on this matter, not on a party basis, but for a cross-party, non-party, community-led campaign.

Peter Peacock: There are well-established procedures for receiving petitions. It would not be appropriate for us to do as Andrew Wilson suggests in these circumstances, as it is conceivable that one part of the exercise may ultimately be referred to ministers. However, the petition will be handed to us as a consequence of the exercise that Mr Wilson has talked about.

Miscarriages (Greater Glasgow)

13. Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will assist Greater Glasgow Health Board's public health department with funding for a fuller investigation of the high incidence of miscarriages it has reported in the area of Paterson's toxic dump, at Baillieston and Mount Vernon, Glasgow. (S10-735)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): That is a local matter and it is appropriate that studies are conducted and funded by the local health board. I understand that Greater Glasgow Health Board intends to carry out a full investigation into the matter.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: I thank the minister for her answer, but the health board requires more assistance. The investigation is a major probe and the health board has already had to fund another one. I think that the minister will agree that Greater Glasgow Health Board's public health department has plenty of brains, but not enough cash.

Does the minister agree, especially in view of the fact that Baillieston and the east end of Glasgow have just been cited among the very worst health areas in the whole of Britain, that it is time that we ended their having toxic dumps, as well as the ill health caused by goodness knows what other reasons, poverty included—

The Presiding Officer: Where is the question?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Does the Executive agree that it is totally unacceptable to have within the boundaries of any city a toxic dump that takes 500,000 tonnes of waste a year, including arsenic and cyanide—

The Presiding Officer: Order. I am sorry, but we must have a question. I remind members that the standing orders are quite clear that points of view cannot be expressed during question time.

Susan Deacon: I ask for members'

forbearance—it is difficult to give a clear answer to a confused question. However, I am clear about the Executive's absolute commitment to providing additional investment for the health service and to supporting local health authorities in discharging their functions effectively. We are also committed to taking action across the range of our responsibilities to reduce health inequalities and wider inequalities, and to tackle poverty across Scotland as well as in Glasgow.

NHS Equipment

14. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what provision it is making for the replacement of medical and laboratory equipment in the national health service in Scotland. (S10-772)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): Capital resources of more than £45 million are allocated to individual NHS trusts on an annual basis for investment in their estate, including the replacement of medical and laboratory equipment. It is for individual NHS trusts to determine local priorities for the provision of equipment and how they should be funded from the resources available.

Lewis Macdonald: I thank the minister for her answer. However, does she accept that there are many demands on the capital budgets of acute trusts, as is the case with Aberdeen royal infirmary, which is in my constituency? Will she consider whether longer-term budget planning might assist those trusts to plan for the replacement of equipment and to meet priority targets in equipment-intensive areas, such as coronary heart care and cancer?

Susan Deacon: I am always happy to have constructive discussions with local health authorities and with MSPs about the ways in which we can become more effective in delivering high-quality health services and in ensuring that resources spent within the health service are utilised efficiently. I am pleased that we are doing that within the context of record levels of investment in our health service so that, as we move into a new millennium, we can provide modern, effective health services for people across Scotland.

Rural Challenge Funding

15. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to ensure that Here We Are Ltd of Cairndow will not lose any or all of its rural challenge funding as a result of the Scottish Executive's decision to call the project in for review. (S10-748)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie): Subject to planning permission being granted,

rural challenge funding is secure.

George Lyon: I thank the minister for his response. However, given that this is a local community project and that the community has put a huge amount of work into raising the necessary funds to get the project off the ground, can the minister assure me that the review process will be completed by 31 March? Any further delay will mean that the project will forfeit £30,000 from Argyll and the Islands Enterprise and £42,000 from Scottish Natural Heritage, in addition to the £50,000 from the Scottish Office rural challenge fund.

Ross Finnie: I cannot give an absolute guarantee on the final determination of the inquiry but, as Mr Lyon is aware, the parties were asked to submit their submissions by 30 November. The submissions are being circulated and the parties have three weeks within which to respond. Therefore, it is up to the parties to meet the inquiry's timetable.

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Meetings)

16. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when the First Minister last met the Chancellor of the Exchequer and what they discussed. (S1O-767)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I met the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday, an encounter that attracted a rather flatteringly large amount of attention.

Mr Stone: I thank the First Minister for his courteous and enigmatic reply.

I am nothing if not persistent. Given the great difficulties that farmers in the Highlands face because of the lack of suitable funding for the agricultural business improvement scheme, will the First Minister consider raising that matter—among other important matters—when next he meets the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

The First Minister: I recognise the hot pursuit of this issue that Mr Stone has mounted and I understand its importance and sensitivity. As he knows, there has been an enormous demand for funds that are, to some extent, limited. My colleague, the Minister for Rural Affairs has, very sensibly, tried to prioritise those funds, so that we can progress this matter in an orderly manner. Mr Finnie will meet the Rural Affairs Committee shortly to discuss the matter and I know that he is looking forward to that discussion.

Epilepsy

17. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether there is a national strategy for the treatment of

people with epilepsy in Scotland. (S1O-742)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): The Scottish Executive endorses the work of SIGN—the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network—in producing national guidelines for the management of epilepsy in adults. We are also working to build links between services best to meet patients' needs.

Mary Scanlon: There are 40,000 people in Scotland who suffer from epilepsy, but epilepsy is mentioned in the health improvement plans of only two health boards. What arrangements are in place for managed clinical networks in each health board area in Scotland?

Susan Deacon: Many of the developments that are taking place in health authorities throughout Scotland—to bring services together to work on a multi-agency basis, and to enable those services to listen more effectively to and meet patients' needs—will benefit epilepsy sufferers and people who suffer from many other conditions. I recently met representatives of the Epilepsy Association of Scotland. I have considered several ways in which the work can be carried out; we are continuing to consider that. I ask members to join me in working to break down the stigma and prejudice that surround epilepsy, so that we can build positive attitudes as well as effective services.

Disabled People

18. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to improve local authority service provision for disabled people. (S1O-782)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): Our proposals to modernise community care will improve service for all client groups, including people with disabilities.

Michael Matheson: Can the minister explain why, in his written answer of 20 October, he detailed that the expenditure on services for those with a physical disability, in the first year of a Labour Government, had decreased by 26.2 per cent? What action does he plan to take to address that situation? Why was there a reduction of 26.2 per cent? Will he tell me on what page of the social justice document that fact appears?

Iain Gray: We have covered this ground before. The grant-aided expenditure for social work services in Scotland has increased since last year by £51.3 million, or 4.9 per cent. It will increase next year and the following year as well.

Mr Matheson has an interest in these matters as a result of his previous profession. He will know that important initiatives can be taken on the way in which those resources are spent. For example,

there is the carers strategy initiative, which was announced last week; the review of direct payments, which makes it possible for better and more flexible services to be provided for people with disability; and the Scottish accessible information forum report, which was published last week. Resources are increasing, but we can do more to spend them better.

Houses in Multiple Occupancy

19. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the introduction of mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupancy will ensure that such accommodation is safe and does not in itself present a health and safety risk to those occupying it. (S1O-777)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): Yes. Local authorities will be able to refuse licences to premises that fail to meet the required standards. Operating a house in multiple occupancy without a licence will now be a criminal offence.

Patricia Ferguson: Does the minister believe that licensing will strengthen the powers of local authorities to prevent situations from arising such as the one that occurred in my constituency earlier this year, when two young men lost their lives unnecessarily?

Ms Alexander: The answer to that is also yes. I am acutely aware of the interest that Patricia Ferguson has taken in this matter following the recent deaths in her constituency. I can confirm that the working party that is drawing up the guidelines is now at work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to examine how preventive measures can be established. I would be happy to send Patricia Ferguson a copy of that guidance when I receive it, which should be around Christmas. We expect to bring it to the Parliament by spring 2000.

Closed-circuit Television

20. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to continue to provide funding to local authorities so that they can install CCTV systems within communities suffering from high levels of crime. (S1O-737)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): On 11 August, I announced that £3 million would be made available in the financial year 2000-01 to fund the new "Make Our Communities Safer" challenge competition. Of that money, £1.5 million will be allocated to projects that address wider community safety issues. The other half will fund CCTV projects on the same basis as the previous Scottish Office challenge

competition.

Karen Whitefield: I welcome the minister's reply. Does he agree that increased spending on CCTV in communities such as Northburn in Airdrie is making a real difference in the detection and conviction of criminals, especially those associated with violent crime?

Angus MacKay: Yes. There is no doubt that all the research evidence in support of CCTV indicates that it has a substantial impact on the detection of crime, the ability to obtain convictions as a result of that detection and the ability of police forces to marshal the use of their resources.

Open Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when the First Minister last met the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues they discussed. (S10-745)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I met the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday; my answer does not need to be cryptic on this occasion because the matters that we discussed were widely reported.

Mr Swinney: I thank the First Minister for his reply. Did he take the opportunity yesterday to discuss with the Secretary of State for Scotland the findings of the University of Bristol study? It showed that of the 15 constituencies in the UK that have the poorest health records and the highest poverty levels, six are in Glasgow. One is, indeed, represented by the First Minister. Will he take the opportunity presented by this question to explain to the people of Scotland his extraordinary decision—in line with the figures that have been announced by the Minister for Finance—to impose a real-terms cut in health spending in Scotland in the first year of this Labour Government? When he has explained why he did that, will he apologise?

The First Minister: John Swinney knows well that, over the period of the comprehensive spending review, there have been real and substantial increases in health service spending. The cumulative total of that spending is about £1.8 billion. The process to which I think Mr Swinney referred is part of the economic platform that has allowed us to produce economic growth.

In 1996, Glasgow had an unemployment claimant count of more than 34,000—it is now 23,000. What is depressing is that the statistics from Bristol are a mark of the challenge and of the problem that we inherited. All the figures are pre-1995. I want to strike a hopeful note—there is a serious problem, but not one about which we should feel despair. Over the past decade, deaths from coronary heart disease have fallen by 32.3 per cent. Cancer deaths are down by 10.3 per cent and stroke deaths are down by 29.7 per cent. In all those areas, Glasgow has done better than the rest of Scotland—as we would hope it would, as it starts from a higher base. Mr Swinney will also know that the £850 million that was given this year to Greater Glasgow Health Board represents a substantial £100 per capita more than the Scottish average.

I will give one more example, and I apologise for taking a minute to do so, Sir David. Mr Swinney knows that there is a spirited debate at the moment—particularly in the Health and Community Care Committee—about the Arbuthnott report. That report is a way of ensuring that we examine deprivation factors, the causes of deprivation and the costs of doing something about it. I hope that we will have strong support from all parts of the chamber for such a constructive attempt to deal with the inherited problems that have been pointed to in that report from Bristol.

Mr Swinney: I thank the First Minister for his reply. His response strikes a chord with the leader column in *The Herald* from this morning. It says that the truth can hurt and that

“the strategies of avoidance shoot up like spring flowers.”

Instead of warm words and cups of coffee with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday, might not the First Minister have taken that opportunity to secure more resources for Scotland's public services, bearing in mind the admission by the Minister for Finance on the day of the budget announcements in Parliament? Over the lifetime of this Labour Government, less will be spent on public services than in a comparable period under the discredited Conservatives. Is not it the case that the Executive is more interested in hot air than it is in the health of our public services?

The First Minister: I normally welcome the quite frequent occasions on which John Swinney is in charge when his leader, Mr Salmond, is not with us. If he is going to play endlessly the base rate comparison game, he is merely obstructing and confusing the debate. I gave him some useful statistics, and I mentioned the weighting that we are building into health expenditure. I mentioned the increase in total health expenditure and I am very anxious—and happy—to have a constructive discussion with him, but I do not think that he is in the mood for that today, judging by that question.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): I am also in the mood for a constructive discussion. I am concerned about the effects of the Arbuthnott report, too. Does the First Minister agree that, given the University of Bristol findings and the growth in population and obvious requirement for a greater health spend in Lothian, it is foolish to cut back expenditure in Lothian to make sure that areas of Glasgow that badly need health service spending get it?

The First Minister: The Arbuthnott report made a number of important points not just about deprivation in urban areas but about under-provision of spending in some rural areas where there are additional costs in delivering medical

services. I also say to Margo MacDonald, and I think she knows this, that no one is suggesting a cut in the Lothian health budget. We are talking about a significant redistribution in the light of detailed analysis of deprivation and health needs, which will be managed out of the increase in overall expenditure that we are providing.

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I ask this question on the basis that one never asks a question to which one does not already know the answer.

To ask the Scottish Executive when the First Minister last met the Secretary of State for Scotland and what subjects were discussed. (S1O-764)

The First Minister: I had no idea that that was the principle on which David McLetchie worked. [Laughter.] I refer to the answer that I gave a few minutes ago to John Swinney.

David McLetchie: Could the First Minister tell us whether his discussion with the Secretary of State for Scotland included the comments of the Government's transport adviser, Professor David Begg, who backed my call for extra money raised from fuel taxes to be ring-fenced for transport improvements in Scotland, as it will be in England? In the light of Professor Begg's comments, would the First Minister like to reconsider the answer that he gave to me on that subject last week and give the same guarantee to motorists in Scotland that will apply to motorists in the rest of the United Kingdom?

The First Minister: I made it clear that while we give a very high priority to infrastructure and transport needs in Scotland—and as David McLetchie is a late convert to devolution and therefore, I hope, an enthusiastic one, I hope that he will understand this—I did not want to suggest that ring-fencing in another part of the country be automatically transferred to the Scottish Parliament. We have a right to look at our own spending priorities in our own time, and that is what we will do. I hope—I always live in hope—that he will feel able to support us when we reach our decisions.

David McLetchie: I thank the First Minister for his answer, which will be met with disappointment by Scotland's motorists. In relation to disappointed motorists, will he express to the secretary of state and to the chancellor the strong opposition in Scotland to imposing VAT on bridge tolls and ensure that the Government resists that measure? In the event of a failure of the Government to counter that European Union measure, will the First Minister confirm the comments of an anonymous Scottish Executive spokeswoman at the weekend, that tolls on the Skye bridge will not rise to reflect the VAT element, and will he give

the same commitment on the Forth, Tay and Erskine bridges?

The First Minister: That is a quite extraordinary question. As David McLetchie knows, that is a proposal from the European Union and a legal ruling is being sought that VAT, as a matter of European Union law, must be imposed on tolls. The United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Executive are not happy with that proposal. However, if he is inviting me to say that if there is a lawful direction on it, we will defy the law, I will not give that guarantee.

We are spending over £700,000 a year to keep down Skye bridge charges for regular users—I think that the charge is £1.40 at the moment. That freeze was one of the agreements of our partnership with the Liberal Democrats and will increase our contribution quite considerably over the coming years. We have done what we promised and I hope that we will get some—I will not say that; I was going to ask for gratitude, but that might be asking too much.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): As a result of his discussions with the secretary of state, does the First Minister think that he and the chancellor fully understand that the Administration in Edinburgh is a coalition between two political parties and is made up of not just one political party?

The First Minister: That fact is well understood in this chamber and by all those who are part of the partnership—to which I referred in my previous answer. I can assure the member that, with certain exciting events that might be coming up in the next month or two, it is well understood much more widely. I value the partnership. It has worked well, and I look forward to its continuing.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): I wish to return to the theme of transport. In the light of John Prescott's apparent decision earlier this week at the so-called roads summit to accelerate the road-building programme in England by increasing the allocation of money to transport, will the First Minister commit the Executive, in the event that it receives further resources as a consequence of that decision, to use those resources to accelerate the Executive's strategic road-building programme?

The First Minister: I cannot anticipate future spending decisions but, as the member knows, Sarah Boyack made a statement recently in which she outlined a number of important developments, of which the M77 was perhaps the most substantial. Those initiatives, including some in Highland areas, were widely welcomed.

I have made no bones about the fact that talking about priorities means prioritisation. We have found an extra £35 million for the roads budget, as

against what had previously been anticipated. As the opportunity arises, we will continue to find resources. However, I cannot anticipate decisions.

Careers Service

3. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it has taken to ensure the future operation of the careers service when the current contract for delivery runs out in April 2000. (S10-773)

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): Careers service companies whose contracts terminate on 31 March 2000 have been offered a one-year extension to their current contracts.

Mrs Mulligan: How can the Scottish Executive encourage careers service companies to develop their work in partnership with schools and other agencies, to identify young people who will find it most difficult to make the transition from school to work or further education?

Henry McLeish: I can reassure Mary Mulligan that the points that she has made will form part of the new careers service review that we have set up. Young people with special needs are a priority, as are young people with a variety of learning difficulties, during the important transition period from school to work or further education.

The careers service in Scotland is excellent, but there is always room for improvement. In the modern Scotland in which we live, there are new challenges caused by changes in the labour market, technology and new forms of communication. We want to ensure that we have the most effective partnership, not only between the careers service companies, but between everyone involved in dealing with young people, so that careers advice is of the very best.

At present, there are age limitations on that work, but I want there to be a full, proper, comprehensive and effective adult guidance service as well. Part of the remit of the careers service review will be to consider the issues related to that and to ensure that Scotland gives a positive lead within the United Kingdom.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I remind ministers that the official report has trouble if they turn their backs to the microphone, pleasant though it is to look at Mrs Mulligan. I call Sandra White. [*Interruption.*] Ms White, you indicated that you wanted to speak.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Yes, Presiding Officer. Obviously, your microphone was not working, as I could not hear you.

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry. [*Laughter.*] That is fair enough.

Ms White: I want to follow up on Mr McLeish's previous answer. I have lodged various written questions about the careers service, particularly in Glasgow, and I welcome the minister's comments about 2001. However, can he give this chamber a guarantee that the future of the careers service will be considered? Perhaps he will take note of the Welsh model, which will come into force in April 2001. The National Assembly for Wales has recommended that the careers service in Wales be funded directly by the National Assembly. Can the minister guarantee that he will consider the possibility of the careers service in Scotland being funded by this Parliament, not just now but after 2001?

Henry McLeish: I am considering a more important policy from Wales, on adult guidance.

The careers service review will not examine ownership as that is not an issue in Scotland—it will remain a public service matter. I want a thorough review of all responsibilities and the ways in which we spend money on specific groups. At the end of the day, we want a better and more effective service, of which we can be proud. I hope that the committee that is chaired by John Swinney will participate in that review. We will have a partnership in this Parliament to ensure that every possible support is given to the review and its implementation in every part of the country.

Equalities

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-334, in the name of Jackie Baillie, and on two amendments.

15:16

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): I am pleased to open this debate on equality—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order—I apologise to Jackie Baillie. Members must not conduct conversations in the chamber. We are starting a debate.

Jackie Baillie: This is the first time that the Parliament has debated equality and the first opportunity that we have had to elaborate on how the Executive is approaching its work on equality. Today is the start of a much wider debate across all sections of Scottish society. I hope that that debate will stimulate and challenge all, and that everybody will participate in it.

Scotland has a vibrant multicultural, multi-faith population, and is rich in diversity. However, our society has not been culturally inclusive or willing to ensure that diversity did not become an excuse for inequality of opportunity. If one is a woman, or is disabled, from a black or ethnic minority background, gay, lesbian, or old, or if one's culture is not part of the mainstream, inequality of opportunity is more often one's badge, and discrimination, harassment, exclusion and poor access to services are a likely legacy.

If we needed any reminder of what that means for many people in Scotland, we should consider the evidence. The pay gap between men and women in Scotland stands at 78.5 per cent. It cannot be acceptable that we continue to have that pay disparity at the end of the century that began with clamour and demands for equal pay. It is unjustifiable that those with black and ethnic minority backgrounds experience higher unemployment and lower incomes than the white population. It is also unacceptable that those with disability have diminished access to the labour market and to full participation in it.

Furthermore, it cannot be acceptable that so many groups face discrimination and exclusion. Women face real exclusion, but it is often invisible. Women can be barred from full participation in society because of their low relative incomes, their patterns of working, and their caring and domestic responsibilities, and because of discriminatory assumptions that are still made about their role and place in society. A lack of financial

independence and, in some cases, violent and abusive relationships can also lead to exclusion.

We know also that those in the gay, lesbian and transgender communities face exclusion because of their sexual orientation. Many experience rejection and alienation and live their lives never feeling that they are able to participate fully. Young people experience homophobic bullying at school and often suffer in silence, unable to confide in family and friends. Others are forced to leave home because their families have found their sexuality unacceptable.

Those with a disability will tell us that trying to live and work in a society that is not structured to enable their participation is soul destroying and frustrating, and that is unacceptable.

Just last week, I read in the report, "Experiences of Social Exclusion in Scotland", comments by respondents from black and ethnic minority communities. They stated that they

"felt that they had been excluded by a society which was geared towards the attitudes and needs of the white majority".

They recounted instances of being verbally attacked because of their ethnic origin. They said:

"These attacks tended to question their right to exist in Scottish society".

We know that racial harassment, racial attacks and racial discrimination are experienced by people in Scotland every day. That is why the Executive is determined to make advances on the issue of equal opportunities and why we are advocating the development of a robust equality strategy. The Executive has consistently stated that it wants a more just and inclusive Scotland, but we cannot achieve that objective if we do not address the issues of inequality in our society.

This Parliament endorsed the consultative steering group recommendation that equality should be an underpinning principle of the Parliament in all its work. The Executive has set about its work on equality with commitment and determination. It is a major task, and one that will not be completed overnight. The process of changing attitudes and mindsets takes time and is a responsibility for us all—not just the Government, not just politicians and not just the equality agencies and interests, but all of us.

Our approach to delivering on equality must be one of partnership, and that is the basis on which I bring the motion before the chamber today. Last night, the First Minister gave an address at the Equal Opportunities Commission launch of the mainstreaming checklist for MSPs. In his address, he identified three requirements for the successful development of the equality agenda. The first is the need to affirm the Executive's commitment at

the highest level, the second is the need to put in place structures to deliver equality, and the third is the need to develop a robust strategy.

Let me say a little about each of those needs. The First Minister and the Executive are firmly and publicly committed to putting equality at the heart of policy making, and are determined that mainstreaming and the promotion of equal opportunities will be key features of our work. The programme for government reaffirmed the Executive's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity. At the end of September, I gave a commitment to the Equal Opportunities Committee that I would go back and outline the progress that we had made, and I fully intend to do that. Several ministers have pledged the Executive's collective commitment to equality and to starting the process to achieve it.

As members know, equality is one of the four key principles of the Parliament, guiding our operations and our organisation. The Equal Opportunities Committee is one of the eight mandatory committees and is already making headway in its work under the convenership of Kate MacLean. Although achieving equality in this Parliament is a valuable outcome in itself, it has the added value of stimulating interest, increasing expectations and raising the profile of equality issues in the new Scotland.

As pledged, the Executive has established an equality unit in the Executive secretariat, at the very centre of our structure. The unit has three main tasks. First, it will act as a single point for advice and liaison in the Executive. Secondly, it will take the lead on mainstreaming equality in the work of the Executive, to put equality at the heart of all policy development and service design and delivery. Thirdly, the unit will actively pursue the promotion of equal opportunities.

We see mainstreaming as the key task because, as the EOC's document, "Questions on Mainstreaming", states,

"it puts people, and their diverse needs and experiences at the heart of policy making. It leads to better government. As a process it tackles the structures in society which contribute to or sustain discrimination and disadvantage and the application of a mainstreaming approach can avoid the adoption of policies and programmes which replicate discrimination and exacerbate existing inequalities."

The pursuit of mainstreaming and the focus on changing culture and attitudes require a particular strategic approach. The development of the equality agenda in Scotland will help to create fundamental cultural change and a deep-rooted commitment to equal opportunities for all. The evolution of an effective programme for the Scottish Executive requires a partnership approach with all interests, both internal and external. I propose that there be a phased

approach to the Scottish Executive's strategy on equality.

The initial phase will run from December to April 2000, and is concerned with establishing the framework for work on equality. In that phase, the emphasis is on consultation and dialogue. The ability to achieve our objective of mainstreaming requires all interests to have shared ownership of the project, and that cannot come about without detailed dialogue and consultation.

I see that David McLetchie started the dialogue outside and continued it as he came into the chamber.

Because detailed discussion is required, there will be a programme of widespread consultation, culminating in a report to Parliament in April 2000, and annual reports thereafter. That will provide Parliament with the opportunity to review the development of the equality strategy and to monitor progress.

This speech will form the basis of our consultation. In addition to the mainstreaming work that we will take forward, the Executive expects work to be done on establishing and improving baseline information and statistics, developing performance management frameworks, and developing and building on internal and external equality networks, consultative mechanisms and communication strategies. We also expect to look at ways of disseminating good practice.

Our commitment to equality has been on-going since July, and time does not permit me to elaborate on all the initiatives that have been undertaken, but I will provide members with a flavour of them: the £8 million package that has been announced, to address domestic violence; the £2.4 million given to finance work in ethnic minority communities as part of our social inclusion programme; and the improved provision for child care.

Last month, we announced our firm commitment to repeal section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986. Recently, we have pursued work with young and old through the millennium volunteers project and the giving age initiative. The Executive has just published our groundbreaking report, "Social Justice ...a Scotland where everyone matters". The report is about establishing social justice and equality of opportunity as the hallmark of Scottish society and politics. It is about working together to achieve a Scotland where everyone matters.

The report "Experiences of Social Exclusion in Scotland", to which I referred earlier, set out in graphic detail the many forms of social injustice that affect our society. It cuts across all kinds of people in all kinds of communities and in all kinds of different ways. The report spells it out clearly

that we cannot simply treat Scotland's people as a uniform group, and that a multi-sectoral approach is needed. That accords with our cross-cutting approach, which the Executive is using to tackle social inclusion, and will also be the hallmark of the equality unit.

We have given a clear commitment to improve the level of representation of women, black and ethnic minority people, and disabled people in public appointments. Although significant work has already been undertaken to address the current imbalance, my ministerial colleagues and I recognise that further work needs to be done to attract more candidates from under-represented areas of society. That is why currently we are reviewing systems for appointment and have set ourselves challenging targets. My colleague Jack McConnell has responsibility for the overall system of public appointments, and will be addressing that matter in a statement shortly.

We also recognise the importance of improving our consultation mechanisms with appropriate bodies in the field. The Women in Scotland consultative forum, chaired at ministerial level, was set up more than two years ago; the race equality advisory forum has been established and held its first meeting last week. Iain Gray and I co-chaired a half-day seminar to identify issues of concern for disabled people. As we identify the areas of concern, we will identify appropriate ways to consult and actions that can be taken forward.

We find ourselves in a significant climate of change. We are not alone in seeing the need to increase the profile of equal opportunities. The UK Government has underlined its commitment to tackling inequality. The Race Relations (Amendment) Bill has been announced and the report of the disability task force is imminent.

Last week, the European Commission produced its proposals to tackle discrimination, under the new powers of the Amsterdam treaty. The proposals cover a wide range of issues: racial discrimination in employment; social protection; education; and access to goods and services. The Commission also proposed an action plan for spreading best practice. That is the start of a lengthy process, but I am heartened by those positive proposals from the Commission and the breadth of grounds of employment discrimination that it intends to tackle.

We are beginning to witness movement at all levels of government on equality issues. That is to be welcomed.

In Scotland, we have an opportunity to craft something unique and at the cutting edge. We have an opportunity to lead the field. We are a new Parliament and a new Executive. For the first time, we have the chance to develop a cohesive

approach to equality work through the strategically placed equality unit. We do not have any precedents; we can make our own blueprint and map our own route.

By adopting the motion today and entering into meaningful dialogue, we shall create the opportunity to scope an effective programme for equality into the next century.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment, as set out in Making it Work Together: A Programme for Government, to promote equality of opportunity for all and to do that through an inclusive, phased and participative approach to the development of an equality strategy so ensuring that in developing policy and in service design and delivery concern for equality is at the heart of the matter.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I should say that the time limit on speeches in the open debate will be five minutes.

15:32

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I sometimes think that I have strayed into a management seminar. All that is missing are the flow charts to go with the buzzwords.

It may come as a shock to the minister that we all support equality of opportunity. Nobody has a monopoly on this area. The statement on equality strategy from Wendy Alexander, who I believe will be talking to us—I hope not at us—at the end of the debate, is a reaffirmation of the document produced by the Executive on 9 September. In her statement, she

"encourages everyone with an interest in equality to send in comments on the statement in writing to the Equality Unit by 18 February."

I was not sure whether that was meant to indicate a formal consultation or not. I hope that there will be a guarantee that there will be a response to the comments received and that they will be acted upon, especially as some of the organisations will be campaigning for legislative changes, which she is unable to initiate.

The motion today is very general and, as such, will be disappointing to the many groups that are looking for real change, especially those groups concerned with issues of race and sexual orientation. The SNP regards equality as, first and foremost, an issue of justice. It has always been the SNP's belief that a Scottish Parliament would present us with an opportunity to take radical steps forward in Scottish society and take us into the 21st century with laws that ensure non-discrimination on the basis of sex, age, religion, race or sexual orientation. Unfortunately, we are not being given that opportunity. That should be a matter of regret for all members in this chamber.

I accept that, even without legislative competence, there is a great deal that can be done. I recall speaking at a number of conferences and meetings in the year previous to the May elections and it was always possible to compile an impressive list of initiatives that could be undertaken and which met many of the demands made by organisations lobbying in this policy area. For example, the commitment to repeal section 2A, better known as section 28, has been SNP policy for many years. It was always clear that, notwithstanding the reservation of equal opportunities, repeal would be perfectly competent within the devolution settlement. Indeed, we welcome the announcement that that will happen. I do not take away from the possibilities that are currently available; other SNP speakers will make more specific references to those possibilities.

Initiatives are always likely to be supported by the SNP, because of our long commitment to equal opportunities. The Executive need have no fear about that. However, there is no point in running away from the reality of the restrictions that are imposed on the Scottish Parliament by the reservation contained within the Scotland Act 1998. That reservation is fairly wide-ranging and includes the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It covers all matters relating to the bodies set up under the existing legislation: the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the National Disability Council.

Many organisations feel that the current situation is inefficient and unfair, so Labour members cannot sweep the issue aside with one of those "They would say that" sneers that seem to be their standard response to anything that they find a bit challenging.

The director of Disability Scotland has said that

"the new Disability Rights Commission should have an autonomous policy making ability at this stage, albeit within the UK framework. If we cannot get these powers then there needs to be a review and consideration to having more devolved powers."

Tim Hopkins of Equality Network, an admirable organisation with which many members will be familiar, has reiterated comments that he made in January 1998:

"Equal opportunities regulations are in need of updating and we feel that the power to do this in Scotland should be available to the Scottish Parliament."

How has Westminster dealt with race relations? Since 1976, the Commission for Racial Equality has submitted three reviews of the Race Relations Act 1976 with proposals for substantial reform. The first submission received no response whatever and the second was rejected outright. The third, which was submitted to the present

Home Secretary in April 1998, received a mixed response. Eight of the recommendations received no response, two were clearly accepted and a substantial number were either accepted conditionally or received no clear decision. However, two Queen's speeches later, little progress is promised.

The Deputy Minister for Communities, in opening the debate, referred to the experience of black Scots. Perhaps the Minister for Communities, in closing, will include some indication of her response to the CRE's recent document "Racial Equality Matters—an Agenda for the Scottish Parliament". I ask that now, as I understand that the minister is unlikely to allow any interventions later. The CRE is still waiting to hear her views and, if she is serious about the concerns expressed here, no doubt she will want to do the CRE that courtesy.

Those were a few observations from some of the organisations that are active in the field. I have not referred to all of them, but it is fair to say that most have concerns about the current position. They also have the rather more specific concern that they were totally unaware of today's debate, and are unhappy that they did not know about it far enough in advance to give us the benefit of their views.

Many aspects of the equality debate have a distinctly Scottish perspective. That difference will simply not be taken on board by Westminster, whether or not it gets around to legislating on those matters. For example, it is an undeniable fact that the composition of ethnic minorities in Scotland is very different from that in England and is complicated by the fact that we cannot exclude anti-English discrimination as an area of concern.

A debate on equalities must, of necessity, be wide-ranging, but I want to highlight one area in which the inability to legislate can be felt already. It has been a puzzle to me for many years that, despite all the rhetoric about religious discrimination, the issue has simply been swept under the carpet. That may be understandable—perhaps religious discrimination has not been a factor in English public life and is therefore not at the forefront of people's minds as an equality issue. Who can tell? However, that is absolutely not the case for Scotland, not now and certainly not when the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976 were being passed.

I will not talk about the Act of Settlement today; I am talking about addressing a problem that may be getting better, but, as we all know, still exists in Scotland. Addressing that problem will be a matter for Westminster. So, what is happening with regard to religious discrimination? I am happy to report that the Home Office has decided that it had better consider the situation. I am not clear about

precisely what motivated that concern. There is, of course, pressure from various religious groups in England to have the issue addressed, since much racial discrimination masquerades as religious discrimination and, presumably, hopes to evade the law by doing so. Quite rightly, the Home Office has commissioned some research into the extent of religious discrimination, but only in England and Wales.

Frankly, this is a ridiculous situation. The power to legislate to deal with religious discrimination is reserved, which means that this Parliament cannot legislate on it. The Home Office, whose responsibility it is, is interested only in the situation in England and Wales and the situation in Scotland disappears into a black hole. More accurately, we are in a Catch-22 situation: we cannot do what is necessary and those who can will not. Even if they chose to legislate, legislation would be on the basis of work that is not applicable to Scotland's particular concerns. That situation cannot be right.

It cannot be right that this Parliament, which has to deal with the fall-out from the discrimination that remains, cannot take the necessary steps to address the problem. Most people accept that although problems of discrimination are the same for people throughout the world, particular circumstances in different countries make the needs of legislation different. The SNP always envisaged a Parliament that would be more ground-breaking on the issue than Westminster has been. I only wish that more people shared that vision.

I note that the Liberal Democrats were eloquent on the subject at the time of the debates on the Scotland bill. I recall Donald Gorrie saying that the Liberal Democrats believed that the Scottish Parliament should have the right to legislate on the matter. He and his colleagues supported SNP amendments at the time and were vocal in their view that this matter should have been devolved. I wonder what their position will be today.

The Government did not think that Scotland should have that power, but the truth is that no adequate reason was given for the decision to reserve equal opportunities. The suspicion lingers that, somehow, it was felt that we could not be trusted, which is ironic, given the shared commitment to equal opportunities that members of this Parliament express with such frequency. Further, while this Parliament has an Equal Opportunities Committee, Westminster does not. The assumption must be that Westminster does not need one.

It is a pity that the Scotland Act 1998 does not allow us to co-opt people on to Scottish parliamentary committees as that means that the Equal Opportunities Committee is unable to have

representation from the ethnic minority community, which is the one area in which this Parliament has been a signal failure. The sad fact is that although we can do a great deal, our hands are tied until Westminster gets round to legislating, and even then, we cannot be sure that the legislation will take into account the circumstances that exist in Scotland. If we are to judge from the Home Office approach, we can be certain that Scotland's specific problems will not be addressed.

What a ridiculous position to be in and what a ridiculous position the Executive is in having to defend it.

I move amendment S1M-334.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"recognises the fundamental importance of equality of opportunity in Scotland both now and for the future and therefore regrets that legislative competence in this area remains reserved to Westminster."

15:42

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As the only Scottish Conservative member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I am delighted to contribute to this debate. The Scottish Conservatives are totally committed to eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone in the UK, regardless of race, religion, sex or social class.

We are one nation and we are proud of our traditions, our achievements and our reputation for freedom and tolerance. The Scottish Parliament gives us a wonderful opportunity further to enhance equal opportunities. Our aim must be to create a society that is comfortable with heterogeneity and which sees nothing unusual in the differences of its members. That will be achieved only when people of both genders, all races, all faiths and all backgrounds are found in all jobs across the land in positions that they have reached on merit and on merit alone.

The Scottish Conservatives are proud of our multicultural society. Scotland and the UK are enhanced, not diminished, as nations by the contributions of people from different backgrounds and cultures. In recent years, great progress has been made in breaking down the barriers to equality in business, the media, sport, entertainment and the arts, academia and public administration. Opportunities for young people have also been enhanced through greater access to further and higher education, although that has been undermined by the Lib-Lab tuition fees scandal.

In spite of all those advances, we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent. Undoubtedly, barriers to opportunity remain in our society. We must do more for our disabled citizens to make

them feel included in the new Scotland. For example, we should ensure that, wherever possible, disabled children follow mainstream education, rather than being sent to special schools or units. In trains, boats and planes, provision should be made to make life easier and more comfortable for the disabled.

As always, I make my plea that the Parliament works for all of Scotland, not just the central belt. As our observant and splendid First Minister recently said, people live and work in rural areas; however, they cannot do so in a museum-like time warp. I thank him for that, and remind the Executive how difficult it is for people living on the edge, with fuel at 90p a litre and all basic commodities priced well above the Scottish average. People who feel forgotten feel unequal, and cynicism about our new Parliament is tragic.

The Conservative-inspired University of the Highlands and Islands goes a long way—

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I welcome Mr McGrigor's recognition that people have suffered discrimination in terms of race, class and faith. However, if it is not too rude a question, could he clarify what is meant by sex in the Conservatives' amendment? Does it mean gender or sexual orientation? Further, would his party endorse the commitment of the Executive to repealing section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986 as a major step towards promoting tolerance, understanding and equality for gays and lesbians?

Mr McGrigor: On her first question, I think that Ms Jamieson was referring to sexual orientation and on her second, no, we do not think that it is a good idea to repeal section 28. I thank her for that.

The Conservative-inspired University of the Highlands and Islands goes a long way to providing more equality in education but, needless to say, its colleges are at a disadvantage due to the extra costs of being so remote. I ask the minister whether the Executive has plans to take account of that by increasing funds, as it does for primary and secondary education in those areas.

In this country, we are fortunate—

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): What is the Conservatives' view, bearing in mind the comments that Mr McGrigor has just made about being in favour of equality—

Mr McGrigor: Come on.

Mr Rumbles: What is the Conservatives' view on the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces?

Mr McGrigor: We are quite clear that we should leave it up to the heads of our armed forces to give us advice on that.

In this country, we are fortunate enough to have some of the toughest legislation in Europe aimed at combating the evil of racial discrimination. The Scottish Conservatives are fully committed to building upon that in the new Scotland. Our message must be loud and clear: discrimination, whether positive or negative, is inexcusable. I look forward to the day when the Scottish Parliament has many more members, of all party affiliations, from black and ethnic minorities.

Last Saturday, I made a speech on behalf of my party at the Scottish Trades Union Congress black workers conference in Glasgow. I greatly enjoyed the conference and the party afterwards. In my contribution, I referred to the most moving speech I have ever heard, by a man who influenced so many of my generation. I am talking about Martin Luther King. He stressed that in the process of gaining minorities their rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. I whole-heartedly endorse that principle.

There is no question but that the ethnic minorities have the aptitude and ability to represent the people of Scotland in this chamber and I hope that they will be doing that soon. However, we must recognise once and for all that so-called positive discrimination is a wrongful deed. It unfairly favours and patronises some and discriminates against others. Indeed, it was part of King's dream that one day his children would live in a nation where they would be judged not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.

Let us make King's dream a reality in Scotland. Let us have a society that treats people on the basis of merit, not background. Let us have a society where access is universal and there are no special rules or status for any group. Let us have a society that fulfils Martin Luther King's dream that

"All of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics"

will

"sit together at the table of brotherhood."

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I wonder whether Mr McGrigor might include women in his delightful picture of togetherness.

Mr McGrigor: Of course I include women in that. [*Interruption.*] I am referring to women and men at the same time.

We can achieve the dream, not by "drinking from the cup of bitterness",

but by creating a society that treats everyone as equal.

I move amendment S1M-334.1, to leave out from "and to" to end and insert:

"regardless of race, sex, class or faith and further recognises that this will not be achieved by positive discrimination or politically correct strategies which label people as categories, but by a commitment to limited government and enhanced personal freedom."

15:51

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Equality is about recognising the worth of every individual. Every one of us is different and unique. In an equal society, we must be prepared to embrace the full width and depth of the human race in all its diversity and manifestations, not just the narrow range with which we are familiar or feel comfortable. Equality is a big challenge; it is a challenge for every one of us, as individuals, never mind as a Parliament.

To achieve equality we have to become aware of our own prejudices, ignorance and personal blinkers. Then we must make a conscious effort to overcome them and we must persuade others to do the same. It will take generations to accomplish, if we ever do. Just because it is a long and rocky road is no reason not to set out along it, or to continue along it. Much has been done already: there are tools to help us, advice and information, and where there is a will there is a way.

Information is crucial. We need good information about our population in order to measure whether resources, services, jobs and opportunities are being fairly allocated across all sectors of our community. We need good information about people's needs, whether that relates to their health and welfare or their cultural and religious requirements. To collect the information, we must be meticulous in seeking out every section of society. It is not easy to persist and to penetrate beyond those people who are articulate and easily accessible, to those people who are cut off by geography, language, lack of expectation, and isolation because of age, disability, infirmity or weight of caring responsibilities. We need to ask the right questions, in the right way, to get useful and meaningful answers.

I was struck by a quotation that I came across about the census:

"The census is not just an exercise in gathering dry statistics—it is a crucially important educational and social policy instrument that has a subtle psychological impact on the social climate since it is sent to every household in the nation. The way the religious and ethnic questions are formulated sends a signal to the entire population about the way the Government understands the multicultural nature of modern Britain."

It has been suggested that breaking down the description "white" into the categories: English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, other, would normalise the concept of ethnicity by underlining the existence of indigenous ethnicity as well as foreign ethnicity,

and would challenge the two-tone, white-and-other view of the world.

We live in a society where discrimination, conscious and unconscious, is all around us. I listened to the debate this morning about the plight of Scotland's pensioners. Without in any way making light of the real needs of a large proportion of our elderly population, and the problems of fuel poverty, inadequate incomes and isolation—all of which were highlighted in the eloquent contributions that were made on behalf of older people by speakers in the debate—I was conscious throughout of a faint undercurrent of agism, and a tendency to talk about the elderly almost as if they were a race apart. There were some positive contributions, but I would have liked to hear some celebration of what old age can mean and of what elderly people can contribute.

Older people are our community. They keep most of it running. They have leisure time and experience of life, and they know how to enjoy them. By and large, they are looking after each other and us. Let us not forget to acknowledge their place in the community and to be glad of it; and let us not forget to ensure that they have equal access to the fun things as well as to the necessities.

Have members ever realised how commercial radio discriminates against older people? Commercial radio was established 25 years ago and, in those 25 years, the radio authorities have awarded almost 170 licences. Nearly all of them have gone to operators that were targeting young age groups, even though 81 per cent of people over the age of 55 listen to the radio, or, as my generation called it, the wireless.

Out of 166 commercial radio stations, only seven have their greatest market penetration among the over-55 age group. Only 28 per cent of over-55s listen to local commercial radio, a medium that could be an ideal way of reaching elderly or housebound people, if the type of programme that was broadcast encouraged them to listen to their local station. However, that is for our colleagues at Westminster to think about.

Do we think carefully enough about the effects of well-meant policies on different groups? Inclusive education is a good thing. Children should all have the same opportunity to mix with their peer group on terms as equal as we can make them. However, I have recently had it pointed out to me that a profoundly deaf child is totally isolated in a hearing peer group. Because total deafness afflicts such a small percentage of the population, real inclusion can be achieved only by collecting deaf children together in a special school where communication is non-verbal.

Children should all be allowed to enjoy

childhood equally. The youngsters out there who are caring for dependent parents or relatives desperately need recognition and support to give them equal opportunities for education and leisure and freedom from adult responsibilities.

There has been an awareness of, and a willingness to tackle, discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, disability and gender for many years. I am glad that we are now adding discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. If one regards homosexuality as a matter of choice, discrimination against it equates with religious discrimination. If one believes that it is genetic, discrimination against it is on a par with racial discrimination. The number of people whose lives have been made miserable by having to hide or deny their sexuality is not known, but it is estimated that between 3 and 10 per cent of the population is gay or lesbian. A figure of 3 per cent would represent about 150,000 people in Scotland.

I hope that I am a tolerant and caring person; I want to live in a tolerant and caring Scotland. If I belittle or demean another human being, I belittle and demean myself. Equality for all is a tremendous goal. To achieve it, we must first admit how far short of it we fall and set about tackling that shortfall. I think and I hope that we will do both.

16:00

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): Jamie McGrigor was right to highlight Martin Luther King's famous speech in which he asked for people to be judged by the content of their character, not by the colour of their skin. That speech, so radical in its time, should echo in this Parliament and stand as a reminder to all of us of the necessity to ensure equality of opportunity for all Scotland's people.

Although I would not claim to be as eloquent or as prestigious a speaker as the Reverend King, I want to express my deep support for the framework for an equality strategy that was announced today. As a member of the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee, I welcome the Executive's commitment to create a fair and just society in which all individuals, whatever their background, have equal rights and opportunities. Those values, which I know are shared throughout the chamber, are primarily Labour values and will take us and our country into the new century.

I want to draw members' attention to inclusion in education. Many young people with difficulties have a restricted choice of educational establishment. They are often deemed not suitable for mainstream education and are placed in more

specialist settings instead. The culture of diverting so many young people to specialist educational establishments is not consistent with the Executive's strategy of inclusion. In many areas of Scotland, there is the presumption that special schools are better—but better for whom? Surely not for the children.

Segregated education brands children with disabilities as second class and is not an equal, but a different, education. Although children can be offered specialist support, they are denied the opportunity to grow with their able-bodied peers. That proves a missed opportunity to educate children in mainstream schools, who must also be given the opportunity to learn with those with disabilities and, by doing so, learn to see the ability in those people.

Mainstream inclusive education must be the way forward for children with disabilities. Such children must not be branded as different; they are different only in that they have a disability. If a child needs an auxiliary, a speech therapist or specialist equipment, that should be provided for the child in a mainstream setting. I know from experience the difference that such help can make to young people. Instead of excluding them and tearing them from their friends and communities, the Executive should ensure that resources are available to provide our children with choice.

Let me make myself clear. I am talking not about dumping special needs children in mainstream schools without support, but about supporting their needs in schools within communities by transferring resources from specialist units to those schools.

I urge the Executive to take positive steps to transfer resources from the costly two-tier system to equip professional teachers with the skills to support our future generations. Rather than perpetuate prejudice—as the Equity Group says—we must move to a system such as Sweden's which is the opposite of the current system in Scotland. In Sweden, special needs children are automatically supported in mainstream schools and placing children in specialist learning centres is the exception rather than the rule. That should be the way forward for our country.

I do not advocate the abolition of specialist centres—they do valuable work—but we must give parents a clear choice, which they do not often have at present. We must provide Scottish parents and children with information to make such choices, which is why I welcome the work of Enquire, the information service run by Children in Scotland. We must transfer the resources allocated to specialist centres to enable integration to occur.

I believe passionately in equality of opportunity; I

have supported it all my life. I recognise the commitment of ministers—Jackie Baillie and Wendy Alexander—in the Scottish Executive and the commitment that exists throughout the chamber, regardless of party, to equality of opportunity. I hope, therefore, that the Parliament will support the Executive today.

The framework for an equality strategy is rooted in the traditions of tolerance and understanding, which is welcome. I urge the Executive to move forward in partnership with all interested parties, including the Equity Group, which campaign for real inclusion and equality in our education system. Once equality is achieved, we will truly be able to say, in the words of Martin Luther King:

“Free at last! Free at last!”

16:06

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Parliament must be getting used to its regular fix of motherhood and apple pie from the Executive, particularly from this combination of ministers. Yes, the issues being introduced by the Minister for Communities and her team are important, but their motions are so bland and self-congratulatory that it is questionable whether debating them is a good use of the Parliament's time. We could, for example, be discussing real issues about racism and inequality in society. The packed benches are evidence of that.

The fact that the Executive treats issues of race or gender as social issues gives us a flavour of its approach; it sees them as issues to be managed and social services to be delivered. SNP members are clear: race and gender are issues of rights—basic human rights—and justice.

Basic human rights are central to this country of ours and to our newborn democracy and are a prerequisite for what we do—or should do. What do we get from the Executive? General, meaningless words about phased and participative approaches and about service design and delivery. What is all that about? It sounds like a description of the Edinburgh Ikea showroom and catalogue launch—phased, participative, service design and delivery.

On human rights, how can the Executive prove its commitment to equality of opportunity when we have yet to hear a statement from it about how it will stand up for refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland now that the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 has been passed at Westminster? The act most certainly has an impact on equal opportunities yet, again, in key areas, the Executive is powerless without the ability to legislate on equal opportunities.

How can we confirm that the Executive is

committed to equal opportunity when we have yet to have a chance to debate a Scottish response to an act that will have a significant impact on how this country deals with immigration and asylum issues, that will arouse sensitivities and that has the potential to cause racial tension?

I remind members that in the 1970s and 1980s, Vietnamese and Chilean refugees were housed in difficult-to-let areas of Glasgow. They suffered from a lack of support and racial harassment. During the Gulf war, stranded Iraqi students were housed in high-rise flats, which they were forced to leave because of continuous harassment. The council reported that the experience had been a disaster.

How can the Executive say that it believes in human rights, social justice and equality when it is complicit in helping through the odious Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 at Westminster? The act removes the human rights of asylum seekers and reduces them to the status of bonded servants, using tokens at the company store to meet their most basic needs.

The act removes the right of Scottish local authorities to come to the aid of asylum seekers through the use of emergency grants; it denies Scottish local authorities the right to aid asylum seekers suffering from mental health difficulties; it removes Scottish local authorities' ability to help to house asylum seekers; it removes Scottish local authorities' ability to provide services to aid the children of asylum seekers. The act is rooted in inequality and amends four separate Scottish acts. It is an act on which, with the complicity of the Executive, this chamber was denied any discussion.

If the Executive thinks that the effect of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 on equal opportunities in Scotland will be negligible, it should stand up and say so. All we have from the Executive are bland assurances, in response to written questions, that consultation is taking place. There is no explanation of what that consultation is. We know what consultation means: it is a one-way street, with Westminster doing all the telling and Holyrood reduced to a listening post.

Does the Executive think that its support for the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 would pass the equality checklist for MSPs launched by the First Minister last night? Does the Scottish Executive believe that changes to Scottish legislation will mainstream equality? Does it believe that full information has been given and analysis made of the impact on equality groups? Have the full range of options and those options' differential impacts on equality groups been presented? Have the direct and indirect effects of proposals been taken into account? I think the answer to that checklist for MSPs on equality is no.

I think that the Executive knows that the Immigration and Asylum Act—as it affects four pieces of Scottish legislation—would fail its own equality test. I want a Scotland of equal opportunity, in which we combat racism, whether it is personal or institutional. We will be judged not on our fine words, however, but on what we do. On this key test, the Executive has failed in the past few months.

It is clear that, on this issue, the Executive is quite happy to be an administrative assembly for Westminster rather than a powerhouse Parliament leading the people of Scotland.

16:11

Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab): While I can agree with a lot of what has been said, it would probably have been more appropriate to debate it at another time. I would like to return to the issues that we are meant to be debating today.

I do not have a tremendous problem with the SNP amendment, although I do not think that it does anything. An amendment that suggested something a bit more positive would have been more useful.

I find the Conservative amendment absolutely ludicrous. It mentions:

“regardless of race, sex, class or faith”.

Jamie McGrigor said that sex meant sexual orientation. Gender and disability are therefore excluded from Bill Aitken’s amendment. The Conservatives seem to think that being called politically correct is some kind of insult; I regard it as more of a compliment.

I welcome today’s opportunity to debate equality. Although there is not enough time to do the subject justice, I hope that over many occasions in this chamber, there will be chances to discuss equality of opportunity on an issue-by-issue basis.

The Deputy Minister for Communities said that this is just the start. It is. We can link other important equal opportunities principles of the consultative steering group report: accessibility and accountability. We can link the establishment of a statutory Equal Opportunities Committee and an equality unit and the Executive’s commitment to mainstreaming equal opportunities which was given today and which Donald Dewar gave yesterday evening. That can be proven only in the course of time—it is, at this stage, a commitment. I think, however, that the First Minister’s launching of the equal opportunities mainstreaming checklist last night gave a positive message.

I have been involved as an elected representative for almost 12 years. I am only too

aware of how little can be achieved in any organisation unless there is commitment at a senior level. I look forward to the commitment being turned into action by the Executive.

I want to be positive this afternoon, although it is understandable that there is a great deal of cynicism and an epidemic of promise fatigue in areas in which people have been working and trying to achieve an end to discrimination for years. We have made a start this afternoon, but we have to be honest and say that we have a long way to go.

The minister mentioned public appointments. A real effort has to be made to address current inequalities. The process for making public appointments has to be far more transparent. We will have to consider how to ensure that as wide a range of Scottish society as possible is aware that appointments have been made.

We have to ensure that no anomalies exist that skew the figures on gender balance, for example. Appointments to children’s panels are included among public appointments. Because far more women are members of children’s panels, that makes the figures look good.

While it is possible to achieve 50 per cent representation of women by next year, it is important that the figures for children’s panels should be removed first when considering public appointments. We must also consider areas that are not within our remit. For example, do benefits regulations prevent people from taking part in public appointments to citizens juries? We must also ensure that lack of child care is not a barrier.

Mr McGrigor: On gender equality, I would not want it to be construed that I meant that I wanted an entirely male-dominated world. Apart from that, I took the word sex to include sexual orientation as well as gender—

Kate MacLean: Presiding Officer, I have only a short period of time and, unless Mr McGrigor has a question, I would prefer to finish my speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Ms Patricia Ferguson): Please carry on.

Kate MacLean: Disabled people should be able to participate fully in Scottish civic life. Accessible formats such as Braille and audio cassettes should be made available as a matter of course to ensure equal access to the democratic process. Access to the Parliament’s buildings, including MSPs’ offices, must be considered. I can meet constituents in an area that is wheelchair accessible and has an induction loop, but the office where my staff work is not fully accessible. The Parliament must ensure that MSPs are able to resource suitable premises and we must try to improve access to our temporary parliamentary

premises.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please wind up now.

Kate MacLean: Racial discrimination is probably one of the worst types of discrimination. To deal with it, we must accept that racism is entrenched in every aspect of Scottish life. I do not agree with Jamie McGrigor that there should be no special rules or status, as gender-neutral or colour-blind approaches have not worked.

I do not want to omit lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, who are often overlooked. Currently, they have no protection in law, although I suppose that we could deal with that were we in the situation described in the SNP amendment—but we are not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close now.

Kate MacLean: I conclude by saying that, today, we have made a start. I am fairly confident that we can make a real difference and I hope that that confidence is shared by others in the chamber and, more important, in the wider community.

16:18

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Scottish women are looking to the Scottish Parliament to make real and practical improvements to their lives—I emphasise that these must be real and practical improvements.

Despite the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equal Pay Act 1970, women and girls still experience considerable inequality and disadvantage in social, economic and political life, compared with men and boys. It is therefore more than regrettable that this Parliament has no legislative competence to redress that situation. As well as legislation we need political will, which will involve real commitment. I wish to make one or two suggestions for measures that we could take, as I have not heard much in practical terms from the minister.

What about taking some action to avoid gender stereotyping, which starts at a very early age? The Scottish Executive could, if it chose, ensure that more girls take subjects such as computer science and physics, encouraged by specialist science and computer teaching in primary schools. Not only would that prepare girls for enhanced employment opportunities; the economy would benefit from having a larger pool of people with the right skills for the future.

By the same token, men should be encouraged into employment in nursery and primary education. As we heard earlier this afternoon in response to a question from Maureen Macmillan, men make up

only 1 per cent of that sector. With most single-parent families headed by women, we know that boys in particular benefit from having a caring male role model in their lives. Lawful, positive action under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 could be used to get more men to train and apply for jobs in the nursery and primary sector. Neither the former Scottish Office nor the Scottish Executive has used lawful, positive action in that way.

One of the factors that impacts most on women and their opportunities for equality is having children. Figures that outline economic activity by marital status and economic type by age of youngest dependent child illustrate the point graphically—and provide few examples of flexible working arrangements. Why does not the Scottish Parliament adopt the principles and objectives of the European Commission's 1992 recommendation on child care, which calls on government at all levels, social partners and private organisations to take measures to enable women and men to reconcile the occupational, family and upbringing responsibilities which arise from the care of children?

Those are three examples of real and practical initiatives that I commend to the Scottish Executive for its consideration. Here is another. One organisation that is undertaking groundbreaking work on equality and small and medium enterprises is Fair Play. Its aim is to increase opportunities for women to participate in the labour market in a competitive and socially inclusive economy by promoting best practice in equal opportunities. Membership of the Fair Play consortium includes Business Enterprise Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Scottish Chambers of Commerce and many other organisations. However, its funding will run out in March 2000 and there is a risk that the expertise that has been built up over the past four years will be lost. An urgent response on the future viability of that organisation is required from the Scottish Executive.

Progress in equality of opportunity for women, if it can be traced at all, is very slow. In particular, the lack of information about the lives and needs of certain groups of women in Scotland—such as black and ethnic minority women, older women, women with disabilities and learning difficulties, rural women and lesbians—is striking. It has long been argued by groups such as the Equal Opportunities Commission and Engender that it should be a priority of Government to collect and publish more comprehensive data on all Scottish women and to support research that fills the gaps in our knowledge of women's diverse lives, gives voice to different perspectives and counterbalances short-term priorities and agendas with a long-term strategy for positive change. As

far as I can tell, that feature does not exist in the Executive's proposals.

The need for accurate statistical information and analysis was underlined time and again by organisations that gave evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee. Only the development of a truly comprehensive picture and disaggregated data will enable gender-sensitive policy to be made, targets to be set and progress to be monitored. In that respect, I look forward to the Scottish Executive reporting to the Parliament annually on progress towards real and practical gender equality, despite legislative competence on that subject being reserved to Westminster.

16:23

Ms Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Like other members, I welcome this debate and I am glad to be participating in it. It is fitting that this subject is at the centre of this Parliament's agenda. The equal representation of women is a cause that has been dear to my heart for many years.

We should not underestimate the achievement of this Parliament; given the number of women that it contains, it is one of the most advanced Parliaments in the world. That was achieved not through wishful thinking, but through hard work. It was achieved by winning the argument that the exclusion of women cannot be treated with anything other than urgency and that we cannot wait for equality to happen naturally.

We must take responsibility for the fact that women are not present in any great number in the political system—certainly not in the Conservative party. A means for involving them must be found. I am proud of the balance that has been achieved in the Scottish Labour group—the ratio of women to men is exactly 50:50—and in the Parliament as a whole. We are at the forefront of the progressive movement in the world. Indeed, in South Africa, the freedom movement argued for positive action for women; it regarded it as a critical issue. However, with all due respect, I would say that the true successor to Martin Luther King is Nelson Mandela, not the Scottish Tories.

In India, the women's reservation bill is going through the Parliament as we speak—I hope, successfully. That is critical in advancing the economic and social issues that women—particularly poor women—face. Throughout the world, the need is appreciated to bring women into key levels of decision making.

The equal representation of women was never meant to be an end in itself; it was always meant to be a means to an end. We must create real change. There has been some evidence of such change, but we know that we must go further.

I was most depressed by the SNP's contribution today. I know some people in that party; several of them have significant contributions to make to the equality debate. It is sad that they have not made those contributions today.

One of the positive things that has happened today is Susan Deacon's announcement that bullying, harassment and intimidation have no place in Scotland's family planning centres. That, too, is at the heart of the equality debate. I respect the views of people who do not share my opinions on the right to choose, but let us be absolutely clear that women must be allowed to exercise their rights freely. Workers have the right to deliver their services in safety. That is a real issue, which the Executive is tackling.

The problem is more profound than that, however. Susan Deacon also mentioned teenage pregnancy. Given the health report that was published today—which I take very seriously and am deeply anxious about—we must do something. Teenage pregnancy is an issue in my constituency, and the work that Susan Deacon has outlined is about an holistic, measured and appropriate manner of dealing with teenage pregnancy. We must not underestimate the problems that face the most vulnerable young women in our communities. There is chronic drug misuse, pregnancy and increased smoking—those are real and serious problems.

It is appropriate that we begin to examine how to widen the horizons of young women. There are no easy answers, but solutions cannot be beyond our reach. We must look at institutional processes in education and at social and cultural processes so that we can encourage women to be more assertive and to have greater expectations. In that way, we will be able to broaden their horizons. The women's agenda crosses the whole Executive; it is important that we make the debate on equality prominent within that agenda. It is also important that mainstreaming—for which we argue strongly—does not mean that the women's arguments get lost.

The anti-racist movement has much to teach us about an approach to institutional processes. That movement has shown us much in terms of understanding institutional discrimination. For years, when complaints about discrimination were made, people were told that organisations were sorry, that they did not mean it and that what was going on was not discrimination, but procedure or administration. That attitude has been seen most clearly in the police and criminal justice services. In those services, racism was consistently denied, only to be proven later. Recent cases in Scotland have shown how significant those issues are. The criminal justice system in Scotland has—to put it mildly—been insensitive to people who have faced

considerable tragedy and pain. I hope that the criminal justice system can ease the burden on the Chhokar family, so that the trial can, at least, be held in Glasgow rather than in Edinburgh.

In conclusion, I believe that equality is critical to the Parliament. It was such a prominent feature in the Parliament's creation that we must please not leave it now. The Executive is moving in the right direction and, believe me, there are people here who will keep it on its toes if we think that it is falling behind. From domestic violence to the repeal of section 28, the Government has signalled that it is determined about what it will do. Let us see what the SNP has to say. Will all SNP members support the abolition of section 28? I am proud of what this Government is doing; I hope that the SNP can be proud of what it does.

16:28

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): It is interesting that we are once again debating an issue over which, on the majority of the relevant legislation, we have no power. We should congratulate the new Northern Ireland Assembly on the powers that were transferred to it at midnight last night. I wonder whether the Executive has considered contacting the Northern Ireland Assembly, because—courtesy of schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998—we have no control over the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Equal Pay Act 1970 or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In Northern Ireland—as a result of anti-discrimination legislation—the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Disability Council are, as of midnight last night, all part of a unified Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

It strikes me that, on this issue—as on many others—if the Executive was serious about what it wants to do, it would make strenuous representations in Westminster for this Parliament to get parity with the Northern Ireland Assembly. Schedule 5 means that we cannot address some equal opportunity issues for 16 to 18-year-olds, the discrimination in the two levels of the minimum wage, the denial of benefits to 16 and 17-year-olds and—

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Mr Quinan: No, thank you.

I have here a letter from the insurance and related financial services national training organisation, which says:

"In England there is a National Traineeship programme which provides funding for 16-18 year olds who, for social or educational reasons, wish to start work at that age. We can often obtain from English Training & Enterprise

Companies up to £3,000 funding towards a programme which includes Level 2 VQs and professional examinations."

Those national traineeships are not available in Scotland through local enterprise companies.

Similarly in relation to discrimination against women, in England part funding is often available for those over 25, primarily mothers of school-age children, who want to return to work but need to retrain because of information technology and regulatory changes. Funding for that type of programme is not available in Scotland through LECs—

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Mr Quinan: No, thank you.

The large insurance companies are always interested in employing staff with previous experience. As that letter went on to say, it would appear

"that these two age groups are being discriminated against for no reason other than that they are Scottish, despite the fact that they could be doing identical work to their English colleagues. I feel that the current situation is iniquitous and puts the people in these categories at a distinct disadvantage compared to their English counterparts."

I hope that the Minister for Communities and the Deputy Minister for Communities will consider addressing those inequalities.

Again, I realise that this may not be entirely within the Executive's competence, but if we are genuinely committed to equal opportunities, we will ensure that there is a desperately needed review of the Scottish Legal Aid Board, which has denied legal aid to a couple from Alexandria, Jim and Anne Bolland—Mrs Baillie knows them well. The Minister for Justice has no competence to review or alter decisions made by the Scottish Legal Aid Board, but it has been suggested many times that the board operates in a way that discriminates against people from poor backgrounds.

I hope that the ministers will address some of the issues raised by the SNP. It would be the first time that they have listened and then acted, but I hope that they will. I support the amendment.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Malcolm Chisholm, can I give you two minutes?

16:33

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Two minutes? Right—

Ms Curran: Lloyd Quinan had five minutes—that is not fair.

Malcolm Chisholm: I was disappointed that the Conservative party failed to understand the importance of positive action in trying to create a

level playing field where none exists. I was staggered to see the SNP failing to understand the many areas where the Parliament can take decisive action on inequality. I say to Fiona Hyslop that the debate is about race and inequality. The Executive motion says that

“in developing policy and in service design and delivery concern for equality is at the heart of the matter.”

Many services could be mentioned. Best value, which is about service delivery, should have equality at its heart. Perhaps the key words in the motion are “in developing policy”, as they show that, from the very start, the intention is to build in equal opportunities. That is called mainstreaming; talking about it is not the same as doing it, but an important start has been made. In many cases, it means transforming the main stream—in developing family-friendly employment, for example. That change in society will have revolutionary implications when it is properly implemented.

Members of the Equal Opportunities Committee have already heard representations on the policies and bills that are before this Parliament. We were told by the Equal Opportunities Commission, for example, that there should be an explicit duty in the improvement in Scottish education bill to increase equality of opportunity, and that annual school development plans should contain equality measures. I am sure that the Executive will take those suggestions on board. There has also been some criticism of the housing green paper's being colour blind—although I accept that that paper was produced before this Parliament was established. I am sure that the Executive will listen to the concerns of organisations such as Positive Action in Housing and give them a place on the Scottish housing advisory panel. I hope also that the Executive will use its influence with Scottish Homes to persuade it to set up the first black and ethnic minority-led housing association in Scotland.

I agree with what Kate MacLean said about public appointments. The Equal Opportunities Committee will be paying special attention to the issue of data, to ensure that all data are disaggregated in terms of gender, race and disability.

The Presiding Officer: I am grateful to the member, as we are running a little behind schedule. I call Robert Brown.

16:36

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Liberal Democrats welcome today's debate, as it is in tune with the fundamental principles of liberal democracy. In particular, it is in tune with the principle that every individual in our society should

be valued for themselves and for their potential contribution to society, regardless of the personal attributes that have been detailed today.

As Jackie Baillie rightly reminded us, the issue of equality is right at the centre of the Parliament's operations. However, the key theme in this agenda is not legislation or controls by Government, but attitude. The Conservative amendment echoes that theme when it castigates the labelling of people by categories and calls for the enhancement of individual personal freedom. That is a valid point, as far as it goes. Equality of opportunity means the opportunity for all our citizens to have access to the educational and other life chances that society offers. It also means the opportunity to go about our daily lives without suffering petty abuse or discrimination, without being excluded and without being affected by the prejudicial attitudes of other people or institutions, which detract from our equality before the law. Attitude is critical, but it is affected by what our children learn in their formative years and by laws that define what is unacceptable. We must end discriminatory practices in law such as section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986, which was introduced by the Conservatives.

Being socially inclusive today, I share the regret that is expressed in the SNP amendment that equal opportunities have been left substantially as reserved matters. Roseanna Cunningham was right to highlight the difficulties that that created. Liberal Democrat MPs recognised those difficulties and pointed them out to the Government and to the Westminster Parliament during the passage of the Scotland Act 1998. However, Roseanna rather over-egged the cake with her strident criticisms of the current situation, and I urge the SNP to recognise that much can be done within the present set-up.

We could, for example, establish a Scottish human rights commission. Such a commission, which Liberal Democrats have advocated for many years, could work in harmony with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality to ensure a united focus on equality issues and to provide a mechanism for enhancing the Scottish contribution on matters that are specifically reserved. An independent Scottish human rights commission could be seen as a natural part of the home rule settlement—certainly, that is how Liberal Democrats have always seen it. It could also be of considerable relevance to the asylum seekers—on whom Fiona Hyslop earlier opined so elegantly—particularly when the Human Rights Act 1998 comes into force across the United Kingdom next year.

I want to touch on the importance of language in equality issues. Language is about communication and understanding. For profoundly deaf people,

that means recognition of British sign language as an official language and support for it throughout the country's institutions. For ethnic minority groups—particularly for women in ethnic minority groups—the ability to use the English language is empowerment. I can offer the example of one of my clients, whose divorce case I dealt with. Because she had been a housewife who stayed at home and looked after the children, she was totally cut off from contact with the outside world following the break-up of her family situation. Having English as a means of communication with the wider community would have been crucial to her.

The reverse is true as well. If we are to have a multicultural society, there must be adequate provision for minority-language teaching—I mean not just Gaelic, but Urdu and other languages that are used by minority populations—to help people to keep in touch with their cultural roots and to help people born and bred in this country to understand and deal with the ethnic diversity that now exists.

I support the Executive motion.

16:40

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): The minister said that this debate was about equality; Roseanna Cunningham spoke about justice. I want to speak about common sense, as equality is justice and justice is common sense.

We have had a very interesting and constructive debate. In his excellent speech, Jamie McGrigor stressed certain aspects of the wider debate; he highlighted disability, as did Jackie Baillie. We rejoice in the fact that nowadays we adopt a much more constructive and positive attitude towards disability. We want to be an inclusive society.

The one point on which I might take issue with Jamie McGrigor was his description of the First Minister as observant and splendid. Most of us might think that he is rather myopic in certain directions.

In this debate, we are plotting a course for the years ahead. There were some very sound speeches. Nora Radcliffe spoke about agism, which not many members have done. Perhaps this morning's debate highlighted the fact that agism is a problem in our society to which we have not faced up.

Michael McMahon made some excellent points about special schools and the needs of children who are disadvantaged. I welcome the fact that he may advance his ideas either at the Education, Culture and Sport Committee or at a meeting of the whole Parliament.

Fiona Hyslop made—not for the first time—a

valid point when she said that motions were being framed in a highly self-congratulatory way. She let herself down slightly by using management speak—with which we have become so familiar—despite the fact that Roseanna Cunningham had condemned that form of speaking. Fiona made some other valid points, although, as someone who in a previous existence was involved in the matter of the Iraqi students in Glasgow, I must say that the monopoly of blame did not lie entirely with the Glasgow population.

I agreed with much of what Kate MacLean said, such as her point that public appointments should be transparent. Lest there be any doubt on the matter, we use the word "sex" as a generic term to embrace gender and sexual orientation, thus demonstrating the inclusiveness that we have in the current Conservative party.

The most valid of Irene McGugan's points related to the funding of the Fair Play organisation. It will be interesting to know what the Executive decides about that.

Margaret Curran referred to the hard work that women had put into achieving the degree of equality that they have achieved. She might also have mentioned intellect, as that had something to do with it.

The debate has been very consensual. We would not have lodged our amendment unless we felt the need to sound a note of caution. If this debate is to be meaningful, it must be about real equality. Nobody should be disadvantaged because of their race, colour, gender or sexual orientation. Minorities must be protected, but we must recognise that the majority has rights, collectively and as individuals. Just as there are dangers in discrimination, there are also dangers in the so-called politically correct thinking that advocates positive discrimination. That creates an atmosphere of animosity and resentment that can generate the very prejudices that we want to remove from our society.

Parliament and every public body must make it quite clear that all our appointments and decisions are made purely on merit. We do not adhere to the old prejudices, nor do we adhere to the new prejudices of political correctness. That would be hypocrisy in the extreme and would demonstrate that some people in our society are more equal than others. That vital point must be borne in mind in our future deliberations.

Jamie McGrigor stressed that merit must be the sole criterion for public appointments. The Conservatives would have no difficulty were there to be a monopoly of public appointments of people from one particular race, gender or sexual orientation, provided that those appointments were made purely on merit. There is much to be

commended in what the Executive has said today. However, we feel that we must underline our point about merit, and that is the purpose of the Conservative amendment.

16:46

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is rather disappointing that the Conservatives should propose an amendment on which the only Tories to speak are the person who moved it and the person who is closing the debate for the party. I thought that a larger number of the parliamentary group would have been able to contribute.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Three of our members spoke this morning.

Bill Aitken: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I am sure that it is not a point of order, Mr Aitken.

Bill Aitken: It is a point worth making none the less. *[Laughter.]*

Michael Matheson: This debate illustrates the need to continue to address the issues of inequality in Scottish society. Given the amount of equality legislation that remains reserved to Westminster, however, the question remains as to whether inequality issues will be tackled to the extent that they would be if this Parliament had full powers in that legislative area.

A number of issues have been highlighted during the course of the debate that clearly illustrate our limitations. As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I am well aware of the pressing demand from organisations to deal with inequality. It is also important to recognise the limitations of the committee as a result of the major pieces of legislation that govern this area being reserved matters.

One of the strongest arguments for having a mandatory Equal Opportunities Committee in our Parliament was that Westminster had failed to deal adequately with inequality. However, having established the committee in Scotland, Westminster keeps the legislation. Important pieces of legislation, such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, are all reserved to Westminster, although they are key in tackling inequality in Scotland.

Roseanna Cunningham has highlighted the fact that the issue of religious discrimination is being investigated in England and Wales by the Home Office, although nothing is being done in Scotland. Fiona Hyslop highlighted the inequalities created by the new Immigration and Asylum Act 1999,

which amends four Scottish acts on devolved matters, and yet there was no consultation with this Parliament about it.

Jackie Baillie mentioned discrimination in the workplace, particularly in relation to wages, but the matters covered by the Equal Pay Act 1970 are reserved. Lloyd Quinan pointed out that the Northern Ireland Assembly is able to deal with all forms of discrimination under its own powers. For some reason, however, it has been decided that this Parliament should not be given that responsibility.

It is not just the SNP that is disappointed by the lack of control over equal opportunities; our disappointment is shared by the trade unions and other interested organisations. The Equality Network has said that

"it seems that the Scottish Parliament, despite its wide legislative powers, will be more limited in what it can do for equal opportunities than the Welsh Assembly will be."

Many other organisations have joined in criticising the reserved status of equality legislation.

Kate MacLean made an interesting point, saying that, although she did not object to our amendment, she thought that it was rather negative. I am not sure whether that amounts to conditional support for further devolved powers over equal opportunities, but perhaps she can enlighten us about her opinions later.

I will return to an issue that was highlighted earlier, and which I have raised with Jackie Baillie in written questions, and that is the Race Relations Act 1976 and the impact that it has on the work of the Commission for Racial Equality in particular. After 14 years—years of shame during which the Tories ignored the need to amend the act—finally, the Labour Home Secretary decided that he would amend the act and accept a number of major recommendations in doing so. However, his official response in the past couple of weeks was, "Yes, we accept the recommendations on the need for a new definition of indirect discrimination, for the CRE to embark on informal investigations on its own, for the CRE to secure changes in discriminatory practices promptly, and to give the CRE the power to issue new codes of practice without further amendment of the act. Yes, we accept the recommendations unconditionally, but there is no time in Parliament to deal with them."

The Government has also accepted conditionally another 10 recommendations, but there is no time to deal with them in committee or to amend the act. What sort of message does that send out about tackling inequalities in the UK as a whole? Let us be honest: Westminster does not have the time, but if we can afford a whole morning debating the millennium bug, we do have the time. If we had the power to amend the Race

Relations Act 1976, we would do it in the manner in which it should be amended.

We need to end the war of words. On Saturday, Wendy Alexander shared a platform with me at a Trades Union Congress rally. The people there said clearly that they want to see action. The time for warm words has gone. The message from this debate should be that if we are serious about tackling inequalities in Scotland, we need the powers to create the just and fair society that we all desire.

16:52

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): This has been a depressing debate for those who have sat through all of it, so let me try to avoid the management speak and get to the heart of the matter—[*Interruption.*] I hope that it will not be for the first time, but let me try.

There are many individuals in all parties who share the commitment of the coalition parties to advance equalities. Jamie McGrigor and Michael McMahon spoke eloquently about the inspiration of Martin Luther King and, in her opening comments, Jackie Baillie began by highlighting the nature of our opportunity—not about what we cannot do, but about what we can do. We are a new Parliament and a new Executive, and we have the opportunity to enable Scotland to be at the cutting edge—to lead the field—and for the first time to map out our own route.

Let me pause and be clear before the barracking begins. The greatest risk today is that beyond this chamber, people will view this debate as another exercise in political correctness. When they make that charge, they do not make it against any one political party in this chamber; but against Parliament as a whole. The challenge for all of us is to convince our fellow Scots of the need for urgent action.

Margaret Curran mentioned the debate surrounding teenage pregnancies, thereby rooting this debate in the real world. It is time to look to the real world.

Mr Quinan: Someone had to do it.

Ms Alexander: People suggested, as did Lloyd Quinan, that we had not dealt with the issue of sectarianism. Is there anyone in this chamber who thinks that dealing with the issue of sectarianism in Scotland is principally about changing the law, rather than about changing attitudes? On the day when a few hundred miles from here people have had the courage to change attitudes and minds, we should be clear that the issue is one of changing attitudes.

Mr Quinan: The minister just said that I made reference to sectarianism. I find it somewhat

bizarre that someone as intelligent as the minister should assume that if someone refers to Northern Ireland they are referring to sectarianism. At no point during my speech did I make any reference to sectarianism. Will the minister withdraw the remark?

Ms Alexander: At least three members of the Opposition made mention of sectarianism in the context of legislation. If Mr Quinan wishes me to withdraw the remark, so be it.

Mr Quinan: Will the minister withdraw the remark?

Ms Alexander: I would be delighted to, Lloyd. Three of your colleagues referred to sectarianism. I am sorry to have cited you. Certainly Roseanna Cunningham referred to religious discrimination in her opening remarks. I think—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. Settle down, please.

Ms Alexander: I will finish the substance of the point. On all those issues, the challenge to us is to change attitudes as well as to change the law.

If members consider our history, it shows that society changes only when people act together to bring about change. There has been an awful lot of talk today about what Westminster should do and what has happened in England. We should look to ourselves and our own history. The divine right of kings was superseded by the rights of men. That gave way to agitation against slavery and was the parent in the fight against apartheid, campaigns for the right to vote for women and debates today on children's rights, gay rights and the disabled. In every age, it has been about progressive forces combining to change attitudes first and then the law. What we are talking about today is changing attitudes.

If members look back at those who in previous generations were condemned for political correctness, they were in fact one step ahead of the public opinion of the day. That is the opportunity and the invitation that awaits this Parliament. The right to vote, family allowances, the right to equal pay, the right to civil rights: those were all seen as at the cutting edge in their time and are now regarded as fundamental tenets of a civilised society. Unless we take the opportunity today for ourselves, rather than blame somebody else, we are saying that the new Scotland will be no better than the old Scotland.

Inequality persists in Scotland. We have heard about the pay gap. Racial incidents in Scotland are up from 662 five years ago, to more than 1,000 last year. That is a mark of shame on us all. Homophobic bullying continues and the disabled still look for recognition.

What lies at the core of the strategy before us

today is basic human rights. Too often, the legislation is there. Consultation and mainstreaming matter, not because that is bland or self-congratulatory, but because it is a challenge to ourselves to change the way in which we do things.

The Presiding Officer: Members are standing talking during this debate. Please sit down.

Ms Alexander: Fiona Hyslop talked about the failings of the past treatment of Chilean and Ugandan refugees in this country. I invite her to come with me to Renfrewshire and see the outstanding practice in the treatment of Kosovan refugees. There is nothing bland about local authorities and this Executive working together to make specialist facilities available to disabled refugees from Kosovo.

This gets to the heart of the matter because, when it comes to asylum and refugees, we will fail if we say that the people of Kent should be uniquely responsible for floods of asylum seekers or refugees when there is a crisis in another part of the world and that we in Scotland are prepared to stand aside and take no responsibility in dealing with those issues. I, for one, do not want to stand aside.

Fiona Hyslop: Will Ms Alexander give way?

Ms Alexander: Let me continue. I will take more interventions in a moment. This is the essence of my point. I will happily take interventions after I have made it.

Equality is not something that stops at national boundaries. Consider the experience of women, which is common across the UK. Violence against women is common across the globe. Roseanna Cunningham suggested that the decision to reserve legislation in this area was small-minded cowardice. It was a principled decision to say that we did not want to go down the route of differential pay levels north and south of the border or separate laws on sex discrimination or disability.

The problem with the SNP's amendment is that it is an invitation for us to condemn the constitutional arrangements that the people of Scotland have chosen. For the SNP to claim that Scotland is unable to promote equal opportunities is not true. There is a battle to be won against institutional racism, discrimination against women and the treatment of the disabled in our schools.

The consequence of the SNP's amendment—should we pass it today—would be that we, as the first Scottish Parliament for 300 years, would have no strategy or programme for moving forward on equality. The amendment offers no concrete suggestion; it merely laments the fact that the SNP lost the argument. It offers nothing to take us forward. So, today—the first time that we have

debated the subject—I invite the SNP to join us in what we can do, rather than lamenting what we cannot do.

I urge the Tories not to succumb to the charge of political correctness. If the Tories are prepared to join us in a dialogue, they are on the right side in saying that the new Scotland can be better than the old.

The truth is that we are building a multinational Britain. Look at the developments of the past week. We are building a multi-ethnic, multiracial Britain. We look forward to new legislation in the coming days. The invitation, to all of us, is to be genuinely involved in leading the debate by the practice that we show here. The new Scotland can be a better place than the old Scotland. Our responsibility starts here, in the chamber. We commend—and we urge members to support—the motion today.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come to decision time. I must put six questions to the chamber.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-327.1, in the name of Iain Gray, seeking to amend motion S1M-327, in the name of Mr John Swinney, on the plight of Scotland's pensioners, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)

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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)
 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 (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S1M-327.2 therefore falls.

The second question is, that motion S1M-327, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)

Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 17, Abstentions 31.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes the Executive's vision of a Scotland in which every older person matters and every person beyond working age has a decent quality of life, and welcomes the measures the Executive has already taken and has planned to support older people in line with its Programme for Government commitment to deliver person centred health and community care.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-339, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following designation of Lead Committee—

The Local Government Committee to consider The Non-domestic Rating Contributions (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1999, SSI 1999/153.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S1M-334.2, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, seeking to amend motion S1M-334, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on equalities, be agreed to. Are we 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 (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)

Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 79, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that amendment S1M-334.1, in the name of Bill Aitken, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S1M-334 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)

McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (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)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, Mr Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 94, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment, as set out in Making it Work Together: A Programme for Government, to promote equality of opportunity for all and to do that through an inclusive, phased and participative approach to the development of an equality strategy so ensuring that in developing policy and in service design and delivery concern for equality is at the heart of the matter.

European Freight and Passenger Terminal (Fife)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now move to members' business. I make my usual appeal for members to leave quickly and quietly. Members' business today is motion S1M-287, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the promotion of a European freight and passenger terminal in Fife.

More members have indicated a desire to speak than I had notice of, so I appeal for short speeches.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that the EU is the destination for over half of Scottish exports and that Scotland has no direct ferry connection with Europe; believes that Scotland, being on the geographical periphery of the EU, has an urgent need for good transport links with continental Europe and that it is uneconomic, environmentally unsound and irrational that the majority of Scottish goods and freight traffic should have to pass through Hull or other southern ports to reach destinations in Europe, as this increases the volume of freight traffic on roads and impedes Scottish economic growth; recognises the need to develop a multimodal freight and passenger terminal to serve Scotland, and agrees the need to promote a freight and passenger ferry terminal at Rosyth, assist Fife Council, Fife Enterprise, Scottish industry and the Scottish Tourist Board in their efforts to secure this facility, encourage the fast tracking of all planning applications to allow the proposed facility to be established without delay, encourage the development of road and rail infrastructure links to ensure easy and safe passage for passengers and freight through the proposed terminal at Rosyth and ensure the availability of an appropriate level of freight facilities grant for the proposed ferry terminal at Rosyth.

17:08

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I thank all the members who signed the motion for today's debate.

Scotland is an exporting nation. Computers, telecommunications equipment, chemicals, whisky and fish and other food products carry the "Made in Scotland" label and directly support 120,000 jobs in Scotland.

There was a time when we thought of our home market as being the 5 million people who live in Scotland, or even the 55 million in the United Kingdom. That is no longer the case: Europe, with a market of about 320 million people, is now our home market. Scotland exports more to France and Germany individually than it does to the USA and the Commonwealth countries combined.

Our exports to the European Union represent 58 per cent of Scottish exports. Indeed, 78 per cent of manufactured exports from Fife are EU-bound. Those are remarkable statistics for a nation on the periphery of Europe. We succeed despite the lack

of a fast, efficient route into mainland Europe—our marketplace.

In its major study into transportation networks, the North Sea Commission said that

"the majority of Ro-Ro and Container traffic is routed to/from English ports. In this context, without significant investment in Ro-Ro and passenger facilities, Scotland will continue to suffer from peripherality."

Is it not madness to be an exporting nation but to make it so difficult for our exporters to reach their primary market? We could do so much better.

Fifty per cent of the traffic that passes through the ferry port of Hull is believed to have its origin or destination in Scotland. A large proportion of the journeys of the 250,000 passengers who use the Newcastle-Amsterdam ferry originate in Scotland. I would like the Parliament to think about the cost of the fuel to get goods and passengers to and from those ferries, the impact of those journeys on our roads system and the pollution that that additional traffic creates in our environment.

A Scottish lorry driver also needs to think about time. More congestion means that Scottish lorry drivers may be unable to reach southern port destinations in a legal driving day, which adds to their costs. Add to that the plans to introduce motorway tolling—now plus VAT—all heaped on to Scottish exporters trying to operate competitively from a peripheral European nation. The motion supports the view that there is a market for a direct ferry service from Scotland to the heart of Europe, with more and more finished goods transported by rail to the quayside, and on to their markets in Europe.

How do other small nations access key European markets by sea? The Danes, for example, are well served by Fredrikshavn, Arhus and Esbjerg. In Norway, more than 80 per cent of the country's imports and exports are transported by ship and/or ferry. However, it is about more than just goods. We need to look only at Shetland to see the huge economic and social benefits that can be had from an international sea link. Hotels, pubs and guest houses in Shetland are full of Scandinavians with plenty of money to spend.

If it can do that for Shetland, imagine what sea access to the continent could do for the rest of Scotland. Opening up Scotland to tourists must be part of the agenda. Imagine a tourist thinking about coming to Scotland without first having to think about an eight-hour car journey. How much more attractive it would be if one could travel from Zeebrugge, Zeeland or the Eemshaven and sail into Rosyth by the next morning. The journey itself would be a holiday, part of the great Scottish adventure. The Scottish Tourist Board's figures show that, in 1998, more than 60,000 Dutch

people made their way to Scotland by sea and tunnel. Imagine how that figure could be increased with a port at Rosyth.

The reason that I brought this motion to the Parliament is to encourage action. A lot has been said over the past few years and encouraging noises have been made, but it is now time to move from the noises-off stage to getting passengers and freight on board.

I am aware that the minister has already confirmed that the Executive is responsible for those ferry and marine freight operations that start and finish in Scotland. I would therefore welcome her confirmation today that freight facilities grants would apply to a ferry terminal facility at Rosyth. We all know that Rosyth has good access to the motorway system and the potential for a direct rail link. It is also an excellent location for storage and logistics operations and has a port facility that is accessible, irrespective of the state of the tide.

As far as the rail link is concerned, I am sure that the minister is more than aware of yesterday's announcement by Railtrack about its preparedness to invest in the rail link between Dunfermline and Stirling and the vital importance of that link to the future development of this exciting port opportunity, which would create hundreds of jobs and retain highly skilled engineers at Rosyth. I hope that the minister will be able to confirm that that will strengthen the case for substantial investment for this line from the next round of public transport fund announcements.

Scottish Enterprise has chosen Rosyth as its preferred east coast port and has already identified a five-point action plan. I also ask the minister to report back to Parliament on the progress of that plan. I am sure that she is aware that Babcock Rosyth is at the forefront of developing the engineering capability to move containers from road to rail to ferry. That multimodal approach and the building of low-deck wagons at Rosyth will allow container traffic to pass through tunnels and bridges previously unsuitable for rail container traffic. Babcock Rosyth estimates that the new engineering enterprise will create significant numbers of jobs. Can I ask the minister to confirm that everything possible will be done to assist Babcock Rosyth to make the product a success?

The Parliament should recognise the efforts of others: Fife Council, Fife Enterprise and other bodies. We need to provide the vital support, encouragement, energy and cajolement to ensure that this venture—of huge potential for Rosyth, Fife and Scotland—becomes a reality, not tomorrow but today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): There are a great many members who want to speak in this evening's debate, so I must ask members to keep to a four-minute limit.

17:15

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): I welcome Bruce Crawford's motion, allowing the discussion of the merits of Rosyth as an international freight and passenger ferry terminal. My constituency covers the whole of the former Rosyth Royal Naval dockyard, now split between Babcock Rosyth and Rosyth 2000. Both companies have proposals for a roll-on-roll-off ferry terminal, using the fact that they have the ability to provide 24-hour docking facilities, unlike a potential rival on the south of the Forth.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that, in the past, the southern Fife economy was overly reliant on traditional industries and those relating to defence. It is clear that the change in economic activity and in the international situation has had a devastating effect on the local economy. No longer will the Rosyth port area be able to rely on Ministry of Defence contracts, as it once did. It is important for employment that the former dockyard area is used for other purposes. However, today's debate is not simply about creating jobs—although that is important—but about making economic sense.

As the motion states, the majority of Scottish exports heading to continental Europe currently have to go through Hull. That involves a journey of several hundred miles from Scotland, when the establishment of a similar terminal at Rosyth would mean that journeys from most of Scotland would be in the region of tens of miles. Similarly, the nearest major passenger ferry terminal is at Newcastle, when Rosyth is obviously nearer.

The Scottish Executive and the UK Government are anxious to reduce unnecessary travel by road—but having our nearest major freight terminal at Hull only increases road travel. Rosyth is well placed in the main arterial road network, a few miles off the M90 at the Forth road bridge, with good links north, south, east and even west, although that will be helped by the creation of a new bridge at Kincardine. Rosyth is also situated just off the main east coast rail network—the rail link is already in place. That could easily be opened up to further freight traffic, if minimum improvements were made to the junction south of Inverkeithing railway station.

Fife Council and the former Fife Regional Council, in partnership with industry, have been pursuing the option of an international ferry terminal for several years. Indeed, in her role as a councillor, my neighbouring constituency MSP, Helen Eadie, has been harping on about the

matter for as long as I can remember. As Bruce Crawford says, the ferry terminal is an issue on which we should make progress.

Both the Scottish Executive and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions need to ensure that the proposals receive a sympathetic response. They would be enhanced if existing rail grants were extended to include coastal shipping. That would be a major step forward in making the Rosyth proposals reach fruition.

As I have said before, there are two proposals on the table for Rosyth. I have no real opinion on which is best; the port provides an excellent opportunity. It is situated on the east coast of Scotland, has potential traffic as yet untapped and is far enough up the Firth of Forth not to be affected by tidal fluctuations. The location of an international freight and passenger terminal is not simply a Fife issue—it would provide a much needed resource for the whole of Scotland. Its creation would benefit all parts of Scotland and would make a strategic improvement to the Scottish transport infrastructure.

17:19

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

I congratulate Mr Crawford on obtaining today's debate. I am sure that it is entirely a coincidence that he has managed to lodge the motion and obtain the debate a week before the Rosyth East council by-election. None the less, I am sure that—in the all-party spirit in the chamber today—he will agree that all parties have worked hard over recent years to bring about a European freight and passenger ferry terminal at Rosyth.

Such a direct freight and passenger ferry service is—as some have called it—the missing link in Scotland's transport infrastructure. It would improve accessibility, increase trade and tourism, and—very importantly for Fife—create jobs among our constituents. It would also be profitable, and it is easy to see why. A quarter of a century ago, a third of Scotland's exports went to mainland Europe; now it is two thirds. Most of those exports go to the Benelux countries, as Mr Crawford said, and to France and Germany. Our export growth is higher than the United Kingdom average. We make 35 per cent of Europe's personal computers, and a large proportion of our electronics goods, as well as whisky, food and paper, are exported in containerised form.

Scotland is an increasingly important tourist destination. The number of overseas visitors has doubled since 1982, and nearly a quarter of them come by sea, mainly from—again—the Benelux countries, France and Germany. If they come by sea, they come to either Hull or Dover. They then

face a very long road journey. In fact, it is surprising the extent to which tourism from mainland Europe has increased without the benefit of a direct ferry link. They brave the congestion on our roads to get up to Scotland—to Edinburgh, the west and the Highlands.

Despite the increase in exports and the increase in the tourist trade, our local economies have been missing out because most of the traffic is routed, as Mr Crawford said, through English ports. Roll-on-roll-off container traffic is the fastest growing sector for United Kingdom ports—it has gone up 84 per cent in the nine years between 1986 and 1995. English, not Scottish, ports have benefited. Of our container trade, 70 per cent goes through Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Southampton and Felixstowe. Nearly all our international trailer traffic—98 per cent—goes through either Dover or Hull.

The Transport Research Institute at Napier University has estimated that a ferry service between Rosyth and mainland Europe would make a profit of at least £5.7 million a year, and probably considerably more. But if Rosyth is to be a successful ferry terminal port, it is important that we improve the links to it. I am glad that Mr Crawford mentioned Railtrack's announcement yesterday concerning the Stirling-Alloa-Dunfermline line, because reopening that line is potentially very important. Railtrack's commitment to such an east-west freight route could significantly boost the economy of the Mid Scotland part of the region that Mr Crawford and I both represent, so I warmly welcome that announcement.

I hope that the minister will talk about measures to reduce the increasingly serious congestion on the roads leading up to the tolls on the Forth road bridge. I say that with some feeling, having been half an hour late for a debate in Dundee on Tuesday night because it had taken me an hour and a half to get from outside this chamber to the tolls on the bridge. Quite frankly, if that congestion continues or gets worse, it will undermine the attractiveness of having a ferry terminal at Rosyth.

My party strongly supports a terminal at Rosyth. We are the second party on the council in Fife, with 21 seats—double the number of Mr Crawford's party. However, we are glad to have his support. Apart from providing an important transport link to mainland Europe for Scotland as a whole, it would provide a welcome boost to the economy of Fife.

17:23

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will be brief, unlike Mr Raffan, who spent half the time making political points.

I congratulate Bruce Crawford on his motion. I believe that there is a pressing need for the facility, and I am happy to support the motion. Believe it or not, the creation of a ferry terminal formed a central part of the Scottish Conservatives' manifesto in the May elections.

Mr Raffan: That is a political point.

Mr Harding: Please do not interrupt, Mr Raffan.

A facility such as the one that is proposed for Rosyth would be a boon to the local economy and to the Scottish economy. Establishing the new terminal at Rosyth would provide long-term security of employment in a depressed area. It would also reduce the cost for tourists and exporters alike, who already face high fuel taxes and long travel times.

I understand that the Scottish Executive would welcome the establishment of a ferry link to the continent, and I urge it to support this initiative and, in the words of the First Minister,

"find a Scottish solution to a Scottish problem."

We support the motion.

17:24

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I apologise if I seem to be going off at a slight tangent at the start of my very short speech, but members will see the reason for that by the time I get to the end. By the way, if Mr Raffan had taken the train to Dundee—as I did—he would have got there in time.

When I read Bruce Crawford's motion, I felt that it was very much concerned about jobs in Fife. I want to talk about what might be another huge opportunity for Rosyth. At the moment, George Lyon is on his way back to Kintyre to promote Campbeltown as a construction base for wind turbines. The offshore environment on the west coast is very extreme, although it offers the biggest wave and wind energy resource in Europe. Tomorrow, at the Scottish Renewables Forum conference, I will spend five minutes advertising the fact that a number of MSPs are interested in setting up a Scottish parliamentary renewables group to press that issue. Renewable energy is the only form of energy over which we have control. Denmark intends to raise 30 per cent of its energy from combined wind-wave and mostly offshore renewables by 2010.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I commend and support Robin's comments. The Scottish National party has a long record of supporting the use of renewable energy. Does Robin accept that the development of wind power would provide an opportunity to deal with the jobs crisis at

BARMAC's yards at Nigg and Ardersier, where 3,000 men have lost or are about to lose their jobs?

Robin Harper: I thoroughly concur. I have to tell members that that intervention was not a plant.

The North sea is clearly an environment with huge possibilities for wind and wave energy to which we should be turning our attention. Of all facilities available, Rosyth docks presents itself as an ideal for the manufacture and floating out of offshore, wind, wave and combined wind-wave installations that can connect easily and directly into the Scottish grid. That is the problem with such installations on the west coast. Such a scheme could have huge possibilities for Scotland and Europe when allied with the development proposed in the motion.

17:27

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I also congratulate Bruce Crawford on lodging the motion. I regret Keith Harding's mean-minded and mean-spirited comments. If ever there was a reason for proportional representation in local government, he has just outlined it. As he well knows, the Scottish National party in Fife has more votes than the Liberal Democrats.

Mr Harding: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not think that I made those comments.

Tricia Marwick: I am terribly sorry, Keith—I meant Keith Raffan. I humbly apologise for that mistake.

A European freight and passenger service from Scotland to Europe is a project that is viable, in demand and would be of long-term benefit to the area. Before the war, a ferry service operated from Scotland to the European continent. However, that service ceased when the boats were commandeered for the war effort and was never re-established. There is a demand for that service today.

Once the stock of roll-on-roll-off ferries on order comes into operation, the capacity of UK ports will increase. It is estimated that within the next 10 years, the capacity for freight transport at UK ferry terminals will rise by 32 per cent.

There is also a great demand for that service from passengers. Most passengers in Scotland would prefer to travel to a port within two hours of their home. As Bruce Crawford said, almost half the passengers who travel to Hull come from Scotland. It also works the other way. The local tourist board whole-heartedly supports the proposal, and estimates a massive influx of tourists directly into Scotland from the continent.

In the current absence of a ferry link to Europe,

there are two options for market access: a 500-mile drive to channel ports or a 250-mile drive to Humber ports. However, current trends are making those journeys less viable—we have already talked about the difficulty for lorry drivers of having to remain within the legal time limits.

The solution is a ferry terminal at Rosyth, which would reduce pressure on existing ports, increase accessibility to Scotland from the continent, increase tourism and create jobs. Rosyth is the ideal location for such a terminal. As a former naval base, Rosyth could offer riverside berths, a deep-water channel and direct access to trunk road and rail networks. Rosyth also has close at hand a plentiful supply of land for expansion. Most important, a terminal would create jobs in an area that has been devastated by job losses. In short, the whole of Scotland would benefit from the ferry port.

Not only is there demand for the terminal, but it is viable. Rosyth is an ideal location for a ferry port and Fife could certainly use the extra jobs. However, if Rosyth is to be established, it must survive in the commercial environment. Rosyth will face a hard world.

If the project at Rosyth is to be launched and is to sail, not sink, the Executive must provide support and assistance to ensure a safe landing for a Scottish sea route to the European continent. The Executive has the power at its fingertips to write the memo and to sign the cheques for freight facilities grants. That would launch the ferry from Rosyth with certainty of a fair-weather passage, rather than with a photo call, with a minister cracking open a bottle of champagne on a departing ferry and then leaving it to face unaided the storms of the wild commercial seas.

17:31

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): I congratulate Bruce Crawford and thank him for lodging the motion, which has opened up the issue of east coast access to ferry services from Scotland.

The idea has been around for a long time and it is appropriate that it should be the subject of one of our earlier discussions in the Scottish Parliament. Tonight's debate has shown that while there has been much discussion before, the real challenge is to promote action.

I want to cover three main areas. First, I will cover the policy framework, because Bruce asked a large number of questions about how the Executive views the proposal. I will then talk about what the Executive can do. Finally, I will pick up on Tricia Marwick's comments about the challenges of the project and where we go next.

We have a strong and robust policy framework. Many of the issues raised today relate to policies for which the Executive already has a policy framework in place, which can be used as a background to discussing the issue.

I will not go through the whole list of statistics that members have raised, but I will pick out three. In 1997, freight going by heavy goods vehicle outwith the UK from Scotland totalled 629,000 tonnes. In 1996, more than half the tonnage going by sea went via the Dover strait. More than 940,000 tonnes of freight for outwith the UK was lifted by rail in Scotland. We know that we have a significant export market. I take on board fully Tricia's comment that freight movement by sea is a competitive market. Policies on east coast access must therefore be developed in that light.

It is not the nationality of our ports that is the problem, but the physical lack of access in Scotland and the distances that need to be travelled. Those are the issues on which we must focus.

There are four key policy areas for which the Scottish Executive has a positive policy framework. First, it is absolutely vital to take freight off roads. That underpins our commitment to a sustainable distribution policy for freight. We are committed to removing 15 million lorry miles a year from the roads by March 2002. That is not an easy or straightforward target, but it is one of the key aims that inform the debate on Rosyth.

Secondly, an integrated approach to transport is at the core of our transport policy. That framework has been set out in our decisions and in our funding mechanisms.

Thirdly, we need locally driven transport strategies. Keith Raffan made a point about the need to tackle congestion. I want to take the opportunity of tonight's debate to pay tribute to the work of Fife Council in promoting practical alternatives to road congestion. The council is doing some solid work and I encourage it to continue with that. There are opportunities in Fife to pull together the local council, the local enterprise company, port providers, Railtrack and other bodies that could be involved to promote a powerful local transport strategy.

The last of the four policy areas is ports policy, and to get that policy right, it is important to work in the wider UK context. We want to enable multimodal ports, with transfer from rail to ferry and from road to ferry. We want to ensure that we get it right, and that the shadow strategic rail authority, Railtrack, the rail freight operators, port owners and the shipping companies will be involved. It is a challenging agenda but, I believe, a positive one.

I believe that the Executive has set the right

framework.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: I will come on to Mr Tosh in a minute.

This is not just a matter of the right framework; it is about what we are doing now. We have a freight facilities grant that is available for developing rail facilities at ports. We are looking for applications so that we can identify appropriate funding. Existing rail links, including Rosyth, could be eligible for the grant—we need the applications. On rail services to Rosyth, it is welcome news that Railtrack will submit a freight facilities grant application for the Stirling-Alloa-Dunfermline freight link. We will consider that application seriously, and it should be approached in the context of overall freight facilities.

There is also the prospect—this is where the UK Government is important—to extend the freight facilities grant scheme to short sea and coastal shipping, which is already a firm UK Government commitment. I welcome that commitment, which is extremely relevant for Rosyth and for Scotland.

On Scott Barrie's comments on the Kincardine bridge, as he will know—and I will remind him—we have given the go-ahead on the strategic roads review announcement.

It is also our policy to encourage other agencies that are involved, and I highlight the joining-up of their approaches. Their work was mentioned by Tricia Marwick and Bruce Crawford, and it is important that we maximise effectiveness. Scottish Enterprise is playing a key practical role. There is also funding from RAPID, an EC-backed scheme which could, if qualification is achieved, assist in associated property development around the port area. Environmental funding could assist with abnormal ground conditions or environmental improvements.

Mr Tosh: Will the minister come on to me now?

Sarah Boyack: I am happy to take an intervention.

Mr Tosh: I am encouraged by the breadth of the minister's agenda. May I respectfully suggest that this rather small debate might be enhanced if the Executive agreed to make time available for a full debate? We have had only one relatively short debate on the roads review. There is a tremendous opportunity for us to have a full debate on the subject of Scotland's strategic transport links. I am sure that the Parliament would welcome that, and I hope that the minister can give some indication that she might promote such a debate.

Sarah Boyack: Whenever anyone says

"respectfully suggest", I treat it with extreme caution. However, I accept the point that Murray Tosh makes. We will debate the overall strategic transport framework when we come to debate the integrated transport bill. I will be happy to engage in such a discussion then, and the subject comes up in many of our debates; transport is vital to Scotland's prosperity.

The other way in which Scottish Enterprise can support the development of transport links is through marketing assistance. There has been a lot of work on that from Scottish Enterprise already. I am sure that members will be aware of the report that it produced last year, which has pushed the debate ahead and has added a great deal of depth to what members have raised in the debate.

Scottish Enterprise has also played an important role with regard to European funding sources.

Bruce Crawford: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: Not just now, thank you.

The pilot actions for combined transport programme—the PACT programme—supports innovative combined transport services. I understand that a PACT application might be considered, and could build on the earlier support from the scheme for initial feasibility work. The application is being made in a competitive situation, but I believe that further work could be done.

On future challenges, I am convinced that the work already being done on transport links will take the debate further. The Scottish Executive will fully support such an agenda.

The framework set by us allows and positively encourages developments such as that at Rosyth. One of the challenges is to highlight for shipping operators the port facilities available and how they can be promoted. We need to study the market carefully and to examine how ferry and shipping operators might be attracted to the routes that have been mentioned. There are some hard questions—Tricia Marwick raised the matter earlier—and I believe that we need to give them further consideration.

We need to ensure that the project is co-ordinated. I pay tribute to the work of Fife Council, Scottish Enterprise, Fife Enterprise, the port authorities, rail freight interests and the many others involved in the work. I welcome the establishment of a project steering group as a means of taking the work forward practically and positively.

The Executive is clear that a ferry service from the east coast of Scotland would be welcome.

Bruce Crawford: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: No thank you, I am winding up.

I know that Henry McLeish visited Babcock at Rosyth on Tuesday this week and met the trade unions and senior management.

Bruce Crawford: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: No.

Bruce Crawford: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I know that the Presiding Officer has already ruled on announcements being made without notice. As far as I understand it, we have just heard an announcement about some future project steering group of which we were completely unaware. It would have been courteous had the minister informed us about it beforehand. Can the minister explain that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure what the minister was referring to, but no doubt she will—

Bruce Crawford: She referred to a project steering group.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, I heard what she said. I am simply not aware of what she is speaking about. I will ask her to clarify.

Sarah Boyack: I did not think that I was revealing anything particularly exciting—it is simply that work is in progress and that the steering group is a further stage of development.

Henry McLeish has been pursuing the matter—

Fergus Ewing *rose*—

Sarah Boyack: Does Fergus Ewing have a point of order?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is an intervention.

Sarah Boyack: If it is not a point of order, I would like to continue.

Fergus Ewing: I wish to ask who is on the steering group.

Sarah Boyack: I am not accepting an intervention—I have just taken one from Bruce Crawford.

We have talked about how the Scottish Executive plays a full part in regeneration and diversification at Rosyth. That is an exciting issue for us, and I am glad that it has been debated early in the life of the Scottish Parliament. The policy framework, the role that we can all play and the role that the Government can play are clear—our challenge is to progress the matter collectively. Work is already being done, and I hope that the debate has helped to lift the issue up the agenda and that it has added value to the discussions that are already taking place in Fife.

I thank Bruce Crawford for raising the issue and I hope that we will be able to report success in future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I thank members for staying behind and I apologise to those who were not called to speak.

Meeting closed at 17:41.

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