

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 3 February 2000

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 3 February 2000

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

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are two debates this morning. The first is a non-Executive debate on motion S1M-482, in the name of Mrs Kay Ullrich, on the national health service in Scotland, and an amendment to that motion. The debate will end at around 11.30 and will be followed by a debate on air passenger and freight links to Scotland. Members who want to speak in the first debate should press their button now.

National Health Service

09:31

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): First, I must say how sorry I was to hear the news this morning that Rhona Brankin has been diagnosed as having breast cancer. Rhona is to be commended for speaking out openly and publicly about her illness. It will give support to many other women throughout Scotland. I am sure that everyone in the chamber will join me in wishing her a full and speedy recovery. [*Applause.*]

The last health debate took place in the middle of the flu crisis. The debate was somewhat marred by the Minister for Health and Community Care's refusal to accept the obvious—that the health service in Scotland was struggling to cope and was only able to cope thanks to the dedication and good will of health service staff, who worked extra hours, forwent days off and, in many cases, worked back-to-back shifts. I am sure that every member of this chamber will want to acknowledge the debt that we owe to health service staff for seeing us through the flu outbreak.

The outbreak exposed the fact that the NHS in Scotland is struggling throughout the year to provide high-quality health care. The previous health debate was a somewhat heated affair, with the minister desperately trying to stick to the new Labour line of, "Crisis? What crisis?" Of course, that was before noble Tony Blair's admission that there are

"fundamental problems we have to address".

Tony said that we need

"more doctors, more nurses, more beds, more long-term financing and a different system and structure in the health service".

We can all agree that, coming from the Prime Minister, those words are a damning indictment of

the state of the NHS after almost three years of Labour rule.

Now that Mrs Deacon no longer has to pretend that all is well and to view the health service as she would the emperor's new clothes, I hope that we will be able to examine the problems that exist and have an open and constructive debate on the state of Scotland's health service.

Before I leave the subject of Tony Blair, I ask the minister whether, in the light of the Prime Minister's commitment to increase health spending south of the border by 5 per cent each year to bring NHS spending up to the European average, she will give the same commitment for the national health service in Scotland? Blair says 5 per cent. What does the minister say?

I admit that I was a little saddened by the tone of the minister's amendment to the Scottish National party motion. There is still a clear reluctance to accept responsibility, in spite of now having permission from above to do so. The minister seems unable to grasp that in order to address a problem, one must first acknowledge that a problem exists. By consistently denying that there is a problem, the minister is rapidly becoming a substantial part of the problem.

I will spend a little time examining the cost in human terms of the failures within the health service today. There cannot be a member in this chamber whose mail has not included harrowing stories of people suffering pain and distress because of the inadequacies in health service delivery. All over Scotland, patients, relatives and health service workers are genuinely concerned about the state of the NHS. We in this Parliament have a duty to address those concerns, and to do so without resorting to the spin-doctoring of figures. We should resist the temptation to indulge in party political posturing.

I am sure that we were horrified to hear recent stories of patients being driven across Scotland in search of intensive care beds. One patient was taken from Inverness to Glasgow; another was taken from Shetland to Edinburgh. It was a sobering moment when we learned of three patients from Fife being sent to the private Health Care International hospital at Clydebank because no intensive care beds were available in their health board area. Let us be clear: those patients were transferred to a private facility because the NHS had failed them at their time of need.

Throughout the year, it is common practice for patients in the Greater Glasgow Health Board area, for example, to be transferred from one hospital to another in search of any available intensive care bed. The figures speak for themselves. In the first six months of last year, there were 270 intensive care transfers within the

Greater Glasgow Health Board area, more than double the figure for the same period of the previous year. The minister will claim a 12 per cent increase in intensive care beds, but, given that 50 intensive care beds have been lost in the past 10 years, we still have a long way to go before the crisis in Scotland's intensive care units is addressed.

As ever, we are subjected to the usual smoke-and-mirrors approach on what actually constitutes a new bed. Take the situation at the Southern general hospital in Glasgow. It had four intensive care beds and one high dependency bed. It received additional funding for half a nurse, and the high dependency bed was upgraded to an intensive care bed. Instead of four, they now have five intensive care beds, but no high dependency bed. Is that what the minister calls progress?

The Labour Executive makes great play of improvement in waiting times and waiting lists. Here again, we have a tale of failure. The real failure, however, is the Executive's inability to recognise the price being paid in human suffering for its failure.

I have selected a few examples from my mailbag. An elderly woman in Edinburgh waited 20 painful, immobile months for a hip operation. A man in his 60s has two growths on his back, which tend to bleed on contact. He has been told that his earliest appointment with a consultant dermatologist is in 11 months' time.

Surely the most poignant example is of a man of 76, living in Lanarkshire. He is a widower, living alone. He was diagnosed as suffering from cataracts in both eyes, and was told that he would have to wait at least eight months for an operation. In the meantime, his sight deteriorated quickly, and he was virtually blind. He returned to his general practitioner, who advised him that he could still not expect to receive treatment for seven to 10 months. On receiving that news, he used his life savings of £2,500 to have one eye operated on privately, because he could not afford an operation on both eyes. That was in December 1999, and he has now been told to expect to wait another seven or eight months before his other eye can be operated on under the NHS.

All those examples have been of painful, distressing, but probably not life-threatening, conditions. It is in considering life-or-death situations that we begin to realise the full truth behind the waiting list claims.

I learned from the letter of the daughter of a man who had been diagnosed on 19 November last year with lung cancer that he was told that his radiotherapy treatment, at the Beatson oncology clinic, would not start until 24 January this year, a wait of eight weeks. The daughter knew that that

was too long. She wrote to the clinic and was told:

"The waiting times are unacceptable . . . It is difficult to explain to patients each week that they will wait unacceptably long times . . . We do not enjoy the hopelessness of it all."

Those are direct quotes from a letter that the cancer sufferer's daughter received from the Beatson clinic.

People are given waiting times of eight weeks, when the waiting time recommended by the Joint Council for Clinical Oncology is no more than two weeks. The situation is truly dire. The Beatson clinic is possibly Scotland's finest but it has to buy time at HCI in Clydebank to enable 30 patients a week to have radiotherapy treatment there. The clinic is four radiotherapy machines short of being able to offer treatment within recommended guidelines. Scotland needs a further 11 radiotherapy machines to stop those life-threatening delays.

The Executive has pledged £12.5 million for the purchase of new linear accelerators. That is to be welcomed, but let us not kid ourselves: due to the fact that more than 40 per cent of the equipment that is currently in use is more than 10 years old and in need of immediate replacement, the new machines will probably only replace the machines that are in use; and, of course, there is no funding for the extra staff to deliver the treatment.

A GP told me about a 70-year-old woman whom the GP suspected had the symptoms of early bowel cancer. She was given an appointment to see a specialist in four months' time. She, too, spent her savings on private treatment, which was carried out within a week. Her GP is in no doubt that, had she waited four months to see the NHS specialist, her chances of a full recovery would have been greatly reduced. We are told that cancer is the No 1 health priority of the Executive. We have heard the pledge. When will we see the action?

The NHS is unable universally to provide the most up-to-date and effective treatment for cancer—that is a scandal. Drugs such as Taxol and Taxotere are widely accepted to be the best drugs available and are widely used in the treatment of cancer in the United States of America, which has a substantially better recovery record than Scotland. In Scotland, health boards are unable to fund the use of the drugs, which cost around £8,000 for a course of treatment. That is expensive, but we spend roughly the same amount of money on drugs to treat cancer as we do on drugs to treat acne. Professor Elaine Rankin, professor of cancer medicine at the University of Dundee, says:

"The Government is talking about making cancer a priority, but it is not making the money available to build on that public promise."

The people in the front line are speaking out. Is the minister listening?

The minister is fond of talking about how much extra funding is being invested in the health service and boasting of how well the NHS is doing under her stewardship. It is obvious, however, that there is a wide gap between what new Labour claims is happening and what is actually happening in the health service. Now that Tony Blair has spoken and the minister is allowed to admit failings in the health service, I await her response with interest. More important, the patients, health service staff and the people of Scotland want answers—not spin. They deserve nothing less.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the debt owed to NHS staff at all levels in relation to their commitment over the winter period and through the flu outbreak; acknowledges that without this commitment on the part of the staff, the NHS in Scotland would not have coped over this period; recognises that the flu outbreak exposed an NHS in Scotland that is struggling to deliver high-quality patient care, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to acknowledge the problems that exist and to provide the necessary resources to ensure that the health service is adequately equipped and funded to provide optimum health care for the people of Scotland.

09:44

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon): I am pleased that the Opposition has chosen health as the subject for debate today. I welcome the opportunity to set out the Scottish Executive's policy on health and to put on record our thanks for the contribution of and the commitment shown by all NHS staff.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Susan Deacon: Over this winter, they have faced unprecedented pressure, as I set out in some detail in my statement to the Parliament a few weeks ago.

More than 136,000 people work for the NHS in Scotland, both within the NHS and as self-employed contractors, such as GPs and dentists. Their work embodies the best values of public service in this country, and it is those people who are at the heart of our NHS.

Brian Adam: Will the minister give way?

Susan Deacon: We need to support them, if we are to improve care and treatment for patients.

Brian Adam: On several occasions, the minister has rightly praised the commitment of NHS staff and their hard work. However, will she explain to us why she has persisted in the Tory habit of paying the non-pay review body staff less than the pay review body staff? If there is such great

appreciation of the staff, will she show that by treating the staff equitably?

Susan Deacon: As Mr Adam and other members will be aware, there is proper machinery for negotiating pay in the NHS, which has existed for some time. We are reconsidering the way in which that machinery can work most effectively in the future. The non-pay review body staff have an offer on the table and are consulting their members. I, as much as anyone, hope that a settlement will be reached as soon as possible.

If we are going to act effectively in the interests of NHS staff, we must address real issues and devise practical policies for pay and other issues. That means that we must deliver real change. It is easy to stand up and identify problems; it is much harder to deliver solutions. However, that is what this Executive is determined to do, for staff and for patients.

I now turn to what we are doing for NHS staff. I shall focus on the record of this Executive and its plans for the future. I have said before that investing in our NHS means investing in our staff. Two weeks ago, I announced pay increases well above inflation for all NHS staff in Scotland who are covered by the independent pay review bodies. For the second year running, those pay increases will be implemented in full, with no staging. Real increases, not empty promises.

Experienced nurses will receive pay rises that are worth more than £100 per month—that is 7.8 per cent, way ahead of the rate of inflation. NHS consultants will start to benefit from an extra £5 million per year to fund payments in recognition of their work load and work intensity, and their commitment to the NHS. General dental practitioners will benefit from a £2 million package to reward quality and commitment to NHS dentistry.

We can afford those increases as a result of the additional resources that this Executive has earmarked for the NHS. We are committed to fair pay for NHS staff. However, pay is only the start.

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

Susan Deacon: As NHS staff and their representatives tell me, day in, day out, staff want more. They want to be valued, to know that their views count and to have their needs recognised. They want action, not words.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Susan Deacon: I shall tell members just some of what this Executive has done, in just seven months in office, for those NHS staff.

We have taken action to reduce junior doctors' hours and to provide training and development

opportunities for all NHS staff, through the first NHS education and training strategy. We have taken action to bring about a safe and healthy NHS working environment, through new occupational health and safety measures. We have taken action to raise the number of entrants for graduate nursing courses, and that number has increased by 14 per cent this year.

We have taken action to involve trade unions and staff representatives in decisions that affect them through national and local partnership forums. We have taken action to put in place child care and flexible working to retain staff by creating family-friendly working environments. We have taken action to recruit and train more doctors and nurses, and to retain experienced nurses in front-line patient care through the introduction of nurse consultants posts.

It is not just what we have done, but the way in which we have done it that matters.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Susan Deacon: All those measures have been developed, and are being implemented, in discussion, in co-operation and in partnership with NHS staff.

Hand in hand with that, we have taken steps to improve the care and treatment of patients.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): If the Executive's staff policies are working so well, why, in January 1999, according to the Unison survey, was staff morale lower than it had ever been? That reflected the fact that staff morale is lower under this Government than it was under the Tories. In December of last year the Royal College of Nursing conducted a similar survey and found that after a year of Labour policy the situation was no better. Twelve months after the Unison survey, morale was still low.

Susan Deacon: I speak to NHS staff week in, week out. The one thing that they do not believe is that life was better under the Tories than it is now. The RCN survey to which Mr Wallace refers shows improvements in many areas, and it shows that there is recognition among nurses that steps have been taken to improve the value that is assigned to them by the NHS. I am never done saying this and I will repeat it here today—we can always do more and I want us to do more. We can do more for staff and more for patients.

Allow me to set out some of the action that we are taking for patients. We have started taking action to develop new measures to speed up treatment and reduce waiting times. Cataract operations have been mentioned. In one major service redesign project in Ayrshire, cataract operation waiting times have been reduced from 12 months to one month through staff teams

working together to redesign services to meet patients' needs.

We have taken action to ensure better joint working between the NHS and local authorities so that they can provide effective care of the vulnerable and elderly. We have taken action to take forward radical proposals to direct NHS resources fairly and according to need throughout Scotland.

We have taken action to set up a Clinical Standards Board for Scotland, to drive up the quality of care that is delivered by the NHS. Just this week, we have taken action to take forward our mental health policies through the creation of a new national mental health support group and we have taken action to develop a new national framework for maternity care.

This week we have also taken action to further strengthen the bond of trust between patients and family doctors in the wake of the horrific Harold Shipman case. I am sure the whole Parliament will want to join me in extending sympathy to the families of the victims of that evil man. I want to assure the people of Scotland that, in conjunction with the medical profession, the Executive will ensure that every step is taken to prevent such an occurrence ever happening here in Scotland.

Let me turn now to the issue of NHS spending and resources, which have, of course, featured in the debate.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister give way?

Susan Deacon: I stress that much of what I have described is dependent not only on money, but on changes to the way we work. However, our programme of change is backed by real additional investment, including £300 million more for health next year.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP) rose—

Susan Deacon: That will allow health boards' allocations to be increased by more than 5 per cent at a time of historically low inflation.

Tricia Marwick rose—

Susan Deacon: I find it interesting when Opposition members make comparisons between England and Scotland. It might be worth noting that health spending in Scotland is 20 per cent higher than it is in England.

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

Susan Deacon: Health service spending in Scotland is already at the level of the European average as a proportion of gross domestic product.

Tricia Marwick rose—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. There cannot be three members standing when the minister is not giving way.

Susan Deacon: In Scotland we have more consultants and nurses per head of population than England does, and we are training and recruiting more.

Kay Ullrich rose—

Susan Deacon: I am keen to set out constructively and openly the Executive's actions and policies on the NHS. We are investing more in health, but I have said repeatedly that that is not an end in itself—it is what we do with the money that matters. We must ensure that resources are channelled directly to front-line patient care.

That is why we have taken action to abolish the expensive and divisive bureaucracy of the internal market and, instead, to put in place new controls over senior managers' pay. That is also why we have taken action to develop proper work force planning by linking today's spending on training with tomorrow's patients' needs.

Cancer care has been mentioned. We have taken action, through the Scottish cancer group, to address not only the needs of cancer patients today, but the needs of those five and 10 years from now, through long-term planning and long-term investment, including £12.5 million for radiotherapy equipment for cancer care.

We have also taken action to establish the Scottish health technology assessment centre, which will provide independent, expert advice on the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of new drugs. We have invested in infrastructure and taken more steps to end mixed-sex accommodation. Along with that action, we will take steps to improve accident and emergency services and to undertake more planning for the future.

Kay Ullrich mentioned intensive care, which I also spoke about in my statement a few weeks ago. This week, the Scottish Intensive Care Society audit group published its latest report. We will work with the society to examine the implications of that report for future provision. Again, actions, not words; planned improvement, not arbitrary promises.

As I have said repeatedly, of course we will learn from the events of this winter. There is always scope for learning and room for improvement. To develop that work, I am commissioning a group that represents a wide range of interests to reflect on existing winter planning arrangements and to consider how those arrangements can be improved in future, for the benefit of patient care—exactly as I said I would do when I spoke about winter planning in the

chamber a few weeks ago.

It is just seven months since we assumed our powers as a devolved Government. In that time, we have taken action to set about the task of building an NHS in Scotland that is fit for its purpose, fit for patients and fit for the 21st century. We are doing that not just through warm words or empty rhetoric, but through real, practical action, and not just through offering quick fixes but through taking steps on the road to lasting, sustainable change.

The issues are complex and the challenges are immense, but we will not shirk from addressing them. We want continuous improvement in the NHS in Scotland. That is the road that this Executive has started upon and which we will continue to take, now and in the future.

I move amendment S1M-482.1, to leave out from “without this commitment” to end and insert:

“the hard work and outstanding commitment of NHS staff, better preparation and contingency planning than ever before, record levels of investment and effective partnership working brought about by the abolition of the internal market has enabled the NHS to deal effectively with exceptional pressures and unprecedented levels of activity over the winter period; and welcomes the commitment of the Scottish Executive outlined in Making it Work Together: A Programme for Government to work in partnership with the health service for the people of Scotland.”

09:56

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

There is certainly room for improvement and scope for learning. I am delighted that the minister now talks about “action, not words” because that will delight the NHS in Scotland. However, we will wait and see.

The saddest part of the NHS debate in Scotland to date has been the arrogance and complacency of the Minister for Health and Community Care in terms of the unwillingness to accept responsibility and the refusal to acknowledge serious problems that exist in our NHS.

If the Labour Government is able to take pride in the success of the economy for three years, surely it can take responsibility for the failures of the NHS in the past three years. If the minister would acknowledge the difficulties and work together with us—although it looks as if there is a change in mood this morning, which I welcome—the people of Scotland might just feel some reassurance. Instead, so far we have had constant political dogma.

The worry about this Executive is that the Minister for Health and Community Care believes her own spin-doctors, who say the opposite of what is happening in the world of patient care. I

will talk about the contrasting situations in Scotland, many of which were raised by Kay Ullrich.

Raigmore hospital, in its January update, probably reflects the situation of the NHS throughout Scotland. In fact, Raigmore is in a much better financial position than the majority of hospitals in Scotland. An overspend of more than £1 million is likely to worsen by year-end. Staff work 16-hour shifts, and many have forgone days off and holidays to keep the service running.

In January, all routine elective surgery at Raigmore had to be cancelled for two weeks. Out-patient waiting times have increased and there is a shortage of intensive care beds. When the intensive care consultant prayed for help, the reply from the Scottish Executive was that

"no additional funding will be made available this year to address the ITU situation, millennium pay costs and winter pressures"

or to cover the inflation element of the pay award for staff covered by the pay review body. Yet Raigmore's difficulties are minute in comparison with many other health trusts in Scotland, particularly Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust, which faces a deficit of more than £12 million. That picture is replicated throughout Scotland.

Today, I ask the minister what she will do for Scotland's hospitals, given the total financial deficit of in excess of £50 million. How can that serious financial deficit be overcome? What would the deficit be if all the staff, including doctors, were paid for the long hours that they work, well outwith their contractual hours? I hear what the minister and the SNP say about the commitment of staff, but should we be asking staff to work double shifts? Should it always come down to the good will of the staff? Is it not the Government's responsibility to support the staff?

I also hear what the minister says about the nurses' pay rise, announced at the height of the flu epidemic. Is she aware that hundreds of GP practice nurses have not yet received their pay increase for last year? She may laugh, but it would do her some good to listen sometimes.

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: No chance.

The system of payments to GPs and their nurses for Tayside, Grampian and the Highlands and Islands, newly centralised in Aberdeen, has been described by GPs as a system in chaos, a total shambles. Let us stop talking about this year. How about paying the GP practice nurses for last year? That would be very welcome. Again I say, "Get a grip on reality".

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: The deputy minister will have an opportunity to speak. He can write down what I am saying and answer the points that we raise, breaking the habit of eight months.

Instead of using agency nurses, which reduces the continuity of care and is more expensive, the Scottish Executive should start looking after the nurses that it has. According to the Royal College of Nursing, nearly half the nurses in Scotland agree that they are unable to take time off for training, compared with only a quarter of nurses in England. Nurses have to fund their education and study in their days off. I quote from the RCN:

"If the NHS is to be a good employer, it must stop taking nurses for granted."

With funding so tight, the training budget is often the first to be cut, affecting health and safety, the updating of skills and career development.

With regard to the flu vaccine, there is no consistent approach throughout Scotland. Grampian Health Board managed the flu vaccination programme by obtaining a list from GPs of all those at risk, writing to them, inviting them in and advertising the centres that people could go to. In the Highland Health Board, by contrast, GPs were sent a letter outlining the at-risk group and left to get on with it, with no assistance. There, again, is the difference between the minister's rhetoric and spin-doctoring and what is happening to people in Scotland.

One Highland GP practice, serving a population of 10,000, identified around 1,500 in the at-risk group. It estimated a staff time of around 240 hours, with no payment. If partnership means anything, we must appreciate that preventive care saves money in hospitals and that it should be given financial support. It would be helpful if the minister would recognise the inconsistent approach across Scotland's health boards that leads to inequalities in access. We might then be able to move forward.

Waiting times were mentioned. The latest report, covering the period up to 30 June 1999, shows an increase in waiting times of 7 per cent, compared with the previous quarter. Again, the minister needs to keep in touch with reality.

The minister boasted about the abolition of the internal market. I would like to give a prime example from this city of what has happened as a result of that. Previously, GP practices in Edinburgh could refer patients to private physiotherapy clinics, where they were seen within days. Now, because of political dogma, all those patients have to be referred to the NHS. Instead of being treated in days, they have to wait months. That not only increases pressure on the NHS but

damages patient care, as conditions worsen because of the long time that more complex treatment takes. Yet Alan Milburn said:

"there is no reason why the NHS should not be collaborating with independent sector and other providers in developing new innovative forms of intermediate care."

Will health policy in Scotland be driven by political dogma or by the needs of patients? The Minister for Health and Community Care should get a grip on the NHS, get in touch with it, stop bullying and dictating to it, and start working with it to solve problems, rather than deny that they exist.

10:05

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I welcome the minister's announcement of a study group into winter care arrangements. That is a good idea, which will allow—this was one of the few positive points in Mary Scanlon's speech—the disparity of approach by health boards to be examined in detail and appropriate measures to be taken to deal with it. I congratulate the minister on the tone and content of her speech, which I hope will set the style for this debate.

We must consider realities. Few things are more important to the people whom we represent than the state of the health service. All sensible commentators accept that there is a growing gap between aspiration and reality. Modern medicine can do amazing things. It can enable people who suffer from epilepsy or diabetes to live normal lives. It can carry out on a day-care basis microsurgical techniques that previously involved long stays in hospital. It can help people who have had heart attacks and—on another illness about which we have sadly heard—it can make steady progress against the once unnameable scourge that is cancer.

However, the cost of those miracles, of people living longer and of treating the ill-health that is caused by tobacco, alcohol, drugs and poverty—not least in Glasgow—has led to growth in demand that is significantly above the rate of inflation. It is to the credit of the Executive that, in only seven months, the list of measures to which Susan Deacon referred has been introduced in such a pointed and targeted fashion.

The SNP called the debate—

Mr Hamilton: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: I will not take interventions until I have made some progress.

This debate offers a further opportunity to explore the issues. To the SNP's credit, its amendment does not seek to blame the Scottish Executive for the flu outbreak. It identifies the growing pressure on the NHS and calls for more money. The Liberal Democrats accept those calls

and have argued at Westminster that to cut the standard rate of tax in April by a further 1p is nonsense. We did not get rid of the Tories in 1997 so that we could continue with a Thatcherite economic agenda at Westminster under new Labour. In the furore surrounding Lord Winston's attack on the Labour Government's position, Tony Blair, whose populist instincts are more finely tuned than those of most people, might consider that 76 per cent of the public would forgo the 1p tax cut so that more money could be spent on health.

Politics, as they say, speaks the language of priorities. In the farrago of examples given by Mrs Ullrich, I listened in vain for positive suggestions on how, within budget constraints, we might meet the calls for more and better spending on health.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Does Robert Brown agree with Tony Blair's sentiments about increasing health spending by 5 per cent? Is he aware that the impact of such an increase in Scotland—we did not hear whether it would apply to Scotland—would be £500 million less over a five-year period, because the Barnett formula would deliver only an increase of 4.3 per cent in Scotland? Perhaps that is the reason why the minister did not ask us about that and was afraid to give us the figures.

Robert Brown: The minister dealt with that in her speech. I am sorry that the SNP continues to peddle the tale of the Barnett formula. Health spending is at significantly higher rates in Scotland than in England. In an independent Scotland, additional resources would have to be found to make up for the benefits that we derive from membership of the United Kingdom.

My colleague Keith Raffan told the chamber on 5 December that the SNP had made spending commitments of £1,381 billion.

Mr Hamilton: Million.

Robert Brown: I am sorry; I meant £1,381 million. Since then the SNP has made further spending commitments of £930 million, including £755 million on health and community care. The running tally is now £2.3 billion—£16.2 million a day, which is equivalent to 10p on income tax. A separate Scotland would come with an expensive price tag. Let us get back to the real world.

Our immediate concern is to get best value from existing resources. We need to look at the drugs budget and at the increased cost of hospital infections—a problem recently identified in a Public Health Laboratory Services report—which is running at about £100 million a year. A targeted attack on such problems could yield additional financial savings.

In summary, we need to spend a greater

percentage of our national resource on health but we need to be scrupulous in wiping out unnecessary costs and waste in the system. We cannot avoid the issue of NHS priorities. I support the Executive amendment.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Speeches should be limited to four minutes.

10:11

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Looking through the *Official Report* of last week's budget debate, I was struck by the number of times that Jack McConnell repeated the claim that Scotland's health service receives substantial extra financial support. That repetition of that misleading spin reveals the true level of insecurity and anxiety that the Lib-Lab Government feels about its spending record. Repeating and spinning one's message ad nauseam to ensure that it becomes received wisdom might work on the voting fodder who sit on the Government back benches, but it does not work with us and I am sure that it does not work in the hospital waiting rooms and wards throughout Scotland.

The spin is also not working with the chief executives of Scotland's acute services trusts. Perhaps the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care will explain when he is winding up why 19 of the 26 acute trust managers have said recently that they cannot meet the financial targets set by the Government. He might go further and tell us which of the acute trusts will meet the financial targets set by the Government.

We have all seen press headlines such as "Budget threat to 600 health jobs". That is a reference to Tayside, where the Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust is struggling to come to grips with a so-called budget deficit of £12 million. The director of finance for that trust recently issued a statement saying:

"To assure safe and sustainable services in Tayside there is a need for a major injection of additional resources."

In Fife, the health board is in disarray as it struggles to deal with the financial constraints placed on it by the Government. Fife Health Board stated in its integrated health care consultation document:

"Health services in Fife will not be affordable within the next five years given the existing resource framework and demand projections."

That is, for Fife Health Board, what living with the realities behind the Government's propaganda means.

Robert Brown: Mr Crawford was kind enough to intervene on finance in my speech. Let us assume that we have heard and accepted the

point about the problems. Can we hear about the SNP's financial approach to the solutions?

Bruce Crawford: One word would sort that out: independence. It is obvious from what we have heard today that you lot have swallowed hook, line and sinker the spin put on by the Government—I apologise, Presiding Officer, for using the word "you".

The reality is a 0.8 per cent real-terms increase in health spending that is predicated on inflation of 2.5 per cent. However, everyone in the health service knows that inflation means nothing as an indicator because the pressures with which the NHS must deal are over and above inflation. Those pressures include: increases of about 10 per cent so that medical staff can deal properly with the issues identified in the Calman report; drugs and radiology costs rising by anything up to 20 per cent; the increase in the number of patients treated, owing to advances in technology and drugs; and increases in the ratio of nurses to beds, due to the complexity of care—increases that are between 16 per cent and 21 per cent. We need to add to that the cost of the recently announced increases—the Minister for Health and Community Care announced them again this morning—in salaries for some NHS staff that are well above the rate of inflation.

Iain Gray: Can I take it from that last remark that the SNP sees above-inflation pay increases for NHS staff as a problem?

Bruce Crawford: What I am saying is that we have heard spin after spin. In fact, ministers are like a bunch of peeries now, they are spinning that much. They are not putting enough money into the system to pay for the reality, despite the pressures that I have outlined.

What do we hear from the minister in parliamentary question after parliamentary question? She attempts to pass the buck by telling members that the matters that they raise are for the health boards to deal with. She is happy to indulge in spinning and misleading statements about the financial position of the national health service in Scotland, but she is not prepared to carry the can in Parliament for the reality of her own propaganda. She and the Government are damaging Scotland's health.

10:15

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): As Robert Brown said, Kay Ullrich outlined a catalogue of perceived problems in our national health service but did not give us an inkling of how she thinks they could be tackled.

Kay Ullrich drew attention to the case of the three people who received treatment at HCI in

Clydebank rather than in Fife. When I visited Queen Margaret hospital last week, I spoke to one of those people who had received treatment at Clydebank. I think that that example shows that, when faced with difficulties, the health service can come through. Someone who needed treatment for a tumour that was diagnosed early last month was treated within two weeks because they needed that life-saving surgery. That is the story of the health service. When the people of Scotland need life-saving treatment, our national health service provides it, and provides it well.

The motion and the amendment that we are debating today both pay tribute to the hard work that health service staff at all levels have done over the past two months. I certainly echo that sentiment. Anyone who has received treatment in a hospital, as I did last year, will know about the sheer dedication of the staff who provide care at all levels.

Tricia Marwick: Will Scott Barrie join me in condemning the actions of Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, which has betrayed the staff and patients of Fife by seeking to introduce car parking charges at the Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline and at the Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy? Will he also condemn the fact that the trust claims that it needs the £300,000 that it will raise through those charges to pay for vital patient care? Does he agree that it is a betrayal of the low-paid workers of Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust that they must now pay for car parking?

Scott Barrie: Tricia Marwick raises an important point. I am concerned about the fact that, as a result of yesterday's decision, charging is to be introduced at Forth Park, Victoria and Queen Margaret hospitals. However, I do not condemn the trust for taking that action, because we must consider why it has done it. One of the main reasons—[*Interruption.*] Just let me answer, please. The trust claims that one of the reasons for introducing charges is that there is insufficient car parking space. When I visited the Queen Margaret hospital a week past Monday, I could not park my car there.

The policy needs to be revisited. I certainly do not want parking charges to be introduced. In the case of the Queen Margaret hospital, it would result in neighbouring residential areas and the carpark at the new railway station being used by those people visiting the hospital who wanted to avoid charges. I join Fife Council in calling for that policy to be considered again.

Mary Scanlon touched on the subject of training. Last August, I attended the launch of a training partnership between Lauder College, Fife College and Fife Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. That partnership is an innovative way of approaching training at all levels in the health service and

demonstrates the commitment of those three bodies. It could act as a model for other parts of Scotland, and I urge other colleges and trusts to study it.

We have already heard comments about the percentage of resources spent on health in Scotland and in Britain compared with what is spent in other European countries. Sometimes, however, people's aspirations for health spending are greater than the available resources. Only this morning, I heard on the news that industrial action is being taken in the French health service because people feel that insufficient resources are being allocated. However, France is often cited as a country that spends a greater percentage of its gross domestic product on health. We must consider what we expect from our health service and what resources we will put into it.

10:20

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): First, I pay tribute to the dedicated staff in our national health service for all the hard work that they do in treating and caring for patients, often in difficult circumstances. I am pleased that the motion and the amendment recognise the work of NHS staff. I pay particular tribute to the staff at Falkirk and District royal infirmary in my constituency. That hospital has a fine reputation, and I am sure that many of my constituents are grateful for the standard of service that it provides.

However, I would be grateful if Iain Gray, in replying to the debate, would comment on recent revelations about certain operations at Falkirk and District royal infirmary. I refer to the amputations of limbs from patients with body dysmorphic disorder. I find it almost incredible that any reputable surgeon would amputate a perfectly healthy limb, and I am surprised that the General Medical Council does not have an ethical code or guidelines on such a practice. Apparently, few surgeons anywhere in the world are prepared to do such operations in such circumstances.

I am sure that many people will be concerned about the report in today's *Daily Record* that one of the patients who had a leg amputated at Falkirk runs a website for those attracted to people with disabilities, and that the website features pictures and stories of amputees and those who are sexually aroused by them.

I am also concerned that, without even informing the chairman of the trust, the hospital management accepted fees for the operations to be done in private practice. I understand that the surgeon waived his fees and that the entire sum of £8,000 was put into the hospital budget, but the fact remains that the operations were done in private practice in an NHS hospital, using NHS

facilities and NHS staff, at a time when NHS patients are having to wait for essential operations. I would like all private practice removed from NHS hospitals so that, when people have to wait for an operation, the person at the head of the queue will be the person who is most in need, rather than the person who is able and willing to pay.

As the Minister for Health and Community Care is aware, I have lodged parliamentary questions asking her to investigate those operations and to issue to all NHS trusts in Scotland appropriate instructions or guidelines. I understand that the chairman of Forth Valley Acute Hospitals NHS Trust has given an assurance that such operations will not be done again privately at Falkirk, and I welcome that assurance, but I would be grateful if the minister would say what actions the Executive intends to take at national level.

10:23

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): While we are paying tribute to NHS staff, we must make it clear that we are not limiting that tribute to hospitals alone, but extending it, of course, to the ambulance service and to the blood transfusion service.

As a member of the Health and Community Care Committee, I was out in Glasgow on hogmanay and new year's day visiting ambulance stations and hospitals. Some of the staff were ill, but had none the less turned up to do their public duty. I wish that, instead of just paying tribute by talking—talk is cheap—the Government would give the staff a bonus for what they did in bringing us through the millennium and in coping with the flu crisis against all odds.

Instead of rewarding the staff for their work, we see that the situation in Glasgow's hospitals is so bad that the hospitals are £11.5 million in debt—hospitals that are manned by the very staff whom we are praising today. I say to the minister, "Please attend to those hospitals." The Executive has refused them extra help, despite the investment that they and their staff have had to make to tackle the flu epidemic and the millennium problems.

The NHS is no longer the NHS. It is the PHS—the private health service. That is why bizarre and disgraceful operations, such as those at Falkirk, can happen. They were done not just through the decision of an individual surgeon, but through a horrible climate, which says, "Okay, we will take the money." Scotland chopped off those healthy legs when no other country in the world would take those two very disturbed patients—one from Germany and one from England. What a reputation to land Scotland with, minister. That is

what Blairism has done to our reputation internationally.

The country that gave the world its key medical advances—the land of Fleming, Simpson and Lister—is now degraded internationally by the atmosphere created by this Government and its money-first approach, which in the long run has led to legs being chopped off that should not have been chopped off. That is utterly disgraceful. We do not need the macabre entering into surgery in Scotland.

I will now talk about Glasgow—the most sick city in Britain. In modern Europe, it is mathematically almost impossible for one city to contain six of the most unhealthy constituencies of more than 600 in the British Isles. However, Glasgow has that toll of shame, despite the fact that it consists of only 10 constituencies. That is what the health service has to cope with.

I visited a young mother in Easterhouse—I hope that this Parliament or its committees will meet in Easterhouse and see the schemes and how the people suffer—who is a chronic asthmatic with an asthmatic nine-year-old child. She lives in a house that has so much damp that I felt it settling round me like a clammy shroud. The young woman had been admitted overnight to Glasgow royal infirmary—for the eighth time in one year, she was admitted as an emergency case who needed oxygen. The child was also in a bad state in that house, which was immaculately kept but had damp seeping through the walls.

There are no proper housing repairs in Glasgow; 47 per cent of Glasgow council housing is damp. That is a disgraceful record for Labour, particularly for the First Minister, who has been a Glasgow MP since 1979—what has he done about the suffering of our people?

In Glasgow, angiograms for heart patients were being cancelled because of a shortage of beds. One patient, Mrs Denise O'Kane, who has a severe heart condition, is calling for an inquiry. She could not obtain an angiogram at Glasgow royal infirmary because of the flu crisis.

Our people are being treated shamefully. Why should Scotland, at the beginning of this new century, be the only country in western Europe with such a shocking and degrading health record? I will tell you why: it is because Mr Blair and his smarmy army are ripping us off. The Trident programme costs £30 billion to run. Just think what only £1.5 billion would do for our national health service.

10:28

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I stand here with a sense of

déjà vu, because it seems that yet again this morning we have had the single transferable whinge about the health service rather than a positive attitude about what can be done to bring about change.

The last time that I spoke on health, I said that I hoped that members would not continue to use the NHS as a political football and that we would get into a no-blame culture and away from the notion that the Opposition just attacks the Government without proposing any positive solutions. I am disappointed that we have not moved forward.

I will move forward and talk about some of the positive initiatives in health care. This morning, there has again been a fixation with beds. Let us remember that the health service is not just about beds and in-patient services; it is much wider than that. The health service includes all the community care services, many of which deliver day in day out—without any reward—a positive service that is welcomed by people in local communities.

I echo the comments made in support of NHS staff. However, I take it ill when the Conservatives lecture me—a trade unionist all my working life—about positive working practices and the need to recognise the workers. When Mary Scanlon talks about—

Mary Scanlon: I used figures from the Royal College of Nursing about training, about nurses working double shifts and about nurses not being valued; I also used figures from Unison. Does the member agree with the Royal College of Nursing and Unison?

Cathy Jamieson: I have probably spent more time talking to people in Unison and other trade unions than many of the Tories have had hot dinners. Again, I take it ill having the Tories lecture me on trade unionism. [MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

I want to talk about the positive issues. I agree that Unison and others have raised serious questions, as have some people in the health boards and the health trusts. However, the answer is not for us to sit here and whinge; the answer is to look for positive action.

I attended the primary care trust board meeting in Ayrshire last week. The question of how we improve patient care services was discussed. For example, we talked about dental provision—which constituents of mine, among others, have been saying does not meet their requirements—and the possibility of extending it out of hours. A positive plan is being drawn up to improve the way in which complaints procedures are dealt with. Again, that is being carried out in conjunction with the local health council. In the "Designed to Care" health care programmes, the minister has discussed such measures, which are aimed not only at reducing waiting times but at giving a better

patient experience.

The minister visited Ayr hospital, as I did, at the height of the flu epidemic in Ayrshire. She will have seen for herself the dedication of the staff. However, those staff were saying that their priority was the patients who were in the hospital at that time. Despite the difficulties, and despite knowing that they would have to cancel some non-urgent appointments, they continued to provide a service. What is more, they took the decision that they would not scaremonger; the last thing that the staff wanted was for people out in the community not to approach their GP or hospital for the health care that they needed. The staff coped with the situation under difficult circumstances—we can all learn from that.

Mr Hamilton: If the SNP is being accused of whingeing when we ask for adequate resources in the NHS, are the staff also whingeing when they ask for more resources?

Cathy Jamieson: My point about whingeing is that the SNP is not making any positive proposals. I would be delighted to hear the SNP describe its approach rather than merely promote independence as a solution.

I hope that the minister will give more information about what she will ask health boards to do in relation to the Shipman case. It has been brought to my attention that people are concerned that there may be people working in the NHS somewhere in Scotland who have been convicted of serious offences. I would like some reassurance for my constituents on that point.

10:33

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I do not want to labour some of the financial points that have been debated back and forth on many occasions; for example, the wonderful spin about the £1.8 billion that, in reality, is an additional £300 million this year, £300 million next year and £300 million the year after that. Such doubling—or tripling—of the figures, by the use of mirrors, is now utterly discredited.

I should like Mr Gray, who I assume is summing up, to address a point that was made earlier. Mr Blair has committed 5 per cent, year on year, to put our health service on a par with other European ones, instead of at the bottom of the league. Can Mr Gray tell us whether we will receive the same 5 per cent—not 4.3 per cent or any other form of Barnett squeeze effect—in Scotland in the coming years? I should like such a commitment from him.

I have just had the usual response from the minister on my question about how we differentiate between pay review body staff and

non-pay review body staff. It is my impression that, consistently since 1982, the Government has differentiated between those two groups of staff and has given the latter group lower pay rises. As far as I am aware, the offer that is currently on the table is again less for non-pay review body staff than it is for pay review body staff. We must ask why that differentiation is persistent in the health service under the Lib-Lab Government.

While we welcome £12.5 million for new oncology equipment, we want to know how much of that will be spent on additional equipment and how much will replace out-of-date equipment. One of the ways in which budgets have been met in recent years is by continually extending the lifespan of equipment that is often redundant, less safe and less efficacious than it should be. Will Iain Gray tell us how much of the additional £12.5 million for that equipment will be spent on new, additional equipment, rather than on replacement equipment?

The health debate that is taking place outwith the Parliament has brought to my attention the effect on individuals. The local newspaper in Aberdeen, the *Evening Express*, highlighted the case of a 25-year-old marine engineer, a non-smoker, who was diagnosed with lung cancer. His consultant advised him that he should have an operation immediately. The NHS was not in a position to offer him the operation for another month. However, he and his family raised enough money for the same consultant to carry out the operation, privately, within a week. That is the reality of our health service.

The national health service is not capable of coping with immediate needs, unlike the private sector. Like Dennis Canavan, I am concerned that we are abusing NHS facilities to deal with private practice. This is not the SNP whingeing—we are public representatives saying that the NHS has never been in such a poor state.

In response to the articles that appeared, further issues were raised in the newspaper. When a GP sends a referral letter to the hospital, requesting an out-patient consultation, the letter is processed—sat on—for six to eight weeks before an appointment is sent to the patient. Out-patient waiting times are being massaged. Another story that was reported was that of a patient awaiting a crucial hernia operation, which had also been delayed. The minister must accept that clever figures and a positive spin do not reflect the current situation.

10:37

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to debate health and to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of the

136,000 professionals working in our health service.

I want to focus on some of the issues that have arisen from the winter pressures. During the past few weeks and months, NHS staff have been working extra shifts and have given up their holidays to deliver the best possible health care in difficult situations. In Lothian, for example, there was a 42 per cent increase in admissions compared with last year's worst seven-day period. The peak activity also came earlier than last year, demanding flexibility not only from the system, but from the staff.

I am particularly glad that the minister outlined the reasons why the Executive is engaging with staff to tackle issues such as training. I am also glad that the Executive has agreed above-inflation pay rises for many NHS staff, ranging from 3.3 per cent to 7.8 per cent for grade E nurses. I hope that that goes some way towards improving morale, which is lower than it should be. The Executive must examine the situation of non-pay review body staff as a matter of urgency. It cannot be right that cleaners and auxiliary staff in the NHS have to do themselves out of money to give of their best to the public, rather than earning more by cleaning city centre offices.

It is clear that there has been a particularly bad bout of flu. We must learn from such outbreaks. I have already alerted the minister to the fact that the Health and Community Care Committee wants to consider the wider issue of on-going winter pressures, to discover the lessons that can be learned. The situation could have been so much worse if winter pressure funds had not been available and used to open 160 beds in Lothian. If the winter weather had been more severe, if acute and primary care trusts and services had not worked together to plan ahead and if the millennium bug had caused problems—today we heard that the worst thing that happened at the millennium was Dorothy-Grace Elder roaming the streets of Glasgow—things could have been much worse.

We have heard a great deal over the past few months about the role of general practitioners. The committee will address that role. GPs obviously have a crucial part to play in handling winter pressures and in being gatekeepers to the acute service.

Health boards also have a crucial role. Mary Scanlon is right to say that there are inconsistencies in service provision, but those inconsistencies are there not because the Executive wants them to be there, but because of decisions taken by local health boards. She talked about equity of access, but then gave an example of people being able to pay for better care. There was inconsistency in her approach.

People live longer nowadays, and survive diseases that once would have killed them. More people are admitted to hospital time and again. There is evidence that when they deal with elderly people in winter, GPs, locums, out-of-hours service practitioners and hospitals are practising more defensive medicine. That leads to more admissions and, crucially, longer hospital stays. That is why pilot schemes that enhance domiciliary care and support patients in their homes—which allows them to leave hospital sooner—must be encouraged and properly funded in the long term, once the pilot comes to an end. They represent good practice and good value for money. There was one such scheme at the Royal Victoria hospital in my constituency, which was visited by the minister and me on new year's eve—so Dorothy is not alone in roaming around at new year.

Various pressures—including a lack of social work cover over the winter holiday—lead to problems such as bed blocking. We have lessons to learn. Across Scotland, much planning has gone into working through those problems. I have seen some of that in Edinburgh and, I say to Dennis Canavan, in Falkirk. Innovative ideas are being channelled into providing appropriate care pathways that focus on the patient much more closely than before.

Demand will always outstrip supply in the NHS. Despite our Executive's best efforts, there will be unmet need. Despite record spending levels, all parties in the Parliament should urge Gordon Brown to think again and to reverse his decision to cut tax by 1p this spring. Liberal Democrats would rather see that £200 million freed up to allow greater additional investment in the Scottish health service next year. While politicians and the public buy into the big lie that service can improve at the same time as taxes are slashed, staff will continue to struggle to cope year on year.

10:43

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the Scottish National party motion, and I heartily agree with the sentiments that have been expressed in all parts of the chamber towards health service staff, who have been struggling at tremendous personal cost.

The second part of the motion relates to resources, and unfortunately it exposes once again the nationalists' naive approach. They believe that simply throwing money at the health service is a solution; it is not.

The Executive must take on board the fact that, after 1,000 days of the Labour Government, problems due to underfunding of the health service are being compounded by

mismanagement and lack of planning, by the Executive in particular.

Last year, we held a debate on public health, in which I called for a more creative approach to health provision. I hope that Cathy Jamieson notices that I am attempting to give details of that.

The first step is to ensure that we run effective and timely advice campaigns for the public. Why did the Executive not run the same advertising campaign on flu that was run elsewhere in the United Kingdom? Any public health campaign must also give practical advice in a form that the public can act upon. I was disappointed that there was no mention by the minister of community pharmacists, professionals whose services are freely available all over the country, and who are ready, willing and able to filter out some of the problems so that the health service does not suffer the full impact. We cannot have a situation where every time there is a cough or a snuffle, people start to queue at the doctor's door. Pharmacists are a resource that we must use more carefully, and I was disappointed that the minister made no mention of the role that they can play.

The debate is not really about flu; it is about the ability of new Labour, and the Executive in particular, to manage our health service. The Executive fails to demonstrate that management responsibility lies in its hands. I agree with the Executive when it expects people working in the health service to deliver more service for the same buck—but they are not miracle workers.

Although Jack McConnell grinds on about the 2.6 per cent deflator—which was mentioned by an SNP member—it cannot be applied as a blunt instrument to a service that sees year-on-year demand rise by three or four times that figure before sectoral inflation kicks in.

Where is the recognition that new treatments and procedures require additional investment and resources? We hear many pathetic claims from the Minister for Health and Community Care and the Minister for Finance that there is no rationing in the health service. The same claim is made in the occasional written answers that I receive from Susan Deacon, one of which was published in the journal of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and went worldwide. I am sure that that is a first for the minister.

The idea that there is no rationing in the health service is nonsense. In the real world, prioritisation and good management cause rationing. We have to plan to make sure that resources are correctly applied, and if resources are not available, alternative means must be found to provide services.

Is the Minister for Health and Community Care clairvoyant? When she writes to me regularly, if

belatedly, she states that she does not know the answers to my questions because the statistics are not available centrally. If the Executive does not have those figures, how does it make strategic management decisions on health? It is incredible; no other organisation in the world can be run in that way. For example, I find it appalling that the Executive does not know how many diabetics are diagnosed each year and whether they are type 1 or type 2. How can we plan long-term to invest in Scotland's health service in a truly focused way that will save money for the health service and prevent personal suffering for the individual? I ask that question time and again, and I am disappointed that I have not received an answer.

Iain Gray: Will Mr Davidson give way?

Mr Davidson: I am sure that the minister will use his time at the end of the debate to answer my question. I have to press on.

The Executive should recognise what the health service could gain from contracting out into the private sector and use that expertise, which is cost-effective and well managed. That would not be privatisation, but it would be co-operation between the public and private sectors to provide the health service that we need. Finally, the next time a member of the Executive goes down to London, could he or she ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give back about £1 billion from the stealth taxes that he has taken out of Scottish pockets in the past two years?

10:47

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): January was a very important month in the history of the NHS. Michael Portillo said that a health service that was free at the point of use and funded from general taxation was a "historical accident", and Tony Blair reaffirmed the fundamental principles of the NHS as laid down by Aneurin Bevan, when he rejected insurance models and established the best demonstration that we have ever had of socialism in action. That is what so many Tories do not like, and why William Hague and Liam Fox are so obsessed with private health insurance rather than a fair NHS.

Mr Davidson rose—

Malcolm Chisholm: As I know that Scottish Tories are often embarrassed by their English colleagues, I hope that David Davidson will take this opportunity to distance himself from Michael Portillo, William Hague and Liam Fox.

Mr Davidson: I am happy to answer Malcolm Chisholm's point, which is the point that I made a few minutes ago. We need to examine creative alternatives, so that the health service is available for people who cannot afford health care

elsewhere. We need to expand opportunities in and access to health. If someone is prepared to buy insurance and go to a private hospital in Glasgow, that saves money for the health service and allows more services and access for others.

Malcolm Chisholm: David Davidson could not be more wrong. Private health insurance is expensive; is focused on people who are good medical risks; rarely extends to the over-75s; is deeply divisive and creates a two-tier service; and would not ease any burden on the NHS.

Ben Wallace: Will Malcolm Chisholm give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have to move on; I have only two and a half minutes left.

Margo MacDonald, in her *Edinburgh Evening News* column, recently supported an alternative social insurance model. That would be a more expensive and bureaucratic system, in which costs would perpetually escalate. By contrast, in an important interview, Tony Blair said that the public finances had been sorted out and the economy had been put on a stable path, so that the Government could afford to put the money in.

Kay Ullrich: Does Mr Chisholm agree with our Health and Community Care Committee colleague, Dr Richard Simpson, who said on "Newsnight Scotland" on 17 January:

"We are going to need some higher expenditure. There is no doubt about that"?

Dr Simpson is becoming our Lord Winston—a very honest man indeed.

Malcolm Chisholm: Of course I do, and on this occasion I agree with Tony Blair, who said that more money was going in.

Kay Ullrich asked what money was going in. The answer is: the same per head as in England. It is a matter of basic maths—because we have a higher base, we receive a lower percentage. If Kay Ullrich has £10 and I have £12, and we each get a £1 increase, Kay gets a higher percentage increase than me, but I still have more money.

Kay Ullrich: Will the member give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am sorry—I have only one minute left.

Whether we look at the increase in terms of percentages or money, in the current three-year period there will be 11 per cent—or £546 million—real growth in the health service.

Kay Ullrich outlined several real problems, which I acknowledge; I believe that the Executive acknowledges them, too. She talked about intensive care beds; a review of such beds is being carried out. She talked about unacceptable waiting times; a commitment on waiting times is central to Executive health policy. She also talked

about the recent flu outbreak and other January difficulties; a commissioning group that represents a wide range of interests has been formed to reflect on existing winter planning arrangements and how they can be improved.

There is no room for complacency and I do not believe that anyone is being complacent, but we must have a sense of proportion. A Scottish Association of Health Councils report, this week, said that waiting times in Scottish accident and emergency departments had been halved since last January.

I am not complacent—we need to go further—but let us remember that much activity is going on. For example, in Edinburgh, three wards were opened in January especially because of the flu emergency. Perhaps that is how we must move forward. If, instead, we just have massive increases in bed numbers throughout the year, we must realise the cost implications for the development of primary care and the broad public health agenda that we all support.

10:52

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I will speak about children's health. I am disappointed that I, as the last speaker from the floor, am the first to raise that issue. I should have thought that the minister, in her opening speech, would have wanted to talk about health and services for our future. She also failed to mention children's health services in her introduction to her first annual report, "Making it work together".

We must consider two aspects of children's health services, the first of which is acute services. We must ask, again, why the 1998 review of acute services had to be persuaded to set up a sub-group to examine children's health services in Scotland. That area has to be given a higher priority than it receives at the moment.

We have heard much this morning about how we have adequate funding in our health service. I question that view, when—for children's health services—we have had to move from funding to fund raising. We have to wait for the likes of the *Evening Times* to hold an appeal to buy a scanner for Yorkhill sick children's hospital in Glasgow. This year, the Blue Peter appeal raised money for incubators for hospitals not in Peru or Africa, but in the United Kingdom. Is that the way in which we should fund health services for children in this country?

Palliative care is particularly close to my heart. In Scotland, we have one hospice for children, Rachel House; it does a wonderful job, but it is a charity. We are looking for a second such hospice and we will raise the money by public appeal and by charity. Is that the way in which we should treat

the most vulnerable people in the health service?

Secondly, many children's health services are about prevention, so that we can give children a good start in life and continue in that way. The statistics on children's dental health show that Scotland has a dreadful record. What is worse is that the target that the Government set itself to reduce cavities, fillings and extractions in the under-fives was missed this year and has had to be extended to 2010. Why did we miss that target? Again, it comes down to funding.

Funding for the dental service is put into general dental practice rather than into the community dental service. We need general dental practice, but the community dental service is at the forefront of prevention in our most deprived areas, which is where the targets have been completely missed.

Cathy Jamieson: Does the member accept that it is a question not just of throwing more money at dental health problems, but of tackling the Scots' traditionally appalling diet? We need a programme of education and work on healthy eating and nutrition, as well as measures to improve opportunities for children and young people to attend dental clinics.

Fiona McLeod: That is exactly the point that I was making. Dental health is affected by diet and nutrition, but dentists will explain that the problem is also one of poverty. The way in which we fund the service is another issue. If we fund dentists through payment for treatment rather than for prevention, the dental service will continue to treat the caries rather than prevent their occurrence.

Recently, I attended Breakfast Daze, the breakfast clubs' annual conference. Within two years, a 50 per cent reduction in cavities had been achieved by introducing young children to healthy eating, fruit and daily teeth brushing. Breakfast clubs need to be supported with resources and—just as important—through joined-up government.

I echo what David Davidson said about the evidence base in the health service. I tried to get statistics on child health services; it was a nightmare. It was difficult to extrapolate statistics on psychiatric services for teenagers from the statistics on provision for adults. If we want to provide resources and a health service that treats people when they need it, we need to collect statistics on children and undertake research into child health.

I leave the minister with two thoughts. We are doing away with mixed-sex wards, but what about mixed-age wards? Teenagers continue to fall between the lines, sometimes being put in with children, sometimes with the dying elderly. Finally, article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says that every child has the right to a healthy life.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Before we move to winding-up speeches, I inform business managers that we are running about 15 minutes early. Business managers should inform their colleagues that the debate on air freight may start 10 or 15 minutes early.

10:58

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I join everyone else in paying tribute to NHS staff. It almost goes without saying that we owe them a tremendous debt for their dedication. They care deeply about the services that they provide and the way in which they deliver them.

In the NHS, as elsewhere, service delivery is all about resources, which means money and people. Money is important. Bruce Crawford said that we must face financial reality. There is not an infinite amount of money, so emphasis must be put on the way in which to make good use of resources.

David Davidson pointed out that we need good information to make good decisions about how resources are allocated. Cathy Jamieson said that we should not have a blame culture. We should have a culture that ensures that we know where we are, where we want to go and how to get there. It is therefore important to think about the information that we collect, how we collect it and how to make effective use of it.

There are issues about money in the health service that must be faced, one of which is the fact that inflationary pressures on the health service are far greater than general levels of inflation. That is especially true of the drugs bill and spending on equipment.

We must examine the way in which we fund pay awards. If we spend more on pay, we take money away from services. Members have raised the issue of staff in different categories being treated differently. I do not know whether that is right or wrong—we should not apportion blame—but we must examine the issue and find the best way forward.

If there is one message about using money wisely that former health service colleagues want me to give, it is to stop wasting money on organisation and reorganisation. They say that they have all the organisation and reorganisation that they can take, and want us to leave the structure alone, stop managing change and start managing services. I am glad to have been given the opportunity to pass that message on.

On the sensible use of resources, let us consider what it costs to train a nurse: £35,000. If we then take the fact that 3,000 nurses leave the service every year, which poses a real problem, we need to consider ways in which to retain staff.

Positive measures have been taken to do that, including reasonable pay awards—although Mary Scanlon identified the question of how to look after ancillary staff and staff employed by practices, not trusts.

I was delighted to hear about the training budget for staff who are not doctors. Doctors' professional development is well catered for; other health service staff have been envious of that. Having a decent budget for training will raise morale and increase retention. We must take account not only of how much it costs to train somebody, but of how much it costs to provide realistic cover to give that person access to training.

I want to mention a matter that Brian Adam raised, on the sensible use of resources: consultants who work both in the national health service and privately. Again, I will not say what is right or wrong, but it is an issue that must be addressed.

Mary Scanlon talked about health boards. I have no difficulty with different health boards having different priorities. That is a good thing. The boards are given a budget to manage, to provide local services with local accountability. If they do things differently, some will do better than others, but that will give rise to examples of good practice, which will then be shared.

Cathy Jamieson correctly reminded us that the health service is not just about acute services. We should appreciate the enormous amount of work that is carried out in community health services. David Davidson mentioned community pharmacists, who form an important resource that has been underutilised in the past, and which should be used better in the future.

Dentists deserve a mention. We need to consider how they are reimbursed so that we retain them in the health service, and how we do so in a way that changes the emphasis from filling holes in teeth to preventive measures.

Malcolm Chisholm mentioned public health, and Dorothy-Grace Elder talked about the underlying causes of ill health. Cathy Jamieson talked about education, and persuading people to take better measures to protect their own health.

I should like to finish by returning to money. Where do we get the resources? Some come from private fund raising—that is fine. Mainly, they come from taxes. Tax is not a dirty word. We cannot have services without taxes. I join my colleagues in urging the Chancellor of the Exchequer to forgo his 1p decrease in income tax and to put the money into front-line services.

11:03

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Just over 1,000 days ago—not seven months ago—the Labour Government came to power. It does not get two starts to this race, I am afraid. In opposition, Labour used the words “crisis”, “verge of collapse” and “sick”. It then declared that waiting lists were the be-all and end-all of health measurement and that staff were better off in Labour’s hands.

A thousand days later, we are all lectured about the reckless use of the word “crisis”. We are told to grow up, to forget waiting lists—in the same way as the Executive has been forgetting about the people on them—and that winter pressures, which I am sorry to inform the minister do happen annually, have been a one-off event.

The Minister for Health and Community Care chose to ignore the warnings given by the SNP and us last June, as she did those given by the British Medical Association. Dr Kenneth Harden said in January that the BMA had argued strongly for an orchestrated campaign; that, in fairness, some health boards took that up and resourced and arranged a proper flu campaign, but that the majority did not and that, sadly, there was no central support from the Government. That is not from me—it is from the BMA.

The minister talks about action. She says that she is happy to compare statistics from England and Wales with those from Scotland. However, she is not too happy to compare statistics from different parts of Scotland. She talks about the dubious record of increases, but the highest increase in health spending in Scotland was 10.4 per cent in 1992-93. Health spending between 1993 and 1996 rose by 23.3 per cent. Under Labour, from 1997 to 2001, the increase will be 23.7 per cent. That 0.4 percentage point difference does not take into account the much higher rate of health inflation that goes on every year.

Perhaps Malcolm Chisholm, who quoted Michael Portillo, agrees with Alan Milburn, who said that there is no reason why the NHS should not collaborate with the independent sector in developing new and innovative forms of intermediate care. The wonderful thing about devolution—which the Scottish Conservative party fully supports—is that we can take a different view from our colleagues in England. It remains to be seen whether we do that with regard to our health policy.

The Executive amendment acknowledges the role of staff—but that is all it does. Actions speak louder than words. The Executive’s amendment refers to the document, “Making it work together”. I infer from that title that the minister is trying to spread the blame. If everyone is working together,

why is morale in the NHS now at its lowest point? Why do half of the staff express a wish to follow another career? Why were the staff at Stracathro left out in the cold while their future was discussed?

Perhaps the minister means that her department should work together better with the Parliament. Her department gives the Health and Community Care Committee statutory instruments once they have become law, not 40 days earlier so that they can be discussed.

Young doctors know all about Labour’s idea of working together: they were almost forced to take strike action last year by an Executive that chose to ignore their demands. At the moment, there are 140 unfilled consultant posts in Scotland—the number of doctors in training does not keep pace with the number of doctors leaving. That information comes from the BMA.

I am afraid that the Executive is determined to do the opposite of working together. It is doing its thing its way and hell mend them. With professionalism and hard work, the NHS staff is saving the skins of the Executive. From my past as a soldier, I know that morale is built by talking straight, not by coming out with doubtful statistics on spending and pay increases that are not backed up by new money. When new Labour talks about new money, it should understand that that money must be new, not a collection of fiddled statistics.

Morale is built up by making people feel valued and important. One of the reasons I got into politics is that I believe that staff in the NHS feel undervalued. The Executive is doing nothing to improve that situation. I see bad leadership every day from the Executive when it deals with staff in the NHS.

Morale is built not by leading through rank but by example. People will not respect the Minister for Health and Community Care simply because she is a minister. They will respect her because of the initiatives that she brings forward and the way in which she deals with staff. Susan Deacon is failing in those respects and that is why morale is low. We want the Executive to acknowledge the problems, to make fair and necessary changes and—above all—to recognise the contribution of all staff in the NHS.

One thousand days ago, people voted for Labour in the hope that it would do better in health and education. The Executive is failing in both areas. The electorate will not forget that. I will be interested to see the result of the Ayr by-election, as I doubt that the people of Ayr will forget it either.

I support the motion.

11:09

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): This has been an interesting, if rather short, debate. When we last debated health—just before the recess—I said that the relentless denigration of the national health service, which amounted to a counsel of despair, failed to acknowledge the care delivered by NHS staff 24 hours a day, 365 days a year—366 days this year. I am glad that the Opposition has seen its error and has attempted to put that right in its motion today.

There has been a lot of loose talk about private health care in this debate. I want to make it clear that NHS staff deliver 95 per cent of health care in Scotland—we have only a tiny private sector. The only people who are interested in privatising the NHS are the Tories, as David Davidson made clear.

Mr Davidson: Will the minister give way?

Iain Gray: Not just now.

David Davidson's speech was also extremely confusing, as it seemed to criticise us for not running the NHS as some kind of soviet-style command-and-control centralised organisation.

Back in December, in the debate I mentioned, Susan Deacon and I expressed our confidence—not complacency—in our doctors, nurses and ancillary staff and their preparations for the winter period. We did not know then that they would in many cases face unprecedented levels of activity in January. Nevertheless, they did and our confidence was not misplaced. Our confidence was based on visits to hospitals, meetings with staff and the close examination of planning. The Opposition could choose to have confidence, too, as Cathy Jamieson did in forming an excellent contribution to today's debate.

We are already—just into February—beginning to plan for next winter with staff. We are looking forward, not back.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The minister said that she found it difficult to find solutions. Lorn and Islands district general hospital in Oban has had the generous offer of a new computed tomography scanner worth £310,000 and a further offer, from another charity, to run it for two years. Why is that offer not being accepted, if the Executive is pushed for money?

Iain Gray: As we have said many times, such decisions are for local planning. The on-cost of a decision such as that must be properly taken into account by the health board.

I want to talk about a different kind of investment in the health service. Susan Deacon called the 136,000 NHS staff in Scotland the heart of the

service, which they are. That is why the pay increases that were announced in January are among the most important and effective investments that we can make in the health service. Investment in staff pay is not the problem, as the SNP seems to think, but part of the solution. Those pay increases are significantly above inflation—7.8 per cent for experienced nurses—to reward them, recognise them, respect them and retain them.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister give way?

Iain Gray: No, sorry.

Mary Scanlon raised the specific case of GP practice nurses. Indeed they should be recognised and rewarded by their employers. The point is that practice nurses' employers are the GPs themselves, who are independent contractors to the health service. Not for the first time, Mrs Scanlon's grasp of the facts is sorely lacking.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister give way?

Iain Gray: No, I am sorry. You did not pay me that courtesy, Mary, and I shall not pay it in return.

Mary Scanlon: That is bad manners.

Iain Gray: This is an especially significant investment in Scotland, where there are 808 nurses per 100,000 people, compared with 620 in England. That is a reflection of the 20 per cent higher spend on the health service, which is being spent where it matters most—at the heart of our service.

The fact bears repeating that public health spending in Scotland, as a percentage of gross domestic product, is one of the highest in Europe—and we are increasing health boards' allocations by more than 5 per cent next year although Scotland will receive the same spending review increases per head of population as England. All staff who are covered by independent pay review bodies will receive their pay increases in full—with no staging and no messing—backed up by a further range of measures on training, health and safety, and involvement in decision making. They will receive reward and respect.

If staff are the heart of patient care, it must also have a home. That is why we are delivering the biggest ever hospital building programme in Scotland. This very day, Grampian University Hospitals NHS Trust will announce the go-ahead for the new children's hospital in Aberdeen.

This is about investment in the future, but let us, for a moment, look at the past. We are reinvesting in and rededicating ourselves to a service that was ill served for 18 years under the Tories. No investment was made in radiotherapy equipment between 1992 and 1997, but we are now investing £12.5 million to try to put that right.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Iain Gray: I do not have time to give way.

Phil Gallie: But the minister is wrong.

Iain Gray: I am sorry—I will not give way.

That investment of £12.5 million is part of the process in which we are replacing outdated buildings, eliminating mixed-sex accommodation and improving NHS pay in real terms. That is action.

Robert Brown was right to draw attention to the absence of positive suggestions from the Opposition. Kay Ullrich mentioned the story from her mailbag about someone having to wait eight months for a cataract operation. She is right to be concerned about that, but Susan Deacon described how redesigned health care in Ayr has reduced the waiting time for such an operation from 12 months to one month. We acknowledge that there are problems and we seek solutions to them—that is government.

Saying that independence from the UK is the solution to the problems of the NHS is nonsense. Of the SNP members who have spoken, I can excuse Fiona McLeod, who made a constructive contribution. I assure her that children's health is a priority.

Can we do more? Yes. Are we listening? Yes. This week, Susan Deacon and I met 30 leaders in mental health. Today and tomorrow we will meet the chairs of all Scotland's health boards and trusts so that we can push forward the modernisation of the NHS. We must match the commitment of staff with resources and vision.

The problem with the SNP motion is that it calls for an optimum health service. I do not know what that means. We will never reach the optimum—we can always do better. There must be continuous improvement and endless action to drive up the quality of care. There must be no limit to our vision.

An endless quantity of words that are used to drive down confidence in the NHS, and vision with no beginning is, sadly, what passes for opposition in the chamber.

11:17

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I enjoyed part of the minister's speech, which is more—I can say with some confidence—than can be said for Fiona McLeod, whose political career with the SNP has just been ended by the minister's praise of her constructive contribution.

I would like, if possible, to do three things in the 10 minutes that are available to me. First, I would

like to look at what we, as the Opposition, keep being told we should be doing. We have been accused of whingeing every time we complain. We are accused of having nothing positive to contribute. We should examine those accusations.

Secondly, I would like to talk about the main focus of the SNP's proposal. We want to refocus the debate in the Parliament and throughout the country. We want to move it away from being a debate that sometimes alienates people, towards being a debate that concentrates on the needs of patients. That is something Susan Deacon, when she started out in office, said that she wanted to do in regard to patient-centred care. That is not what has happened. What the SNP wants to do today is highlight real-life human problems to show why we need further action.

Thirdly I will examine what has happened in terms of financial commitments. The minister has called that debate sterile—it might be so to her, but it is vital to the health service that it knows what funding is dedicated to it.

On the accusation of whingeing, I suggest that it is the Opposition's role in the Parliament to point out what exactly is wrong with the current situation and how we can improve it. All we hear from the Executive is that the SNP has nothing to say. That simply does not stack up against what we say must happen, particularly in financial terms, in the NHS.

Nora Radcliffe seemed to suggest that everybody is right. She nearly pulled out a candle and started to sway at one point. She was saying that there are major problems in the NHS—we all accept that. She also said, however, that no one is to blame for them—that no one should be criticised. That is the route to the death of debate and of proper accountability. Real accountability means that the Executive and the ministerial team that is before us should be called to account.

The main thrust of the SNP motion, lodged in the name of Kay Ullrich, is the human cost of the failings in the NHS. We heard what that means from a wide range of members, representing all areas of the country. Kay talked about patients being driven from Inverness to Glasgow for intensive care beds. We talked about what that means for people's lives and the problems that that represents for them. She talked about a woman in Edinburgh who had to wait for 20 months for a hip operation. There was talk about patients being unable to access the drugs that would be most effective in treating their condition.

Those problems affect people day in, day out in the health service. Brian Adam mentioned a case in Aberdeen, which highlighted exactly that problem. An operation performed by a consultant could be undertaken privately in two weeks,

whereas the NHS was unable to cope with that kind of proper, optimum health care.

The Deputy Minister for Community Care seemed to be confused about what the SNP means by the optimum health care in Scotland. If this Parliament does not aspire to the optimum health service in Scotland, we are not doing our job. It is simply not enough to sit back and agree, "Yes, there are problems, but we're going to make progress."

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, not at the moment.

The Executive must say, "Here is where we can go. Here is our strategic vision. Here is the kind of health service we want in Scotland. Let's work together to get there." We are not getting that vision from the Executive, which is why there is frustration in the chamber.

Iain Gray: While we can argue about the meaning of optimum, we must have a vision of the kind of health service to which we aspire. The point that I was making, which has been made by many members during this and other health debates, is that we have no concept of the SNP's vision, because it has not been presented to us.

Mr Hamilton: Our vision is right at the heart of the SNP motion—the health service should be driven by the needs of real people. The whole idea behind this Parliament was that it should be accessible to the people of Scotland, but it is in danger of becoming divorced from mainstream Scotland. Today, we have an opportunity to refocus.

Some points about finance have been raised. We hear a great deal these days about joined-up government, but it appears that not only is the Executive not joined-up, but ministers do not talk to one another.

The minister said that the percentage of gross domestic product in Scotland spent on health is already above the European average, but that does not seem to match the figure of 6.9 per cent given by Mr Jack McConnell in an answer to Andrew Wilson. That point is important because it is the very measure that the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, chose to evaluate the success or failure of his policies.

Let us compare Jack McConnell's 6.9 per cent with the 8.9 per cent of GDP spent on health in France, or with the 10.4 per cent spent in Germany. Those figures suggest to me that France and Germany are nearer to the elusive optimum than the Deputy Minister for Community Care does not appear to understand. We can even compare the 6.9 per cent with the European Union average of 8.02 per cent. These are not my

figures; they come from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The minute we start to approach those kinds of figures, we can consider being self-congratulatory about where we are with the health service—but where we stand now is not good enough.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Will the member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No thank you, George.

We should also bear in mind where we are heading. If underfunding, in terms of the percentage of GDP being spent on the health service, is the context of where we are now, what are the Executive's proposals for future years? It depends which one of the Executive's budget statements we read: next year's increase will be either 0.8 per cent or 1.6 per cent, in comparison with an increase of 4.4 per cent south of the border. Figures published in October show that the three-year average increase in Scotland is 3.5 per cent, in comparison with 4.3 per cent south of the border.

Throughout the debate, we heard the argument that those figures are justifiable because Scotland already spends 20 per cent more on health per capita. It is fair to say that Scotland gets more per head of population, but why is that? Perhaps the Minister for Health and Community Care, during one of her late-night television sessions, saw Richard Simpson on "Newsnight Scotland". When asked why Scotland gets more per capita, he highlighted the fact that the needs of rural Scotland and the historic detriment in the Scottish health system meant that that 20 per cent was justifiable. On 17 January, he said:

"There are two problems: we have a poorer health record and rurality. The difference is accounted for therefore."

Does the minister accept that? Which member in the chamber would want to admit that the current settlement is overgenerous? Do we really believe that the extra 20 per cent is not justified? I do not think that there is one member who would stand up to contradict that.

George Lyon rose—

Mr Hamilton: As ever, George Lyon surprises me.

George Lyon: We have heard Duncan Hamilton mention numerous figures. Can he say to what figure the SNP believes spending should rise? Is it the French figure or is it the German figure?

Mr Hamilton: Of all the parties to intervene on this issue, the Liberals are the most interesting, because today they have adopted the penny for Scotland that was much derided by Mr Lyon and his colleagues throughout the election campaign. Every Liberal member to speak has jumped on the

back of a poll in *The Observer* suggesting that people want to forgo the cut in income tax and invest that money in the health service. If that is where the Liberals are at, I welcome their latter-day conversion.

On this I agree with Malcolm Chisholm—for once, perhaps, Tony Blair has got it right. Maybe when Tony Blair says that the NHS is chronically underfunded and that we must do better, he is right. However, the Scottish Executive has still not given us an adequate answer to whether the 5 per cent real-terms increase will happen. At this week's meeting of the Finance Committee, Jack McConnell gave us two answers.

Hugh Henry: Will the member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, thank you.

Jack McConnell gave us two answers. He said, first, that the money would be available, but then he added that that would not be the case in areas where Scotland gets historically higher spending per capita. Which is it? The Executive must tell the people. If Tony Blair is claiming in London that there will be a 5 per cent increase, what is the Executive saying in Scotland? If it is suggesting that the NHS will get 5 per cent, what does that mean? Does it mean 5 per cent, or does it mean 4.3 per cent, taking into account the Barnett squeeze on health spending? I refer members to the comments not of an SNP researcher, but of a parliamentary staff researcher, on what this proposal would mean. Mr McVicar said:

"Therefore, in total, Scotland will lose over £500 million through this process."

That is the result of the iniquitous system of funding in Scotland. Until the Executive recognises the problem, all the warm words and self-congratulation will not count for anything—not in this chamber, not in the NHS and not in wider Scotland.

Air Transport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-483, in the name of Mr Kenny MacAskill, on air passenger and freight links to Scotland, and amendments to that motion. I call Kenny MacAskill to speak to and move the motion.

11:28

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): What is the purpose of this motion? It is to highlight the importance in the 21st century and in a global economy of air links and infrastructure. It has been suggested that the strength of the Scottish economy can be observed in the vibrancy of the Edinburgh to London shuttle, but it should be clear that air links, if not an economic weather vane, are certainly an integral part of economic growth.

We must not compound the problem of our geographic peripherality by imposing a cost penalty on access to our markets. At the moment, however, we restrict access by routing almost everything through London and compound that by having a pricing structure that economically disadvantages our nation in general and individual areas of it in particular.

Air links are not simply about flying our businessmen to London for a mid-morning meeting or packaging our tourists off for a fortnight's break in Benidorm. They are about bringing in business and tourists. For too long we have been looking through the wrong end of the telescope. We must set our sights higher, because in the 21st century nobody owes Scotland a living. We must access the markets and promote our industry.

What do we face at the beginning of the new millennium? Privatisation of the national air traffic control system. Surely the word "national" should indicate the responsibility that the service has to the nation and the clear duty that the nation has to retain it in public hands. I will not say too much on that issue, as my colleagues will speak on it in greater detail, but I believe that there is neither an economic case nor a safety argument for privatisation. I am taken by the comments of the former transport minister—

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment.

Gavin Strang said in the *Edinburgh Evening News* on 29 July 1999 that the three priorities for air traffic control should be safety, safety and safety. He added:

"I do not believe that privatisation should have a role in the future of our air traffic control."

He said that privatisation of air traffic control was not proposed to make air traffic management safer, but was put on the political agenda last July as part of the comprehensive spending review.

It is a pity that the Minister for Transport and the Environment has chosen not to say what her position is or who speaks for the Labour party in Edinburgh. Moreover, who speaks for the Edinburgh East and Musselburgh constituency Labour party—Dr Strang or Nurse Deacon? Are they for or against privatisation?

In preparing for this speech, the SNP conducted significant research to try to find out whether any other nation has privatised its air traffic control system. We had been misled by Dr Strang, who had misdiagnosed the situation. He had said that no other country had done so, but I can reveal to this chamber that Fiji has sold its air traffic control system to Australia. That is an absurdity.

In this part of the chamber, we had assumed that the unedifying race to privatise any asset that stood still long enough had ceased, but what have we seen? Harold Macmillan said that the Tories were selling off the family silver; new Labour is selling out the family safety.

Secondly, I will address the issue of job losses at Federal Express. It is a bit like the Hampden fiasco.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): What about the Wembley fiasco? [*Laughter.*]

Mr MacAskill: One month the Executive trumpets a supposed success, the next its cover is blown and the gaffe is shown.

What has happened? On 25 August 1999, the eminent and esteemed new transport minister, Lord Macdonald of Tradeston, told us:

"Prestwick's emergence as an economically important air cargo hub could be encouraged by granting US companies 'fifth freedom' rights there, while continuing to pursue a wider deal—and this is what we have done today."

So proud was the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in its boasts that its press release, a copy of which I have here, is entitled,

"Prestwick cargo cleared for take-off."

The proposal did not even get to the end of January before it crash-landed at Prestwick causing casualties to the work force in Ayrshire. Ayrshire and Scotland have been sold out to preserve the interests of bigger corporations in the south of England.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Does the member agree that although the decision by FedEx was regrettable, it

was made for commercial reasons and that FedEx appears to be more interested in securing rights at Stansted than in the future of jobs at Prestwick?

Mr MacAskill: I will explain when I come on to that matter.

Glasgow Prestwick international airport will tell inquirers that it can turn around cargo in four hours, whereas it takes 48 hours to do that at Heathrow. Rather than having companies pulling out and workers being laid off, the area and the work force should be booming.

Let us examine the situation. I received a short call yesterday from a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation seeking to blame FedEx. I then received a call requesting that I speak to a representative of FedEx. Although I was engaged on other matters at the time, I arranged to meet the representative last night for a lengthy chat. I understand that Mr Scott of the Liberal Democrats took advantage of the opportunity to speak to the representative this morning before he flew out.

I understand that FedEx met the Minister for Transport and the Environment in July, prior to Lord Macdonald's gushing declaration. I was advised that FedEx had offered to meet her on several occasions between then and the recent announcement of job losses, but that she had declined. I asked whether FedEx had met other members of the Executive about this crisis and was told that it had not. That is an absolute disgrace. When Scottish jobs are on the line, is it not the duty of the Executive at least to discuss with the employer the possibility of action or assistance? The Executive did nothing.

Success was claimed south of the border and Labour sought to bask in its afterglow up here, but when everything goes belly up, Labour shies away. We will not let it do so. Air transportation may be a reserved power, but Scottish jobs remain a devolved responsibility, and this is nothing short of a shameful abrogation of responsibility. At the meetings that matter on air transportation, the First Minister, the Minister for Transport and the Environment, and the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning sit voteless, voiceless and anonymous, like the three wise monkeys—hear no crisis, see no crisis, speak no crisis.

I return to Cathy Jamieson's intervention: what is the background to this? FedEx did not arrive in August—it has been here for 10 years. It was not a new business start with the possibility of exponentially boosting air freight from Prestwick. FedEx's main European hub is not at Prestwick or Stansted but at Charles de Gaulle in Paris—because it does not have full UK rights. In a nutshell, it operated big and small spokes. Prior to

August and since 1978, the routes were Prestwick to Charles de Gaulle and back via Stansted.

Since 1978, FedEx has had rights to go to nine centres—what are called beyonds in the trade. Were and are those centres the main hubs, the vibrant economic bases, of Europe and the European Union? For sure they include Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, but thereafter they are Iran, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and India. I do not wish to be disparaging of those nations, but they are not economic powerhouses. FedEx wanted fifth freedom rights throughout the UK, particularly in Stansted, to pick up and go beyond on routes from the USA.

In August, nothing was agreed. Labour trumpeted its achievements and FedEx pressed on, on the basis of good will and negotiations. To be fair to Lord Macdonald, the small print of the press release of 25 August says:

"Discussions with the US will include consideration of Federal Express's parallel application for full rights".

Although FedEx welcomed fifth freedom rights at Prestwick, it wanted similar rights at Stansted. It welcomed continuing negotiations and proceeded in expectation of a successful conclusion—an opening up of the skies. FedEx made that very clear.

Notwithstanding the PR hype and fawning praise Labour heaped upon itself, no deal was concluded, no document was signed and no jobs were secured. New Labour claimed to have built a future, but it was built on sand. What FedEx saw as an advantage for itself would also have been an advantage for others—its competitors would have been boosted by Stansted's operation being opened up. It was made abundantly clear that the price for Prestwick was fifth freedom rights in the UK. Labour trumpeted a success, but the jury was still out. At national level, Labour was still negotiating with the USA, with parallel discussions with individual operators. Labour decided to play poker with the USA and Prestwick was a chip to bet with.

Lord Macdonald was negotiating not for Tradeston, but for London. What were the other bargaining chips in that game of international poker? The USA wanted fifth freedoms and the UK companies that lobbied Lord Macdonald wanted access to US domestic markets. Those UK companies wanted not to boost incoming freight and trade, but the right to fly in the US domestic cargo market.

The opportunity to boost companies that wanted access to the American cargo market was the goal, not the growth of Prestwick as a cluster zone. The British Cargo Airline Alliance represents the interests of those companies and none are located in Scotland—they are located at co-

ordinates south, such as Bournemouth and Stansted. They are nothing to Scotland and do not represent our interests. They are Channel Express, a supplementary air operator; Atlantic Air, which operates one scheduled flight from Liverpool to the Isle of Man; and Air Foyle—its speciality is filling up large planes of east European origin. What do they want?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up please.

Mr MacAskill: I am trying to. Those companies want not fifth freedom rights but access to the US domestic cargo market. Lord Macdonald gambled that he could get that for those companies and boost them. The bluff was called and Scotland and Prestwick paid the price.

Fifth and even sixth freedom rights are not a threat, but an opportunity, for Scotland. What Scotland needs in fifth freedom rights is not unusual in Europe. The USA has long-standing agreements with the Netherlands and Luxembourg. On 22 December 1999, while negotiations between Lord Macdonald and FedEx were still going on, Portugal signed an open skies agreement with the USA. At the same time as we were being sold out, Portugal was signing up for economic advantage.

We have seen it all before in Scotland. As a West Lothian boy, I saw it at BL Bathgate. The day that factory closed every product that was assembled there was still being produced—but south of the border. We saw it at Ravenscraig when Scotland was sold out for Shotton and Llanwern. We saw it when Rosyth was sacrificed for Devonport.

The fact of the matter is that an independent Scotland would not allow that to happen to Prestwick. We would put Prestwick, not the interests of big business south of the border, first. It does not need to be this way; we can fly Scotland into the 21st century. The solution, as I said earlier, is political will, political power. We can make Scotland fly, so I condemn the motion and I condemn the Executive.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr MacAskill, I was expecting you to move the motion. [*Laughter.*]

Mr MacAskill: I move,

That the Parliament recognises the vital importance of air links and air infrastructure to Scotland and the Scottish economy in the 21st century; acknowledges the potential for economic growth through improved air links; condemns the proposed privatisation of National Air Traffic Services and Her Majesty's Government's failure to ensure that FedEx remains at Prestwick, and calls for government action to retain air traffic control in the public sector, save associated jobs and promote economic prosperity by increasing direct air passenger and freight links to Scotland.

11:40

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): I think that Mr MacAskill was wound up from the moment he took to his feet.

In moving my amendment, I must comment on the extraordinary situation in which a major public policy matter is before the House of Commons and in the public domain, but our Executive has not lodged a motion in its own name defending its own Government policy. I wonder what conceivable reason there can be for that. Are the Liberals speaking for the Executive here? Why is the Labour party silent? Will the Labour party really try to smuggle its position through this debate, hiding behind an amendment that notes the views of the Liberal Democrats?

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I notice that the Conservatives really struggle with the idea of devolution. They are supposed to be on board about devolution. Do they understand it? Will Mr Tosh address the point that there is a UK Government that has nothing to do with the Scottish Executive?

Mr Tosh: I understood that, under devolution, parties in this Parliament were entitled to speak up in defence of their party policy here and in other places. Mr Rumbles's position comes close to saying that devolution means that the policy of the Labour party in this Parliament is not to support the bill that is before the House of Commons. That is an extraordinary confusion that Mr Rumbles has planted in this chamber.

Let us talk about the Liberal position. In another chamber, the Liberal party has spoken adamantly against any private capital approach to air traffic control. In the House of Commons, Michael Moore has insisted that it is a scandal on air safety grounds. Does the Liberal Democrats' amendment say that? It notes "that there are concerns". They do not dare speak out here in support of the policies that they issue in another place. I shall come to the SNP's policies in just a moment.

Let us be clear about this. Safety in air traffic control is a function of investment, and that investment must be put in place.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Will Mr Tosh give way?

Mr Tosh: It is a function of regulation, which is there, and a function of culture, which is also there. The important issue is investment in a second air traffic control centre, but neither the SNP motion nor the Liberal amendment—

Des McNulty: Will Mr Tosh give way?

Mr Tosh: No.

Neither the SNP motion nor the Liberal Democrat amendment adequately addresses that

issue. The position of the Conservative party is clear. *[Laughter.]* Jim Wallace may laugh, but I think that he knows that our position is clear. For many years, we have embraced the idea of a second air traffic control centre at Prestwick. The previous Conservative Government was well down the road to preparing a private finance initiative. We have no difficulty in supporting a public-private partnership. We have no difficulty in accepting commercial freedoms for National Air Traffic Services similar to those proposed for the Post Office. We accept that massive investment is needed, that the money is simply not there and that it must come from the private sector.

We regard it as ludicrous and scaremongering to suggest that a private capital approach would in some way imperil the safety of air passengers. In that respect, I am actually quite happy to support the founding principle behind the Labour Government's House of Commons bill, and I am surprised that the Executive is not.

Let us deal with the SNP. How would it fund a new air traffic control centre? SNP members come here and spend Gordon Brown's war chest several times every week. They are going to raise the money from the public sector. How? How will they fund it? What is the SNP's approach? We heard very little from Kenny MacAskill because, since he lodged his motion, the world has moved on and we have a better issue with which to bash the Government in the Ayr by-election—FedEx.

Kenny MacAskill is a curious combination. Sometimes he is the oldest of Labour, a pure tax-and-spend, old-fashioned socialist. Today, what is he? He is the unashamed apologist and spokesman for a multinational American company that has rattled on Prestwick airport this week, has issued 17 redundancies to its local staff and is going to sack another 40 people. This is an airline that has been here for a decade, and which won a significant concession from the UK Government in advance of all negotiations between the two countries to get rights to fly from Prestwick. Now, within months, the company has flown off.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to give Mr Tosh a chance to pause for breath. May I make the point that, as a South of Scotland MSP, he will have had a letter from FedEx, which says:

"We continue to be surprised that a Government so committed to ensuring that the UK is globally competitive remains firmly wedded to an aviation policy clearly focused around a small number of interests concerned with access to Heathrow to the detriment of Scottish jobs".

Will Mr Tosh condemn the Government for that policy, instead of defending it?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Tosh, wind up, please.

Mr Tosh: Mike Russell's comments prove that he can read and that he has no more grasp of this issue than does Kenny MacAskill. Clearly, in any game of poker, there are two parties. FedEx has been playing a game of poker with Prestwick airport, and with Scotland, and deserves condemnation for what it has done.

Mr MacAskill: Will Mr Tosh give way?

Mr Tosh: No, the Deputy Presiding Officer would not allow it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Tosh is winding up.

Mr Tosh: If the SNP wants to do something for Prestwick airport, and if it wants to do something for the Ayr constituency—which is what this debate is all about—it will support our amendment calling for urgent action to ensure that alternative carriers are allowed to carry freight.

Mr Salmond may smirk. There are three companies who want to carry this freight. One of them already has fifth freedom rights. We want to be sure that that freight can go by other carriers. This is an continuing matter and, frankly, the issue of independence is irrelevant, because, in the context of an independent Scotland, the SNP will neither raise the investment that is required, nor be able to influence UK-US negotiations on fifth freedoms.

It is time to get real. It is time for the SNP to stop this posturing and fishing for votes, and address the real issues and come forward with a motion that is about a strategy for airports, rather than a strategy for votes for the SNP.

I move amendment S1M-483.1, to leave out from "acknowledges" to end and insert:

"and, acknowledging the potential for economic growth through improved air links, supports the development of a new Air Traffic Control Centre at Prestwick funded by private capital, calls for the acceleration of the Scottish Airports and Air Services Study and effective surface access strategies for Scotland's major airports, and calls for urgent assurances that other freight operators will be authorised to carry freight traffic currently carried through Prestwick Airport by FedEx."

11:47

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I was just thinking that I go home on a Saab 340 turboprop every week, and at least I know now that there are more than two things that are wound up on an average morning.

I will speak to the Liberal Democrat amendment in my name—and I say this for Murray Tosh's benefit—which sets out the Liberal Democrat position that:

"the Liberal Democrats are opposed to the development of the air traffic control system by public private partnership".

That is clear, even if Mr Tosh is having some difficulty with comprehension this morning.

Mr Tosh rose—

Tavish Scott: No, he can hold his horses.

I would welcome a serious debate about external transport links and our air infrastructure but, unfortunately, we have not had that this morning. This debate is not about air links, freight to and from Scotland, air passenger duty or the Scottish airports and air services study—matters that we should discuss, but have not had the chance to discuss this morning. This debate is about the Ayr by-election. There are no two ways about it.

The SNP's apparent diminishing popularity obviously has called for desperate measures. The BBC reported yesterday morning that the SNP had launched a premier chatline. Members may have heard that story on "Good Morning Scotland". Apparently, callers press 1 for a chat with Alex Salmond, 2 for a chat with Dorothy-Grace Elder, and, obviously, they press 999 for a chat with Kenny MacAskill.

I want to concentrate briefly on air traffic control, because it is an important issue. I agree with Murray Tosh when he says that there is a need for more investment—no one doubts that—but we disagree on how that investment should come about. It is predicted that the number of flights will increase by 15 per cent in the coming 15 years. The question is how we make the investment.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP) rose—

Tavish Scott: I wish to make some progress, Mr Salmond.

I visited Prestwick airport with my Westminster colleague Mike Moore in December. We met the chief executive of NATS and the general manager of Prestwick. We listened to the concerns about the need for £350 million of investment in Prestwick. We saw controllers at work. I fly every week, and along with many people I feel literally that our lives are in their hands. I was impressed by the dedication, professionalism and coolness of those staff in difficult circumstances.

There is no doubt about the need for investment. We discussed with the union and staff representatives at Prestwick their concerns about the proposed part privatisation. Why are there so many concerns about those proposals? Air traffic controllers, who have a strong public sector ethos, believe—and made the point forcefully to us—that that will be undermined by commercial pressures. The point was made at Prestwick that the prevailing culture should be one of safety, not profit.

Mr Salmond: The Liberals agree with the private finance initiative in schools, as part of the Executive, and they agree with PFI in the health service, as part of the Executive agreement. Does that mean that if air traffic control was a devolved responsibility, they would agree with PFI in that sector?

Tavish Scott: The Liberal Democrats do not agree with PFI, as Mr Salmond is well aware. The partnership Government has introduced a form of finance for those methods that makes progress on all the concerns that we had at the time of the election.

This debate is on a reserved matter, and I will deal with the issues. Why are pilots also worried about those proposals? Why do the trade unions and operators oppose part privatisation? Those are not irrational, emotive people taking a short-term political view; they are pilots and air traffic controllers who make a cool, professional judgment about those decisions.

Mr Tosh: Will Tavish Scott give way?

Tavish Scott: I will make some progress, Mr Tosh. I have only five minutes.

The Government states that the public-private partnership model is the only method of making the necessary investment. There are two important points here. First, National Air Traffic Services does not cost the taxpayer one penny. The chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that in a recent speech. NATS recovers all its cost because of the structure and the way in which it is financed, and indeed made a profit.

Secondly, there are alternatives. The Liberal Democrats favour an independent, publicly owned company. Those alternatives were outlined in the speech that my colleague Mike Moore made in the House of Commons on 20 December. The Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons also produced many viable alternatives.

The Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists, the union that represents more than 3,000 air traffic controllers in the United Kingdom, illustrated that an independent, publicly owned company would protect the NATS safety culture, it would promote investment and it would, above all, allow NATS to remain a publicly accountable organisation.

Last Friday, the Government gave the Post Office the commercial freedom to act, while remaining in the public sector. I am sure that I am not the only member who has received a letter from the chairman of the Post Office in Scotland illustrating the benefits and extolling the virtues of commercial freedom in the public sector.

There are sensible and viable options that could

mean the investment that everybody is agreed on, while reconciling the potential difficulty between safety and profit. I will not take lectures from the Tories on this. NATS explained to me at Prestwick that the Conservatives' ideological pursuit of their policies on Prestwick meant that the Scottish centre has been subject to delay after delay.

Phil Gallie: Will Tavish Scott give way?

Tavish Scott: No.

It is interesting that the Tories' Westminster transport spokesman, Bernard Jenkin, advocated complete privatisation. I see today that Murray Tosh has joined the Hague Conservatives, just in time for the visit this afternoon. The Tories' approach is to flog it and forget it.

It is understandable, given the Ayr by-election, that the SNP has suddenly become interested in this issue. However, for example, the standing committee on the Transport Bill is debating this matter today, but the SNP could not care less. SNP members are not at Westminster, where it matters and where they could change the bill. Where was the SNP on 20 December when the Transport Bill was debated in the House of Commons? Not one SNP member spoke in that debate, when they had the chance to oppose it. They did not bother to turn up. What does the SNP do? It raises this matter in the Scottish Parliament, where members can debate it all day and cannot change anything.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): Will Tavish Scott give way?

Tavish Scott: The SNP can no longer be trusted to fight for Scotland on reserved matters. It is never, ever there; it does not care.

I move amendment S1M-483.2, to leave out from "in the 21st century" to end and insert:

"and acknowledges the potential for economic growth through improved air links; notes that the future of air traffic control and associated issues are a reserved matter outwith the remit of the Parliament, but recognises that there are concerns and that the Liberal Democrats are opposed to the development of the air traffic control system by public private partnership; strongly supports a two centre strategy to protect jobs at Prestwick; underlines the need to give the highest possible priority to air safety, and further notes that during the second reading of the Transport Bill in the House of Commons on 20 December 1999, no Scottish National Party MP spoke in the debate, and only one voted against the second reading of the Bill."

11:54

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): I am pleased to speak in this debate. It is interesting that while Kenny MacAskill was wound up this morning, I do not think that many members thought that he took off. It was a remarkable rant, even by the standard

of Kenny's activities this week. Independence was in the news earlier this week—that is still on the runway and is not taking off—and then we had the internet story.

Colleagues may be interested to know that Kenny MacAskill has a wide brief in the SNP. Not only is he transport spokesman, he is now a disconnected sports minister. He suggested that we should all support the German bid to hold a competition rather than the English bid. We could make frivolity out of that, but the serious point is that if his rant today was anything it was a traditional recipe of anti-Englishness, anti-Westminster and, sadly, a refutation of the fact that we are still living in the United Kingdom, with all the attendant benefits that can accrue to us.

What was more remarkable than anything—and it was highlighted by the Conservative spokesman—was that a spokesman of any party should swallow, hook, line and sinker, one company's view of the pending departure from Scotland—

Mr MacAskill: Can the minister tell me when he met a representative of Federal Express? If he did not do so, which of his colleagues in the Executive has done so since 25 August 1999?

Henry McLeish: What I would like to say—
[MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] Before Gus Macdonald made his marvellous intervention on behalf of Prestwick, I met FedEx representatives and I met Brian Souter. In addition to all the other weaknesses and inconsistencies of the Scottish National party, it continues to try to sap the confidence of Scottish industry. It plucks out one immediate problem of FedEx, then belittles the fabulous success story that is Prestwick today. For the SNP's embarrassment, I want to detail that success.

However, there is another serious issue today. The Parliament can, rightly, debate any issue that it wants to debate. It is a fabulous institution, representing the Scottish people, but it will fall into disrepute if the SNP continues to use it for its party benefit, instead of for the benefit of the Scottish people.

I ask the SNP to imagine our colleagues at Westminster debating tuition fees, housing or local government. The SNP would say that such a situation would be ridiculous. The point is that the right of debate here is sacrosanct. In a devolved context, it is surely not right that the SNP should pretend that certain matters are reserved, while asking the chamber to come to decisions on areas that, following the devolution settlement, are for our colleagues from Scotland in the Westminster Parliament to debate. I raise that as a serious issue that the nationalists will never respect. I believe that for the credibility, respect and integrity

of this chamber, the SNP should look closely at what it does with the time that has been allocated to it.

Turning to FedEx and the letter that has been circulated, I will use polite language and say that I do not think that it tells the whole story about Prestwick and FedEx.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Henry McLeish: I want to set this in the context of Prestwick generally. In 1992, FedEx was handling about 11,000 tonnes of cargo; it is now handling 4,000 tonnes. We have observed a situation in which the tonnage of what was regarded as the world's largest carrier was not increasing. Lord Macdonald intervened last year, and secured a unique deal of fifth freedoms for Prestwick, after a consultation process in which Scotland said, "This would be good for business in Scotland."

The Westminster Government accepted that, but we then heard that Stansted should have been given the same rights. However, what the SNP will not say this morning is this: if a substantial number of airports are to be opened up to this cargo deal, it has to be based on reciprocity. The Americans did not provide that reciprocity.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Henry McLeish: I will not give way just now.

Why on earth should the open skies policy, the question of Stansted, be the reason that, after nearly a decade in Scotland, FedEx walks away from its commitments to 16 permanent jobs and 40 related jobs—56 in total—and blames it on the Westminster Government? On behalf of this chamber, I say to FedEx, "You are there and you have not left yet. Reconsider your position, because not one part of your argument would justify your leaving Scotland, at a time when Prestwick is enjoying unparalleled success."

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Henry McLeish: I will not give way just now.

Let us detail that success. In 1992, Prestwick dealt with 16,000 tonnes of freight. In 1998, the figure was 40,000 tonnes. Cargolux has 44 per cent of Prestwick's market share, Air France has 15 per cent, Polar Air Cargo has 13 per cent and Lufthansa has 14 per cent—FedEx has only 10 per cent. Singapore Airlines also uses the airport.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Henry McLeish: I want to make this point decisively, because Kenny MacAskill must listen to it. FedEx is leaving a success story. It is part of the fastest-growing cluster in Scotland. One of our key businessmen, Brian Souter, has invested multi-millions in Prestwick.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Henry McLeish: No. I am not giving way. I want Kenny to listen to my point.

Brian Souter is also investing in passenger traffic. In 1991, there were no passengers travelling through Prestwick; there are now 600,000 passengers per annum. In 1991, there were 100 jobs; now there are 400.

Mr MacAskill: What about a supplementary?

Henry McLeish: If Kenny MacAskill continues to rant, people watching the debate and looking for common sense and maturity from his party will see neither quality.

Prestwick is a success story that Federal Express should recognise. FedEx should not leave on the pretext that the UK Government is responsible. The real issue is Stansted. I urge FedEx to get involved in the unfolding success of the Scottish economy.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister clarify what he meant by the continuing negotiations to which he referred? The press release from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on 25 August notes that

"Discussions with the US will include consideration of Federal Express's parallel application for full rights at Stansted Airport".

It goes on to say that

"the absence of reciprocal rights in the US would have a negative effect on UK carriers and jobs."

What was the reciprocal right that the UK was seeking in the USA? Was it fifth freedoms or was it to allow the British Cargo Airline Alliance the opportunity to carry internal cargo in the United States? Is it true that Prestwick lost out because the Government supported the British Cargo Airline Alliance in its desire for access? What were the negotiations about?

Henry McLeish: The simple answer is that the Americans would not concede reciprocal rights of any kind.

Reciprocity is crucial, but the key issue is why Prestwick should get caught up in a fifth freedom issue relating to Stansted. That is the point. Gus Macdonald achieved the fifth freedom objective for Prestwick with no strings attached. That was a huge bonus for Scotland. Why does FedEx want to walk away from something that was done for its benefit?

I do not want to go into technicalities, although I am happy to send details to Kenny MacAskill. Under wet lease agreements, crews and planes can be transferred to other carriers for use at times of peak capacity. The US will not allow any UK carrier to wet-lease its aircraft, despite the fact

that the UK provides a reciprocal arrangement. Let us not parade the problems of the US in this Parliament to justify the bogus arguments of the SNP.

We have talked about passengers, freight and investment, but I want to point out that, due to our industrial strategy, we have one of the fastest-growing clusters at Prestwick. BF Goodrich, Woodward Governor, British Aerospace and GE Caledonian are companies that want to do well. It does not help for the SNP to give radio and television interviews, in which it sends out a negative view of Scotland's economy.

Let them read the facts, let them assume and acknowledge that we are making progress. There are many areas in which we want to see further investment. The confidence of a nation is not helped by a group of people who constantly carp, girm and whinge about the real progress that has been made.

The Executive is very pleased to acknowledge that aviation and air transport are vital to the Scottish economy. We will continue to work with all concerned, including the UK Government, to ensure that we make progress. I will finish as I started. I invite FedEx to reconsider its decision and to appreciate the success story of Prestwick. I invite every member of this chamber to applaud the progress that has been made in Ayrshire at Prestwick. It is good for FedEx, and it is good for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is very little time left for open debate, so I ask members to stick strictly to the four-minute time limit.

12:05

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I am standing in for Adam Ingram who has had a family bereavement. He has a special constituency interest in this debate.

I would like to concentrate on the privatisation of the air traffic control service. Our position is clear—to sell off NATS is nuts. The minister talks about the Scottish Parliament being brought into disrepute. If anything were going to bring the Scottish Parliament into disrepute, it would be a failure of the Scottish Parliament to speak up on behalf of the vast majority of the Scottish people who are totally opposed to the privatisation and sell-off of the air traffic control service.

If anything or anybody is being brought into disrepute, it is new Labour. When the Tories were in power, it was new Labour that led the fight against privatisation. Andrew Smith, its transport spokesman prior to 1997, said: "Our air is not for sale." That was before the election. After the election, new Labour is saying: "The air is for sale

to the highest bidder.”

George Robertson said that the privatisation, in part or in whole, of the air traffic control service would be outrageous and disgraceful. How can it be outrageous and disgraceful prior to 1997, but okay in 2000, and outrageous and disgraceful to criticise it? Privatising air traffic control would be nuts for two reasons. It would be dangerous and economically ridiculous.

Mr Tosh rose—

Alex Neil: Normally, I would love to let Murray Tosh intervene, but he had 10 minutes and I have only four. I intend to use them.

Murray Tosh said that what matters in terms of safety is culture and investment. The culture of safety is the predominant reason why the only country in the world to privatise air traffic control has been Fiji. Every other country, including the United States, has its air traffic control in the public sector. They have it in the public sector for safety reasons.

Mr Tosh rose—

Alex Neil: We should not underestimate the importance of air traffic control as an industry for the future. Projections for the next 10 to 15 years show a doubling of air traffic worldwide. Over the past year alone at Prestwick and at the Oceanic centre, there has been an 8 per cent growth in the number of flights. Prestwick now handles more than 1,000 transatlantic flights every day of the year. That employs more than 650 people.

Privatisation will lead to profit coming before safety. It would be madness from an economic point of view as well as madness from a safety point of view. If there is one organisation that more than pays its way in the public sector, it is National Air Traffic Services. If its external borrowing limit were raised to the necessary levels, it could fund any investment required. It can and does provide a return on capital to the public sector of around 8 per cent a year.

The move to privatise, which will generate perhaps £350 million of one-off capital investment over a period of 10 to 15 years, will cost the public sector an enormous amount of money and will lead to asset stripping. A total of 60 per cent of the costs of NATS is on staff costs. The only way in which it can be made profitable to get a return for the private investor is to make it unsafe by cutting down staff and by making staff conditions worse. The policy is total madness.

Mr Tosh rose—

Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab) rose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has come to a conclusion.

12:10

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): The difference between the SNP's approach and that of my party to this issue is summed up by, on the one hand, Kenny MacAskill's almost hysterical posturing and, on the other, the measured, pragmatic stance that has been adopted by Sandra Osborne, Ayr's Labour MP.

Although people might instinctively have preferred a public sector solution for National Air Traffic Services, it is clear to members who have discussed matters that have come before Parliament that investment requirements across the range of public sector services cannot be met entirely from public borrowing. That is a plain financial fact, and public-private partnerships have provided an effective means of injecting sizeable amounts of capital into improvements in service provision.

Investment of more than £1,000 million is now required in air traffic control because of delays under the previous Conservative Administrations—a fact to which Murray Tosh, despite his comments, should own up.

Before the voters threw him out in 1997, Phil Gallie did not contribute very much to Westminster debates, despite the implications of those delays for his Ayr constituency. Since Sandra Osborne's election in 1997, she has fought a strong campaign with the trade unions to secure a sizeable proportion of the new investment for Prestwick. That investment will secure 700 jobs that the Conservatives failed to provide in 800 years of rule—[*Laughter.*] Well, it felt like 800 years of rule, even though it was only 18 years.

As Sandra Osborne pointed out in her excellent speech on the Transport Bill in December 1999, the question about NATS is not the principle of proceeding with new investment through PPPs, but the form that any PPP should take. Sandra has constantly highlighted the need to consider the implications of any proposal on the work force, the quality of the ensuing service and issues of safety, which must be the overriding consideration for the Minister for Transport, Lord Macdonald.

We must be clear about these proposals. The public sector will continue to control the specification and contracts associated with the air traffic service. The Civil Aviation Authority will remain within the public sector.

As Tavish Scott pointed out, the Westminster debate on transport was on 20 December 1999, when this Parliament was not meeting. Not one SNP member spoke—

Mr MacAskill rose—

Alasdair Morgan rose—

Des McNulty:—and only one SNP member, Alasdair Morgan, bothered to turn up to vote. Perhaps the rest of the SNP MPs were too busy eating their mince pies.

Alasdair Morgan rose—

Mr MacAskill rose—

Des McNulty: However, a month and a half later, the SNP is prepared to devote precious time in this chamber to debate matters for which we have no responsibility. Who can be surprised at that? Certainly not the people involved in the Skye bridge campaign, who have already had an opportunity to experience Kenny MacAskill's fickleness at first hand.

While I am handing out advice, I suggest that Kenny MacAskill and Alex Neil leave fundamentalist rants about public ownership to Tommy the Trot, who is not here today. At least Mr Sheridan has a consistent record of opposing private sector involvement.

Mr MacAskill: Come on—give way.

Des McNulty: Prestwick will survive and thrive as an international freight operator if its potential can be marketed to top companies here and overseas. Its interests are not best served if potential investors see the main Opposition party in Scotland delivering the kind of rant that we have heard today from Kenny MacAskill.

The problem with the SNP position is inconsistency. On the one hand, we have this rhetoric about public sector ownership but, on the other, we have a defence of FedEx. Six minutes of Kenny MacAskill's speech were devoted to 16 jobs that will be lost as a result of a commercial decision by FedEx. However, he did not mention the 700 jobs that will come to Prestwick as a result of Labour's policy and the work of Sandra Osborne in particular.

The SNP has to learn to engage seriously in the debate. If it wants to engage in discussions about air transport strategy, it has the opportunity to do so when those discussions take place at Westminster. I hope that we can have more sensible, intelligent contributions to the wider transport debate. Lots of issues are available for which this Parliament has responsibilities—why does not Kenny MacAskill choose one of them for debate?

12:15

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): As my colleague Tavish Scott said, today's debate should be renamed the Ayr by-election debate.

The issues that we are debating are vital for Scotland, as Kenny MacAskill and Mr Neil pointed out. I want to deal with the privatisation of the

NATS system. As Tavish made very clear, the Liberal Democrats are opposed to that privatisation. We believe that real concerns exist over safety, which must be given a high priority. It is not just political parties that are saying that—as Tavish rightly pointed out, unions and management have real concerns about the possible consequences of privatisation.

Mr Tosh: Will the member give way?

George Lyon: I have only three minutes, Murray; you had your six-minute rant, so you have said more than enough.

We ask that the UK Government reconsider the matter and address the safety issues that have been raised. Alternatives exist; as we have seen with the Post Office, other mechanisms can be used.

As our motion notes, air traffic control is a reserved matter and, as such, the fight needs to be taken up at Westminster. The Liberal Democrats are doing that, with support from many Labour colleagues in the House of Commons—Gavin Strang, for example. However, time after time in this chamber, the SNP has chosen to hold debates on reserved matters, as Henry McLeish said. In fact, the nationalists have used nearly 50 per cent of the parliamentary time available to them to debate reserved matters. The same is happening today. The SNP claims that air links and infrastructure are a vital issue for Scotland. I agree, yet when the issue was debated at Westminster on 20 December, on second reading of the Transport Bill, when widespread opposition was voiced by the Liberal Democrats and many Labour members, not one SNP MP spoke.

Alasdair Morgan: Will the member give way?

George Lyon: Not one SNP MP spoke for Gavin Strang's amendment against privatisation and only one voted for it.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan rose—

George Lyon: Poor Alasdair Morgan was the only MP whom the SNP could persuade to make the effort to travel to London for this important issue for Scotland. When he got there, such was the importance of the matter that he did not even bother to speak. That demonstrates how important the issue really is to the SNP. Today's debate is nothing more than gesture politics of the worst kind—the kind that brings the Scottish Parliament into disrepute.

I reaffirm today that the Liberal Democrats will continue to oppose at Westminster the privatisation of the air traffic control system. I am sure that they will enjoy the support of some of

their colleagues on the Labour benches. It would be a great pity if the battle were lost because one party could not be bothered to turn up.

12:18

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Despite Des McNulty's words, *Hansard* records my tremendous involvement in the issue between 1992 and 1997. Perhaps the difference between Sandra Osborne and me lies in the fact that, when she speaks with the Labour Government nationally, she appears to support privatisation, whereas locally she does not.

If we look back over that period, we find that the Conservative Government achieved much in relation to air traffic control systems. The Conservative Government established the two-centre approach, which has been maintained. It also identified a preferred bidder—Lockheed Martin—for the private finance initiative. During the next stage, in September 1997, the phase 2 contract was due to be placed and work started on the site.

The Labour party should be criticised for its handling of the matter. Since 1997, a succession of transport ministers, all from Scotland—Gavin Strang, John Reid, Helen Liddell and now Gus Macdonald—have failed to deliver on this issue. All that they have done, all the way through, is to push the issue backwards.

The new air traffic control centre is essential to the local economy. As Alex Neil pointed out, it will sustain 650 good-quality jobs. However, the local impact is not the most important issue. Nationally, air safety is all important. Whether the air traffic control system is privatised, funded through the PFI or even funded using the same model as the Government is using for the Post Office, Conservative members will support anything that puts money into the project and gets it off the ground.

We recognise the need for the project and the need to improve the flow of air traffic across the United Kingdom. The Conservative Government gave the go-ahead to the Oceanic PFI, which is now under way. Oceanic handles the flow of air traffic into the UK. It is important that we are able to pick up en route.

I identify with almost everything that Henry McLeish said about FedEx, but it is a pity that he did not make the same comments when he was in opposition.

In relation to the United States, I warn members that they should consider what happened to the British Merchant Navy. We opened up our ports and gave freedoms to sea trade. The USA did not, and where is the British Merchant Navy today?

We want the project to get under way. Labour members should support our amendment, which is in line with the objectives to which they profess to aspire.

12:22

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Even after only seven or eight months of this Parliament, one recognises some things in the chamber the moment a debate starts. I predicted earlier this morning that we would see panic among those members who have a common interest in defending the union. We saw it first from the unusually agitated Mr Tosh. I have never seen him like that before, but then he is due a visit from Mr Hague later this afternoon—clearly the Conservatives are trying to put the ideological iron into his spine before Mr Hague appears.

There has been panic, too, on the Labour benches. One always knows when there is fear among Labour members, because—

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): They do not turn up.

Michael Russell: That is certainly true. Moreover, Henry McLeish is put in charge to attack the SNP for talking about things that are forbidden. Then, to ram home the message, a loyalist is found to read out the new Labour line. Today, the lottery was won by Mr Des McNulty, who read out the new Labour line with great aplomb. He also gave me the most unusual opportunity of my political life. [MEMBERS: "No."] Absolutely—and there is more to come.

After all Mr McNulty's affirmations that there would be guarantees and safeguards, I am able to quote, with approval and total agreement, the words of Mr Brian Donohoe, the MP for Cunninghame South, who is a member of the Transport Sub-Committee, as members will know from recent publicity. This is an historic moment. It is the first time that I have done this. He said:

"It doesn't matter what guarantees there are. We've all seen the past history of golden shares. They are worthless".

We are talking today about three vital matters. First, we are talking about public safety. Opposition to privatisation of the National Air Traffic Services has come from across the spectrum and has even involved loyalists such as Mr Brian Donohoe.

It was fascinating today that Mr McLeish did not mention once in his speech any defence of the Government line on national air traffic. The line is indefensible. It is a piece of worthless ideological baggage, scraped from the bottom of the Tory barrel and taken over by new Labour and Gordon Brown for financial reasons. There is no support

for the Government line in the United Kingdom or in Scotland.

Mr Kerr rose—

Michael Russell: Not just now, Mr Kerr.

The only defence is that the Government needs money from a get-rich-quick scheme. I am ashamed for the Tories that they cannot see that and that they cannot put public safety before ideology. It is shameful.

Mr Tosh: Is Mr Russell aware that safety in this country is regulated by the CAA, and that in no proposals does that change? Is he not aware that the most pressing safety issue is the lack of investment? Does he not realise that the same issues were raised over the denationalisation of airlines and airports? Does he believe that our airlines and airports are inherently unsafe and lack a safety culture? That is scaremongering of the basest kind.

Michael Russell: It is not scaremongering of the basest kind. It is reflecting the public concern about the railways, for example. We need safety first, second and third, not profit first, second and third. If the Tories have not learned that, they will be in the political wilderness for even longer than expected.

The Tories' amendment is worthless. It is designed from ideology and adds nothing to the debate. At least they have lodged it for a reason: to please Mr Hague, who will be here later today.

Tavish Scott: Here we go.

Michael Russell: Well, I am delighted to turn to the Liberal Democrats. The only reason that the argument is coming from the Liberal Democrats is that they have been let off the leash today. They are being let out a wee bit today to take part in this debate—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. Mr Russell, you must not literally turn to them.

Michael Russell: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, I just like to see the whites of their eyes. *[Laughter.]* I notice that a Labour member, Allan Wilson, has joined them on their benches today. The partnership is moving a stage towards completion.

The Liberal Democrat amendment is not an amendment; it is an apology. If the Liberal Democrats were really interested in ensuring that Scottish air transport was effective, they would vote for the motion. They cannot vote for it, however, just as they could not show their principles on the agricultural business improvement scheme.

Tavish Scott: I will read from the motion in my name. It says that

“the Liberal Democrats are opposed to the development of

the air traffic control system by public private partnership”.

It could not be clearer, Mr Russell.

Michael Russell: We have read it. *[Laughter.]* Well, as I said in a recent debate, I enjoy reading Liberal Democrat motions and reports—they lull me to sleep. Their amendment is all the usual material, with all the usual inaccuracies. It has all the hallmarks of a piece of work by Government spin-doctors. It was clearly handed to the Liberal Democrats in the same way as speeches are handed out to Labour members. It was handed to the Liberal Democrats because they were given the wee bit of freedom and licence to be dissenters today.

For the Liberal Democrats, principle is the vice that dare not speak its name. They have no principles; they have sold them. Instead of being involved in the argument, they are running away from it. I would like to think that they would want some accuracy.

Mr Rumbles: What about Westminster?

Michael Russell: Mr Morgan attempted to intervene several times when Liberal Democrat members were speaking, but was not allowed to. It is true that five SNP MPs were not present at the transport debate at Westminster on 20 December. Exactly the same number of Scottish Liberal Democrat MPs did not vote in that debate, including the now Deputy First Minister. I think that we could call it a tie.

Mr Rumbles: Hypocrisy.

Michael Russell: If, as I heard, Mike Rumbles used the word “hypocrisy”—I am sure that it will not be in the *Official Report*—I think that it will have to be sent back as a return of service.

There is a most serious situation in air traffic control, which threatens jobs and safety. It should not continue. In passenger transport, the lack of services from Scotland is inhibiting the growth of the Scottish economy.

There is also a great difficulty with freight, a business that Prestwick needs. I said that I was always conscious that, when the Administration was in trouble, we would see Mr McLeish panicking. An indication of that was his old argument: “If you criticise the Administration, you talk down Scotland.” The people who are failing Scotland sit on the Labour benches. No amount of spin or bluster—

Henry McLeish: Will Mr Russell give way?

Michael Russell: Let me just finish, Mr McLeish.

No amount of spin or bluster will get Mr McLeish round that fact.

The letter from FedEx is real. The meeting that

Mr MacAskill had with FedEx was real. If Mr McLeish wishes to put the points to FedEx that he made earlier—rather than hoping on the off-chance that FedEx will read the *Official Report*—he should meet its representatives, something that he has so far refused to do.

I urge members to support the motion. If members support the Conservative amendment, they will be dancing to Mr Hague's tune. If they support the Liberal amendment, they will be dancing to Labour's tune—that is the reality of Liberal amendments. Members should support the motion because it stands up for vital Scottish services.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-489, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau. I ask Iain Smith to move the motion.

The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Iain Smith): I advise members that the business for next Wednesday afternoon will be a ministerial statement on public appointments, followed by a debate on the knowledge economy. I also advise them the topics chosen for debate for Thursday next week are, from 9.30 am until 10.45 am, a debate on enterprise and, from 10.45 am until 12.30 pm, a debate on section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees

a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 9 February 2000

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Ministerial Statement
followed by	Executive Business
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
	followed by Members' Business - Debate on the Subject of S1M - 304 Cathy Jamieson: Asylum and Immigration Act

Thursday 10 February 2000

	9.30 am Non-Executive Debate on a Motion by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party
followed by	Business Motion
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Question Time
3.10 pm	First Minister's Question Time
	3.30 pm Stage 3 Debate on the Budget (Scotland) Bill
5.00 pm	Decision Time
	followed by Members' Business - Debate on the Subject of S1M - 413 Jamie McGrigor: Scottish Scallop Industry

Wednesday 16 February 2000

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
	followed by Executive Debate on the Census (Scotland) Order 2000
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

followed by Members' Business
 Thursday 17 February 2000
 9.30 am Executive Debate on Tourism
 followed by Business Motion
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Question Time
 3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time
 3.30 pm Debate on the
 Standards Committee Report on the
 Code of Conduct
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business

and (b),

the following dates by which other committees should make any recommendations on instruments or draft instruments to the lead committee:

the Rural Affairs Committee to report to the Health and Community Care Committee by 18 February 2000 on The Food (Animal Products from Belgium) (Emergency Control) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/15) and on The Animal Feedingstuffs from Belgium (Control) (Scotland) Regulations 2000 (SSI 2000/16)

and (c),

the following timetables for Bills:

Stage 2 of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill be completed by 1 March 2000;

Stage 2 of the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Bill be completed by 6 April 2000.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S1M-489 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before we begin this afternoon's business, and in accordance with our custom, I should like to recognise in the distinguished visitors gallery, and invite members to welcome, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition at Westminster, right hon William Hague MP.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

1. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the Scottish allocation from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust is sufficient. (S1O-1062)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): The Coalfields Regeneration Trust will spend £4.5 million in Scotland over the next three years. That, of course, is in addition to the Executive's programmes to tackle the problems of deprived areas and to promote social inclusion.

Fiona Hyslop: Is the minister aware that the UK Treasury profits by some £250 million a year from the miners pension fund? Does she think that £4.5 million, which represents £2.50 per head per year, is sufficient to regenerate the mining communities, which lost so many jobs under the Tories? Will she admit that the Labour party is following the Tories in betraying the mining communities of West Lothian, Ayrshire, Fife and Lanarkshire by using the miners pension fund to feed the fat cats of Whitehall rather than to pay compensation to miners or to regenerate those communities?

Jackie Baillie: There was a question in there somewhere, to which my response is absolutely not.

The £4.5 million is in line with our share of the population, the number of collieries and the number of people still working in the mining industry. The Coalfields Communities Campaign has made representations to the Department of Trade and Industry—members will appreciate that this is a reserved matter—which Helen Liddell is currently considering.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Does the minister agree that Ms Hyslop misses the point about areas such as West Lothian, which is an example of the successful regeneration of a former coalfield community and has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Scotland? Had Ms Hyslop attended the economic development

conference that was held in Livingston this week, she would have been aware of that.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the member for pointing out an example of the significant regeneration of a former coalfield area. Let me put the matter in context, as it is not just about the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. In December and again this week, Jack McConnell announced a special deprivation allowance, which will target eight former coalfield areas and which represents an additional £5 million in 1999-2000 alone. In the social inclusion partnerships, which also cover several coalfield areas, there is a further £5 million.

National Lottery

2. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what help and guidance it can give to organisations in Glasgow to encourage them to apply for funding from the national lottery's community involvement and poverty and disadvantage programmes. (S10-1035)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander): The National Lottery Charities Board opened an office in Glasgow on 17 June 1999, specifically to raise its profile in the west of Scotland. A team of people at that office has been trained to work in the west of Scotland.

Patricia Ferguson: Given that health and deprivation problems in Glasgow have been highlighted recently, and given the Scottish Executive's serious commitment to eradicating such problems, does the minister agree that further action is required to increase the proportion of successful bids by organisations in the cities from the unrepresentative levels of 10 per cent and 26 per cent of total awards in September and December respectively?

Ms Alexander: I agree whole-heartedly. That is why we have asked the Glasgow Alliance to work with social inclusion partnerships in Glasgow to attract a larger share of lottery funding into the city.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister consider that the £60 million that, it is reported, will be allocated by the lottery to bail out London's dome would be better used for the relief of poverty in Glasgow?

Ms Alexander: I invite Lloyd Quinan to reflect on how I spent my day yesterday—I was with one of the lottery distributors, suggesting that the £23 million that it will be spending over the next three years in Scotland should be spent in areas of social exclusion. I commend the efforts of the Universal Connections digital inclusion conference to him.

Roads (A77)

3. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with the progress being made on the upgrade of the A77. (S10-1034)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): The preparatory work for the new section of the M77 is proceeding in line with the timetable for implementing the scheme, which I announced in November.

Alex Neil: Is the minister aware that there is suspicion and concern in Ayrshire about possible delays and in particular about the timing of the Glasgow southern orbital route? Will she confirm and give a guarantee that the upgrade of the A77 will not be held back by any delay in the Glasgow southern orbital route?

Sarah Boyack: Our intention is to ensure that the two schemes proceed in parallel. I know that East Renfrewshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council are extremely keen to make sure that the Glasgow southern orbital route proceeds properly and that the M77 proceeds as quickly as possible. The timetable that I announced is a two-year programme from now to construction starting in 2002. There is no need for anybody to be suspicious. We have started the preparatory work, orders have been laid and the scheme is progressing well within the timetable that I specified to Parliament on 4 November.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To allay people's fears, will the minister reassure me that the Executive is committed to the upgrade of the A77 and that it is proceeding as fast as possible?

Sarah Boyack: Yes. Let me make it absolutely clear. It is a £60 million scheme and a complex piece of work; it must be done properly and go through the right procedures. We are making sure that that is being done. I can give every assurance that we are going ahead with the scheme, as I announced in November.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that it would be desirable for the Kilmarnock to Barrhead railway line to be upgraded before the disruption of construction work on the A77? Can she update us on progress towards receiving grant support from the shadow strategic rail authority—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Tosh—

Mr Tosh: —and will she indicate whether, if that falls through, she will be prepared to consider including the cost of the railway works within the public-private partnership for the road construction?

The Presiding Officer: That was only just in

order, Mr Tosh.

Sarah Boyack: I would not want to do anything that delayed or impeded progress towards the M77 scheme. That is why we are progressing with the approach that I have just outlined.

Temporary Sheriffs

4. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will appeal against the decision relating to temporary sheriffs, and what the up-to-date position is in respect of the consequences of the original decision. (S10-1020)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): The Lord Advocate has decided against an appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. In the light of that decision, ministers are now considering the way forward and I will make a further statement to Parliament in due course.

In a written answer on 1 February, I announced that authority had been given to recruit six more permanent sheriffs in addition to the 10 new appointments that I announced on 11 November 1999.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is the Deputy First Minister aware that the president of the Glasgow Bar Association, the other Mr Jim Wallace, said:

"There will be considerable difficulties and considerable burdens imposed on sheriff courts the length and breadth of the country. The potential for chaos is there".

In those circumstances, will the Deputy First Minister consider the appointment of even more sheriffs, as it appears that there is a need for at least 12 more?

Mr Wallace: Lord James will recognise that the number of sheriffs and whether we need any more is kept under constant review, but I think that he will also agree that it would not be good use of public resources to over-endow the bench with sheriffs if other means can be found to address the particular difficulties that have arisen. I do not deny that there are difficulties in the sheriff courts because of the decision on temporary sheriffs. We are looking at other measures to address that. If appointing more sheriffs is part of the solution, we will want to give proper consideration to that.

Lord James mentioned the Glasgow Bar Association. I was in Glasgow sheriff court—visiting it—on Tuesday and met a number of sheriffs. I commend sheriffs and sheriff court staff throughout Scotland for the way in which they have coped and discharged their duties in the light of the difficulties.

Irish League of Credit Unions (Meeting)

5. Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will report on its recent meeting with the Irish League of Credit Unions. (S10-1070)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): I met Tony Smith and his colleagues in Dublin last month and heard about how the credit union movement in Ireland has grown over the past few decades and about the factors underpinning its success. We will use that information to determine how best the Executive can support the credit union movement here in Scotland.

Cathy Jamieson: Will the minister join me in welcoming to the visitors gallery George Foulkes, the MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, who has long been a supporter of the credit union movement? Does she agree that this Parliament should lead by example in progressing the setting-up of a parliamentary credit union that would allow access to a credit union for Parliament staff?

Jackie Baillie: I join Cathy Jamieson in welcoming George Foulkes to the gallery. George and I shared a platform not too long ago at a Burns supper that happened to coincide with his birthday, when he turned 58. *[Laughter.]* I am getting my own back.

I would welcome the establishment of a credit union in this Parliament, and I shall have meetings with MSPs later today to progress the matter.

Local Produce (Retail Outlets)

6. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to introduce new planning regulations or guidelines that would allow planning authorities to stipulate minimum shelf space for local produce when granting planning permission for major new retail outlets. (S10-1030)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): We have no plans to do so.

Mr Stone: I should perhaps take this opportunity to declare an interest—I have a small stake in my brother's family cheese-making business. *[Laughter.]* I am a small cheese, Sir David. I have to say that—

The Presiding Officer: You do not have to say anything, Mr Stone. You have to ask a question.

Mr Stone: I am about to do that, Sir David.

Does the minister agree that the sort of change that I am suggesting would greatly assist our hard-

pressed farmers, small businesses and rural communities, and will she consider such a change?

Sarah Boyack: I am aware that my response to Mr Stone's first question did not sound very sympathetic or helpful.

Mr Stone: Too right.

Sarah Boyack: Let me try to be more sympathetic and helpful in my second answer. Any planning condition or requirement in planning law must be reasonable, must be enforceable and must relate to the development. That does not mean that it is not a good thing to encourage the sale of local produce on the shelves of supermarkets or local shops. In fact, many supermarkets are open to that idea. However, any planning requirement must be enforceable, and that would mean that the proportion of local produce displayed on supermarket shelves would have to be monitored by local planning authorities. There would be major practical implications.

Although I am ruling out the option that Mr Stone suggests, I certainly do not rule out other schemes to encourage supermarkets or small shops to take advantage of local produce. I hope that we can encourage the sale of local produce, but I do not think that the planning mechanism that he suggests is the best way to deliver that.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Does the minister agree, in advance of an organic targets bill, which I hope the Parliament may consider, that a scheme to encourage the sale of local produce would be of great assistance in the interim to small farmers who want to convert to organic farming, as it would provide an outlet for their goods, which are in great demand?

Sarah Boyack: I do not want to stray too much into Ross Finnie's territory, and I know that organic farming is more in his patch than in mine. However, I think that there is an opportunity to engage in discussions with shopkeepers and with major supermarket chains to identify local produce that could be sold in their stores. I have no doubt that that would be popular, whether with small cheese makers or with small-scale organic farmers.

Drug Misuse

7. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will welcome the recent release of a toxicology report in relation to fatal drug misuse-related overdoses in greater Glasgow and encourage the continued and extended release of this type of information across Scotland. (S10-1060)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): I welcome the publication of the report,

which provides useful and timely information on recent drug-related deaths in the greater Glasgow area. Official statistics on drug-related deaths are collated and published annually with the co-operation of forensic pathologists and local enforcement agencies. The Executive is currently assessing whether that information can be improved.

Hugh Henry: Will the minister join me in welcoming to the gallery the Reverend Canon Kenyon Wright, who has a long history of supporting many community-based projects and disadvantaged groups across Scotland?

Does the minister recognise that many drug users in the greater Glasgow area have died as a result of injecting heroin, either by itself or in combination with other drugs? Given that in 55 per cent of the recorded deaths in the report, more than one drug was implicated, does he agree that it is vital to the development of our drug prevention and education services that we have access to such information?

Angus MacKay: I agree with Mr Henry's sentiments. It is critically important that every drug action team, of which there are 20 in Scotland, effectively develops research on the nature of the drug problem on the ground in its area, so that rehabilitation and education services in particular are tailored accurately to the nature of the problem in each part of Scotland.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Which new rehabilitation services might aid the tragic young women who are prostitutes in Glasgow, in areas such as the Broomielaw? I will be sensitive, because one reputation has been damaged enough—that of the prostitute seen in public with a Government spin-doctor. [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Does the minister agree that those girls are rendered helpless by drugs? Will he ensure that there is more action to aid them, and will he progress to a change in the law of clandestine injury to include prostitutes, who are rendered helpless by heroin?

Angus MacKay: Dorothy-Grace Elder's sensitivity is touching.

The provision of services for drug misusers in Scotland is at the heart of the Executive's drug misuse policy. It is part of a balanced package of enforcement, rehabilitation and education. As the drugs minister, I want to see an increasing number of services such as those provided by Phoenix Health Group in Glasgow, which tackle directly the problems of drug misuse, but which also tackle all the circumstances surrounding individuals who have drug misuse problems, regardless of the nature of the circumstances.

Domestic Sprinklers

8. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive which local authorities have begun to implement the installation of domestic sprinklers in new and renovated housing stock. (S10-1066)

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): That information is not available at present, as there are no requirements to install domestic sprinklers.

Dr Jackson: I am sure that the minister will join me in congratulating Central Scotland Fire Brigade and Stirling Council on promoting a domestic sprinkler initiative. Will the minister indicate how the Executive proposes to encourage and support that initiative in the Stirling and Ochil constituencies, and more widely throughout Scotland?

Mr McAveety: I can assure Sylvia Jackson that we wish to address the matter to which she referred at the appropriate level—locally. Many local authorities may wish to pursue similar community safety initiatives in new housing. I hope that those initiatives will develop. Given the overall assessment, we will continue to review the matter, but at present, it would not be appropriate to consider making such initiatives statutory with regard to housing.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the elderly and disabled are particularly vulnerable to fires in the home? We already have classifications of housing for them, such as sheltered housing and amenity housing. Does the minister feel that it would be reasonable for building regulations to be amended to ensure that houses that are classified as amenity or sheltered housing have sprinkler systems installed, so that some of the most vulnerable members of our society have reasonable protection if there is a fire in their property?

Mr McAveety: The member makes an appropriate contribution. We have the opportunity to review those matters. Professionals in the areas of housing, community safety and the fire services believe that there are other measures that can address some of those concerns. We welcome any local ideas, and I hope that they can contribute to a longer-term review to resolve some of the concerns that have been raised by Sylvia Jackson and Michael Matheson.

Radioactive Waste

9. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will make a statement on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's current policy relating to the disposal of short-lived radioactive waste in the

national health service. (S10-1061)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): The policy of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency with regard to the disposal of short-lived radioactive waste in the NHS is to ensure that the material is disposed of in accordance with the terms of the authorisations granted under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Lewis Macdonald: Is the minister aware that the way in which that law has been interpreted by SEPA means that clinical waste from Scottish hospitals has to be transported to England for incineration, despite the fact that in many cases, it is well within recognised safe levels of radioactivity? Does she agree that that is an avoidable cost for the NHS in Scotland, and will she urge the agency to complete its examination of the matter quickly and come to a sensible conclusion?

Sarah Boyack: I can give the member the commitment that I will take the matter up with SEPA urgently. I will also tell SEPA that I am currently considering the Substances of Low Activity Exemption Order 1992, which is the detailed guide to the disposal of those types of waste. I will be happy to take that matter up and pursue it shortly.

Roads (A74)

10. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what the current position is in its discussions with Her Majesty's Government on the upgrading of the A74 from Gretna to Carlisle to full motorway status. (S10-1036)

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): My officials were advised on 24 January that the Government office for the north-west has submitted a steering group report to the north-west regional assembly for consideration.

David Mundell: I thank the minister for that answer. Does she undertake to endeavour to ensure that the priority for Scotland of that upgrade is made clear? Is she aware that the Scottish Council Development and Industry has said that to ensure the continued development of the economies of both Scotland and the north of England, that piece of road should be completed as soon as possible?

Sarah Boyack: I am well aware of the interest in ensuring that the road is brought up to the best possible standards. It is to that end that, when I last met Gus Macdonald, I raised the issue of that stretch of road with him, and said that we were very keen that it should be upgraded. If the north-west regional assembly confirms that the

recommendations are acceptable, I will write again and be in touch with Gus Macdonald to add our support to those recommendations.

Prisoner Release

11. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what involvement it had in the decision to release Barbara Glover from prison. (S1O-1051)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): Scottish ministers referred Miss Glover's case to the Parole Board for Scotland in accordance with section 2(5)(a) of the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993, and in accordance with section 2(4) of that act released her on licence on the direction of the Parole Board.

Phil Gallie: Will the minister say what submission ministers made to the designated life tribunal, given information that showed that Miss Glover, from her place of custody, had carried out a war of attrition against her victims' families, with devastating results?

Mr Wallace: I quote:

"Any information . . . in connection with the proceedings . . . about any application . . . to the tribunal . . . shall not be disclosed, either directly or indirectly . . . except . . . in so far as the chairman of the Board"

otherwise directs.

That is rule 9 of the Parole Board (Scotland) Rules 1993. Mr Gallie will understand that I am not in any position to break the law; I think that the second part of his question is somewhat contentious.

NHS Dental Services

12. Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it intends to take to restore NHS dental services to rural communities such as Alford in Aberdeenshire. (S1O-1024)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): A number of measures, including the provision of grants under the Scottish dental access initiative and the appointment of salaried dentists, are already in place to increase the availability of NHS dental services in rural areas of Scotland, and further measures are in prospect.

Mr Rumbles: That refers to one salaried NHS dentist in the city of Aberdeen, to which the whole county of Aberdeenshire has to travel, and is ineffective. In view of the fact that the Alford practice in my constituency closed, because after trying for 18 months it was unable to attract a dentist who was prepared to work in a rural practice with NHS patients, will the minister consider introducing new initiatives to protect NHS

dental care provision in rural areas, such as introducing salaried rural NHS dentists? Does he have any specific plans to launch a recruitment campaign to encourage NHS dentists to work in rural areas such as Aberdeenshire?

Iain Gray: As with so many of those matters, proper planning is a local issue. Grampian Health Board, as with all other health boards and primary care trusts, may apply to Scottish ministers for approval to appoint salaried dentists, where it believes that dental services are inadequate. As I have indicated, the Scottish dental access initiative is available to make grants where there is demonstrated unmet need or particularly high oral health needs. At the moment the grants are some £635,000, which includes grants in Aberdeen, for example, and Banff.

As I indicated, we believe that more initiatives could be taken. A short-life working group has recently been set up to consider exactly what those initiatives might be, to try and improve access generally, but particularly in rural areas.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware that all general dental and general medical practitioners in North Angus, Grampian, Shetland, Orkney and Moray have been advised that waiting lists for routine referrals to Aberdeen royal infirmary have been closed? Does he agree that that is a major blow to the provision of dental services in the north-east and that those problems, which are overwhelming the service, will result in its destruction if the lack of investment is not addressed, as a matter of urgency, by the Executive?

Iain Gray: Oral health is one of the priorities that we have set for health, as are initiatives to try to reduce waiting times, so it is a matter that we expect to discuss. Once again, it is for the local health board and the local health trusts to try to resolve the problem that the member described.

Dirt Bikes

13. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what regulations exist to govern the use of dirt bikes on public land by those under the age of 16. (S1O-1038)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay): The provision of regulations governing the use of various types of transport on land depends on the specific status of the land concerned.

Karen Whitefield: I make the minister aware of the case of one of my constituents, Mrs Condon, whose young son Paul was seriously injured while walking along a path beside a public road, by an eight-year-old boy who was riding a dirt bike. Will the minister give me a commitment that he will

examine the safety implications of that case, and review the need for changes to the legislation?

Angus MacKay: In addition to the specific circumstances, the way in which the regulations would be enforced would depend on which type of land the dirt bike was travelling. I am sorry to hear of the injury to the individual concerned. If Karen Whitefield is willing to write to me in detail about the case, I will undertake to examine the matter and to write back with a detailed examination of the position.

Local Authority Pay Awards

14. Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what the cost was to local authorities in 1998-99 of self-financing local authority pay awards and what was its estimated effect on the provision of public services. (S10-1040)

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): Pay is a matter for local authorities themselves to consider, when setting their budgets and determining their spending priorities. We do not hold that information centrally.

Mr Welsh: Nevertheless, does the minister accept that seven years of self-financing pay awards has taken £700 million out of local authorities' budgets and caused enormous strain on existing resources? Will he admit that that policy inevitably leads to higher council taxes, increased unemployment and cuts to services throughout Scotland? How does the minister explain that Tory finance policy to his Labour local government colleagues?

Mr McAveety: It is a sort of "Groundhog Day" with that question, every time we have question time. The settlements in the past two years have been much better than local government has had in the past, with a rise in real terms up to 2002. The real issue is the serious debate about how to resource the many areas in local government—and other aspects of the block grant—that are competing for resources.

If the Scottish National party would identify how it would attack other aspects of the block grant settlement—and tell the public how it would raise it further—that would be fine. However, it gives us only the beginning of the sentence and not its conclusion—that is not serious politics; it is playing at it.

Mr Welsh: The minister must surely acknowledge that his Government is spending £500 million less on local government services than was spent under the Tories and that those inevitable cuts will lead to council tax increases. When ring-fenced expenditure and extra Government burdens are taken into account,

along with inflation, there is less money for local government, which means cuts, closures and higher unemployment. That is his responsibility.

Mr McAveety: Before we walk the lonely roads of the SNP's picture of miserable local authorities, let us get the real picture. I will say it again: there has been a rise in real terms in the past two years. Key priority areas—as agreed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—particularly in education and social work, have been addressed.

The other fundamental issue is how we address flexibility at a local level. The member asked about ring-fencing—local councils themselves still have the flexibility to determine 90 per cent of local government expenditure. I hope that the principle of subsidiarity is supported by the member, in recognising the way in which local councils can allocate resources to priorities at a local level.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister accept that there is a further problem that compounds the situation to which Mr Welsh referred, as many local authorities have a latent problem with capital infrastructure not being maintained and going out of service? Does the minister agree, given that he has said that he is anxious to encourage co-operation, that a national directive to local authorities commissioning a survey on all their capital infrastructures might be useful?

Mr McAveety: Recently, the wonderful Minister for Finance, Jack McConnell, and I were at a meeting to address the issue of capital finance for local authorities. Many COSLA representatives were delighted that for the first time there is room for growth in the capital allocation to them.

It is a bit rich to hear Annabel Goldie tell of the nirvana of Tory capital investment in public services over the past 20 years. Having, as a delegate, experienced central Government's inability to address the capital investment needs in many parts of Scotland, I remind her that the Executive has a much more open-door approach.

We also want to address ways in which to lever in new investment. One of the radical ways in which we are doing that is through public-private partnership. For example, the investment in secondary schools in Glasgow, which I announced this week, will deliver substantial investment over the next two to three years. Those are flexible responses that recognise the legacy of the major capital underspend of the Tories.

We are combining public expenditure with private investment in a positive way to deliver the much needed investment in local services for which people have been crying out for years, but which was not delivered by the Conservative Government.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does the minister accept that the Executive's proposed budget will fail to protect vital core services in councils such as Aberdeenshire, as we witnessed in the lobby of the Parliament this week? Does he recognise that people's jobs are on the line? What is he going to do about it?

Mr McAveety: The Minister for Finance and I have met representatives of Aberdeenshire Council, including Audrey Findlay, who was present at our discussion with COSLA on Monday. We have considered the guideline flexibility for Aberdeenshire Council, as Mr McConnell announced this week.

The question of priority services needs to be addressed at a local level. I hope that the council can work with trade unions to ensure that there are no compulsory job losses. People need to negotiate at a local level how best to address the financial settlement that has been reached.

Nephrops Industries

15. Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to solve the present difficulties being faced by the Scottish nephrops fishing and processing industries. (S10-1056)

The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson): Stocks of nephrops—otherwise known as prawns—are currently in good condition. I am pleased that during last December's Fisheries Council we were able to negotiate an increased total allowable catch of nephrops in the North sea and avoid quota cuts in waters to the west of Scotland. Prices for this stock increased substantially last year and provided the fishery is managed sensibly, prospects seem reasonably healthy.

Mr McGrigor: I thank the minister for his answer. Does he realise that price is now the question? Does he recognise the importance of the prawn industry, especially to the west coast fishermen? Is he aware that, this week, the price of whole prawns plummeted another £5 per stone, to reach an all time low, and that the price of small prawn creels is now half of what it was in 1979? Does he agree that the main reason for that drop is the over-landing by large fishing boats using twin-rig trawls in the North sea? What will he do to protect the livelihoods of the west coast fishing communities that depend on prawn fishing?

Mr Home Robertson: There has been a significant increase in the targeting of the prawn fishery, not only by former whitefish boats, as Mr McGrigor described, but by new, efficient, under-10m boats. There is now an opportunity to develop both the fishery and the market. However, there is

also a risk of damaging the stocks and oversupplying the market, as Mr McGrigor suggests. My officials are well aware of the problem. I assure him that the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency is keeping a close eye on the situation.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister tell us what help the Executive has given to Scotland's fish processors so that they can meet their obligations under the urban waste water directive? What more help does it plan to give before jobs are shed due to the exorbitant costs involved in meeting those obligations?

Mr Home Robertson: I am not quite sure how Mr Lochhead can associate a question about the urban waste water directive with question 15.

Richard Lochhead: It was a question about the processing industry.

Mr Home Robertson: His question would have been more appropriately addressed to Sarah Boyack. However, we understand the importance of the processing industry and we have been actively engaged in discussions with people in the industry. Next week, I will be in Aberdeen to talk to people about it again.

Health Boards (Meetings)

16. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Minister for Health and Community Care last met representatives of health boards in Scotland and what matters they discussed. (S10-1055)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): The Minister for Health and Community Care meets representatives of health boards regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. The minister is meeting health board and trust chairmen in Dunkeld this afternoon, as we speak.

Mary Scanlon: Why are our hospitals facing a £50 million deficit? What is the minister going to do about it?

Iain Gray: Clearly, we are concerned to ensure that all national health service trusts remain financially healthy. It is true that 18 trusts have forecast deficits. Recently, 12 of those trusts either improved or stabilised their position. However, it is important to keep a sense of proportion. The combined deficit is significantly less than 1 per cent of their forecast income. Our officials work closely with senior management in the affected trusts to help them prepare plans that will ensure continued high-quality patient care while achieving financial balance year on year.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): Will the minister talk to his senior colleague when she gets back from Dunkeld and impress upon her the

need to ensure that Lothian Health Board does not become the victim of the area's success in terms of population growth and of the number and quality of services that people have come to expect? The Arbuthnott report must be revisited and the amount of money that it will take out of health services in Lothian must be revised.

Iain Gray: Following wide consultation on its report, the Arbuthnott group has been asked to do further work on a couple of aspects. We emphasise that we remain committed to the principle of allocating health resources fairly. That means allocating them to try to deal with the kind of health inequalities that have been debated on a number of occasions in this chamber. Margo MacDonald's question is flawed. What makes change possible is the guarantee to each and every health board in Scotland that it will have real-terms increases in its resources over the coming years. No money will be taken away from any health board.

17. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met Tayside Health Board and what issues were discussed. (S10-1072)

The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray): I refer Ms Cunningham to my answer to Mrs Scanlon.

Roseanna Cunningham: The minister will, I am sure, be aware of my constituents' great concern about the impact of the acute services review on the Tayside Health Board area—in particular, the impact on the services delivered at present by Perth royal infirmary. On Monday, I met staff from the maternity unit at PRI. There are great fears about the future of maternity services there. Will the minister say whether he or his boss is prepared to come and listen directly to my constituents' concerns? I have now invited them to do so twice.

Iain Gray: I regret that the response to that invitation—kind though it may have been—is likely to remain the same, but of course we support the review and redesign of acute services. They are an important and powerful means of ensuring that people in all parts of Scotland have access to the highest possible standards of modern service. We believe—it is an important belief—that decisions on the detailed configuration of local services are best taken locally. Tayside Health Board is still developing its proposals for acute hospital services and we would encourage it to involve all its planning partners, the public and interest groups in that process. Although we are aware of concerns about services at Perth royal infirmary, those concerns are being considered in the context of the acute services review. We remain convinced that those matters are best decided locally in partnership with local people.

First Minister's Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Westminster (Visits)

1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he next plans to visit the Westminster Parliament. (S1F-72)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I was there on 12 January 2000 and, sadly, it turned out to be a one-line whip. However, I am going again on 9 February and, of course, visit Westminster regularly.

Mr Salmond: I am sure that, like me, the First Minister likes to welcome distinguished visitors to the Parliament. This morning, I was delighted to meet and welcome Mr Tom Conti when he visited the Parliament as a guest of Colin Campbell.

When the First Minister next goes to the Westminster Parliament, will he take the opportunity to talk to the Prime Minister about the press report in *The Scotsman* last Friday, which announced the Prime Minister's visit to Scotland under the headline:

"Blair visit to 'reassure' Scots over devolution

Labour turmoil continues as Dewar is forced to defend another aide"?

The article argued the line from Labour sources that the Prime Minister's visit to Scotland was to shore up the First Minister's incompetent Administration. Is that the reason for the visit, or are London spin doctors as out of control as the ones in Edinburgh?

The First Minister: I should make an important announcement—I have no one to welcome in the gallery today, although all who are here are of course very welcome. As for Tom Conti, I was also delighted to meet his wife, Kara Wilson, who was at university with me and who gave me a very pleasant kiss. Sir David, may I say, without sounding pathetic, that that is not something that happens to me every day. *[Laughter.]*

As for the report in *The Scotsman*, I hope that the Prime Minister will be able to say a few words of welcome to the Parliament. The chamber will remember that, for very good reasons, he was unfortunately unable to be at the official opening ceremonies. He will be in Scotland for a very simple purpose: to address the annual conference of the Scottish Labour party. If he were not coming for that purpose, I cannot think of all the ingenious words that would be used to suggest that that was a snub, a disaster and a repudiation of Scotland.

Mr Salmond: On the subject of snubs, I am sure

that Mr George Foulkes is recovering from not being welcomed by the First Minister.

I want to return to the report in *The Scotsman*, which quotes senior Labour sources in London as saying:

"[Mr Dewar's administration] were meant to be the best and brightest that Scottish Labour had to offer, but they have displayed a naivete and incompetence that is quite extraordinary. People are appalled by the sheer naked incompetence of it."

If we leave to one side the "naked" bit, are not people right to be appalled by the Executive's incompetence, just as they should be appalled at the arrogance of London spin doctors who say that all that is required to sort everything out is a visit from the Prime Minister?

The First Minister: I have noticed a rather depressing tendency for Alex Salmond to reduce everything to arguments ad hominem. If he wants to judge this Parliament and this Administration, perhaps he should consider some of the achievements and policies that we have pursued. I am unashamedly proud of the fact that we were able to announce a settlement for student finance, which is very distinctly built for Scotland and will put £50 million gross into student support. The settlement was described by the spokesman for the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals as a new and better ball game compared with the old system.

I am proud of the fact that, since March 1998, waiting lists in the health service have fallen by more than 15 per cent. I am proud of the fact that we have the lowest unemployment claimant count for 24 years. I am certainly proud of the fact that we have the biggest building programme for Scottish schools that we have ever seen.

Mr Salmond: How interesting. The same source said in *The Scotsman* that there were concerns about

"the fallout south of the Border over student tuition fees"

and the Administration in Scotland.

The First Minister says that he knows the reason for the Prime Minister's visit. Are we expected to believe that the fact that the last prime ministerial visit to Scotland took place during the Hamilton by-election and that the next will take place a week before the Ayr by-election is mere coincidence? Or are people in Scotland entitled to be appalled by the Administration's incompetence, by the effrontery of the Labour spin doctors in London and by the gall of a Prime Minister who wants to treat this Parliament as a political plaything a week before a by-election? *[Applause.]*

The First Minister: The noise of the chief whip's clapping shows a certain loyalty.

I very much hope that Alex Salmond will listen with courtesy to what the Prime Minister has to say. I hope that Alex Salmond will not tailor his response to the visit to whether the Prime Minister goes to the Ayr by-election, but I rather fear that that is what will happen.

I say to Mr Salmond that, occasionally, people come to my surgeries clutching newspaper cuttings and boring me with them—*[Interruption.]* I regard them with some suspicion.

Scottish Executive

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether he will outline the Scottish Executive's priorities. (S1F-74)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): The Executive's priorities were set out clearly in "Making it work together: a programme for government", which was published last September.

It is important that we concentrate on major policy areas, such as health, education and the strengthening of the economy. I offer that to Mr McLetchie as a friendly, early warning point, because I fear that if the Scottish Conservatives approach the next election in their present state of confusion, the slaughter is likely to be terrible.

David McLetchie: In a week in which Wim Duisenberg, the president of the European Central Bank, said that in his opinion it will be many years before the United Kingdom will be ready to join the euro, and when according to opinion polls some 70 per cent of British people—indeed 58 per cent of Labour voters—want to retain the pound, will the First Minister tell us—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order.

David McLetchie: Members must contain themselves.

Is it one of the First Minister's priorities to continue his unholy alliance with Alex Salmond and Jim Wallace in the Scotland in Europe campaign, which they launched so enthusiastically last autumn?

The First Minister: Our position on Europe is well known and well set out.

Although I may be misjudging the situation—genuine prejudice may be involved—I fear that for the sake of short-term electoral gain the Conservatives are trying to rule out any progress at all on the European front. That is unfortunate for a major political party. Most of us take the view that when the circumstances are right, there is a very strong case for entry to the euro. That is something that must be judged in terms of its impact on employment and on our economy and, of course, has to be endorsed by the people in a

referendum.

That is an eminently sensible and proper position for the Government to take. I recognise that populist slogans about the pound may give some consolation to those who are in struggle, but such slogans are not grown-up politics.

David McLetchie: The First Minister will acknowledge that Mr Duisenberg's comments on the timetable are far more in accord with my party's policy than with the various policies announced daily by HM Government.

For the benefit of other members of the Parliament, I observe that the First Minister did not answer my initial question about the Scotland in Europe campaign to abolish the pound in which his party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party are enthusiastic participants. I am surprised by the First Minister's coyness; it is obviously the euro love that dare not speak its name.

If I could I move on to another issue—[MEMBERS: "No."] I was generous with the amount of time I gave the First Minister to answer. I am sure that he can listen for a few moments to this very pertinent question.

As the First Minister is aware, HM Government, the Scottish Executive and many public agencies are spending millions of pounds on the Government's national handover—or changeover—plan to abolish the pound and adopt the euro. In light of Mr Duisenberg's comments, will the First Minister instruct Government agencies in Scotland to abandon their participation in the campaign and so release millions of pounds to ministers to spend on hard-pressed public services? Or is it the First Minister's policy to continue to hedge his bets at the taxpayers' expense?

The First Minister: The answer, quite clearly, is no. I like to think that Mr McLetchie will go and talk to Scottish industry. If he does, I accept that he will find a variety of views, but among many people he will find a certain degree of contempt for the black and white way in which the argument is presented by the Conservative party and for the popularisation of the campaign for progress in Europe and the possibility of joining—

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): He means that we are winning, David.

The First Minister: That is very interesting. I suspect that that is all that matters to David McLetchie—the hope that he is winning. He should perhaps look at the polls and be just a little bit more humble. The important thing is to have an intelligent debate, which is the one thing of which I see no sign at all.

I offer an olive branch to David McLetchie. I

know that the Conservative party in Scotland has a proven record of being able to change its mind. I was particularly touched when I listened to "Good Morning Scotland" today to hear the leader of the Tory party in Westminster's heart-felt tribute to the need for a Scottish Parliament. I genuinely appreciated his comments. I hope that Mr McLetchie will undergo a similar conversion to a more reasonable attitude to the important issues he raised in his question.

Local Government Act 1986

3. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's timetable is for the publication of the guidelines with regard to the repeal of section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986. (S1F-75)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): My colleague, Sam Galbraith, announced last week the package of safeguards that will be put in place before the repeal takes effect. Part of that package will be a review of the existing curricular materials used by teachers. A working group is being appointed to undertake the review, the membership of which will include representatives of parents, teachers and Churches.

We will publish the group's views on the package of safeguards and its proposals for revising the guidelines before a final vote is taken on the bill. We certainly will not bring the repeal of section 2A into force until that work has been concluded and revised guidelines are in place.

Mr Monteith: I thank the First Minister for that full response. I was aware of Sam Galbraith's letter to school boards, but I am disappointed to hear that the guidelines will be available only before a final vote and not at an earlier stage of consideration of the bill.

If the current guidelines, which allow the discussion of homosexuality in schools, fail to work to the First Minister's satisfaction, will he explain why parents should accept that the new guidelines will work to their satisfaction? Would not it be in the best interests of calm and sensitive debate on section 2A to delay the possible repeal of the section so that we may have a full inquiry into all sex education in Scottish schools?

The First Minister: I do not agree, but I am genuinely happy if Mr Monteith is in favour of a rational, good-tempered and balanced debate on the issue, and I would welcome his contribution to such a debate.

The answer is to get a package of safeguards that reflect the values of family, marriage and stable relationships, and which offer as a basis for the upbringing of children security, stability and, hopefully, happiness.

I think that the best safeguard is not section 2A; the best safeguard is the skill and professionalism of teachers in a very sensitive area, the policies laid down in schools by head teachers, the vigilance of HM inspectorate of schools and, very important, the concern and involvement of parents.

Mr Monteith will remember that any parent who is upset or concerned about what might be happening has every right to raise the issue that concerns them, which will be properly and immediately investigated. I hope that it will not be necessary, but any parent can, in extremis, withdraw their child from sex education classes.

It is a question of how to promote tolerance. I fear that the existence of section 2A on the statute book does not, in my balanced judgment, do that; indeed, it stands in its way.

Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab): I am glad that the First Minister's reply took some time, as I was quite speechless on hearing Brian Monteith talking about a calm and sensible debate on section 2A.

Does the First Minister agree that the issue of the repeal of section 2A should not be used as a vehicle for party political jibes or for the expression of personal prejudice, as that detracts from the importance of appropriate sex education and the promotion of good sexual health for all Scotland's young people, whatever their sexual orientation?

Does the First Minister agree that this Parliament would be letting the young people of Scotland down if its political parties did not work together to promote appropriate sex education in encouraging young people to engage in their first sexual experience when they are older, which would reduce the current unacceptable level of teenage conceptions and abortions in Scotland?

The First Minister: I agree with a great deal of what Kate MacLean said, and with the spirit in which she said it. We all want an effective framework that encourages children to face up to the real world and equips them to do that effectively and responsibly. There is no doubt that the main weight remains on the shoulders of parents and family. Schools have an important role to play, and we want to get it right.

I say to Kate—and I mean this—that there are encouraging signs on this matter. There is a willingness, at least in this chamber, to examine the arguments and to conduct a debate in the way that members have described in the past few minutes. I hope that that will become the norm throughout this chamber in areas as sensitive and, in a sense, as non-political but as socially important, as this.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I note, in relation to Sam Galbraith's announcement last week about the working group, and in particular about the materials to be used in sex education in classrooms, the First Minister's comments about the organisations or representative bodies that will be involved. Can the First Minister be more specific about which organisations and, in particular, which bodies from the teaching profession, will be involved in the working group? It is teachers who will be responsible for using the material the working group may provide.

The First Minister: I do not want to be more specific at this point. Some thought is going into the matter and it is important to have a properly balanced working group that will carry out the remit we are all setting it.

I hope that there will be an announcement reasonably soon, but until people have been approached and until we are a little further down the track, it would not be helpful for me to speculate.

Convention of the Highlands and Islands

4. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what plans there are for the future of the convention of the Highlands and Islands. (S1F-79)

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I am pleased to announce that the convention of the Highlands and Islands will be reconvened in March this year. It is a difficult matter, because the number of possible participants has increased enormously, and the political circumstances, with the setting up of this Parliament, have changed.

There are now 16 MSPs representing the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area in the Parliament, and there are other elected members at parliamentary level. There is no longer a shortage of opportunity for the parliamentary representatives of the Highlands and Islands to make representations to the UK Parliament and to this Parliament's Executive. Members of the Scottish, Westminster and European Parliaments will not therefore be part of the reconstituted convention.

We will concentrate on the continuing need for the Executive to meet the key agencies responsible for the economic development of the Highlands and Islands, which need to work together to secure a prosperous future for the region. That includes local enterprise companies, the area tourist boards and, above all, the locally elected representatives of councils.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the members of the previous convention and thank them for their contribution to its work. I hope that,

in its new geometry, the convention will resume its valuable role in providing direct access to ministers for the key agencies in the Highlands and Islands.

Maureen Macmillan: I welcome the First Minister's announcement and I hope that the convention will give local representatives the direct access to the Executive that we enjoy in this Parliament.

How will the local authority representatives be chosen? Will the convention continue to meet in public?

The First Minister: I do not want to anticipate a decision by the convention about meeting in public. I hope that it does. No doubt that will be discussed when it reconvenes.

I recognise that a controversy surrounds the constitution of the convention. Alasdair Morrison, who has been involved in many members' business debates at the end of the day, tells me that he has taken part in five such debates on the Highlands and Islands so far. Through our committee system and the chamber, we have a great opportunity for talking about issues relating to the area.

We wanted to make the scale of the convention practical and useful. It seemed to us that it was right to concentrate on the membership that I outlined. I am grateful to Maureen Macmillan for understanding that.

Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I am sure that the First Minister will be aware of the enthusiasm and co-operation that has been demonstrated by all members of the convention of the Highlands and Islands in the past, and in particular the excellent work that they have undertaken on behalf of communities in the Highlands and Islands.

Will he ensure that the Scottish Executive will encourage and support the continuation of this all-party group?

The First Minister: I can promise the member that there will be strong support for the convention and for its work. It was a useful organisation in the two years I was Secretary of State for Scotland, which is one of the reasons why—despite some difficulties about its constitution—we were so keen to see it re-established.

It is right that we should have this listening post. It is right that—particularly at a local authority level—the Highlands and Islands should come together to put arguments to ministers. I look forward to being part of that process and—to be straightforward—learning from that process.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I am sure that the First Minister

agrees that people in the Highlands and Islands want politicians to work together. That is impossible if we are not at the table together. A man of his intelligence would surely find it easy to devise a model that allows all elected parliamentarians—from this place, Westminster and Europe—to be represented. We could operate on a rota basis—we do not expect everybody to be able to be there on every occasion.

Has the First Minister abandoned consensus? Has he abandoned the slogan, "working together"? If he has, I would ask him, "Donald, where is your democracy now?"

The First Minister: I do not take that from Fergus Ewing. Perhaps I will say no more than that.

I will say that the business has been difficult. Fergus Ewing—who is in touch with his part of the Highlands and has great access to ministers and is able to put his point of view in this chamber—should not assume that the convention cannot operate properly without the benefit of his wisdom.

One of the most strongly put representations that I heard was that we should drop all the local representation and have the convention made up entirely of parliamentarians. That was an extreme choice that we clearly did not want to take. Along with the Westminster MPs from the Highlands and Islands, there are 16 MSPs from the area and eight MSPs who have an interest in the Highlands and Islands. A body made up of those representatives as well as local representatives would be unwieldy.

We will see how things go. We will see what those who are on the convention make of it. I intend to try to make a success of it and I hope that I will have Fergus Ewing's help.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): On a point of order. I crave your indulgence for some guidance, Presiding Officer. Which minister—it may be your own committee or bureau—is responsible for day-to-day expenditure on the Holyrood project? I find it extremely difficult to get anyone to own up to responsibility for the money that is being spent daily. Is that operational or financial?

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is responsible, and I answer for it. If you lodge a question, I shall answer it.

Sustainable Development

15:35

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): Environmental and sustainable policies are at the heart of everything that our Executive stands for. In moving this motion, I want to keep sustainable development at the top of the agenda and to demonstrate the way in which we are making sustainable development a reality.

It is right for this Parliament to declare its support not only for what the Scottish Executive is doing, but for making sustainable development an integral part of the democratic process in Scotland. This is not about academic theories; it is about the way in which we make development sustainable in the long run. We want, and I quote from Brundtland,

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

For the Scottish Executive, sustainable development is about two things. First, it is about making decisions with all the issues on the table, ensuring that we understand the implications for the three arms of sustainable development—economic growth, social justice and the environment. Secondly, it is about taking a long-term view. We have become used to talking about issues on a short time scale—a political time scale—and to looking no more than five years ahead. We must think about delivering continuous progress over a much longer period.

Sustainable development is not new; it came to world prominence at the Rio summit in 1992. In 1994, the UK was among the first countries to address sustainable development. In 1999, the Secretary of State for Scotland's advisory group on sustainable development set out its proposals to the Scottish Parliament. Throughout the world, countries are addressing the challenge of sustainable development in ways that meet their needs, as Brundtland suggested.

Issues such as climate change require global action. Making a commitment to sustainable development is no longer an option for us; it is vital to our lives and is a matter of life and death for future generations. It must be central to the work of government at all levels, and it needs to be translated into everyday language and practical methods. We must address the ways in which we can change our behaviour.

Last year, the Secretary of State for Scotland's advisory group on sustainable development submitted its final report. It had worked for five

years to bridge the gap between the aspirations of Brundtland and the action that was needed in Scotland. The report sets out 10 key action points, which are addressed not to the Scottish Executive, but to this Parliament. It is an excellent piece of work and I commend it to members. In a sense, it has been my route map for the past eight months. As a top priority, the advisory group said that the Parliament and the Executive should demonstrate committed leadership. It also said that we should have a debate on sustainable development.

Today's debate is the start of our discussions in the Scottish Parliament. We must further that debate so that people other than those who are already committed will begin to talk about the issue. The people who have the power to change our lives and deliver sustainable change should be involved in developing the structures and mechanisms that will make the change a long-term one.

We will report to Parliament; I intend to keep members informed of progress. A key part of the remit of the ministerial group on sustainable Scotland is to support Cabinet colleagues in attempts to embed sustainable development in all their policies and programmes. One of the group's first conclusions was that some key players from outside the Scottish Executive should be invited to join it. We must ensure that some ownership of the group is by organisations other than the Executive. We also want the group's work to make a difference—that means securing the involvement of people from a range of sectors, in particular from the business, environmental and education sectors.

I am delighted to announce the first of our appointments to the group; Kevin Dunion, director of Friends of the Earth Scotland has agreed to be a member. I invited him to join not merely so that he would agree with what we said, but so that he would help us to push on with the implementation of sustainable development objectives. I will inform Parliament of the full membership of the group as it is agreed.

Crucially, devolution gives us the opportunity to decide on the implementation of policies that will be best for Scotland. Last week, we invited tenders for work on Scottish indicators of sustainable development. I know that for many people sustainable development is somewhat intangible, but we need to know whether we are making progress and whether the steps that we are taking are steps in the right direction. There are past examples of such indicators being produced in Scotland—that gives us a strong starting point. I have asked experts to look at that work and to compare it with the best in Britain, Europe and the world and to identify the best indicators for Scotland. We must also ensure that

those indicators have wider ownership than merely that of the Parliament; the Executive and I will be running a consultative process from early in the summer to ensure that. Once the indicators have been established, we can start to build objectives and targets into all our programmes.

We need to set some priorities now, however. The key priorities in sustainable development should be to tackle the issues of waste, energy and travel. We know that reduction in the waste of resources is right; we know that raising energy efficiency and encouraging renewable energy is right; and we know that there is much more that can be done to make travel more sustainable. Waste, energy and travel bring costs to every business. Those are key concerns for everybody, every day. They are also key issues in the achievement of social justice. We have powers and we must ensure that they are used to maximum effect.

I want to ensure that we provide guidance and assistance to a range of bodies in Scotland. That guidance will enable them to relate their everyday work to the Executive's overall goals for sustainable development. The ministerial group has agreed to convene a group that will develop guidance on identifying new approaches to the key issues and on how work on those issues should be related to other initiatives.

Delivery by the Executive on the issues of waste, energy and travel will mean that companies will perform better and that public bodies will make better use of our money. We will all benefit not only in the future, but now. The challenge is to improve practice in order to improve our economic prosperity, to deliver on aspirations for social justice and to address long-term environmental quality. Using indicators, and with guidance and initiatives on waste, energy and travel, the Executive will have a powerful and practical approach to sustainable development.

We are not alone—through the devolved Administrations in Britain and through the UK Government, there are initiatives to take sustainable development forward. The National Assembly for Wales has begun work on the issue. I have met ministers from the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive—ideas are coming together there, too. In England, the regional development agencies are advancing sustainable development as part of their remit. Even with all that activity, there is still value in our all coming together and considering an overview for the UK as a whole.

The UK Government has proposed replacing both the British Government panel on sustainable development and the UK round table on sustainable development with a new sustainable development commission. I have agreed to work

with the UK Government in establishing that commission to ensure that it reflects the interests of people in Scotland and to ensure that its membership, remit and work programme help in examination of sustainable development practice. The commission must also add new ideas and innovation that we in Scotland can also examine. It is vital that we remain plugged in at the UK level while engaging at a European level.

We have done much in the past eight months—our Parliament is already beginning to exert a new force for sustainable development. The constitutional steering group recommended that Executive bills should be accompanied by policy memorandums to cover the effects of those bills on sustainable development, among other things. I would argue that that is beginning to concentrate minds—we must think carefully about the impact of every bill. For some issues, such as the national park, that might seem relatively straightforward. For other issues, thinking is much more difficult and at a less advanced stage. None the less, that approach is a useful discipline and I hope that we can develop it.

For example, we know that the planning system will have profound effects on our future—it defines much of the way in which we live. One of my initiatives is the announcement of a review of the national planning guidance system, so that sustainable development will be at the heart of our objectives. We are also about to consult on the building control technical standards for conservation of fuel and power. Energy efficiency issues are key to sustainable development and the building control system represents a practical way in which to address those issues.

The Executive's report on social justice included targets and milestones and put our commitment to sustainable development well to the fore. Sustainable development has the power to deliver benefits to people who are socially excluded—benefits such as warmer homes, homes that are cheaper to heat, cleaner local environments and better public transport.

In the programme for government, we said that we would work with people to develop greater understanding of and involvement in sustainable development. We will use all available channels, such as the civic forum, community councils, local authorities and the Local Agenda 21 process, in order to reach deep into Scottish life and to enable people outwith our Parliament to become involved in the discussions.

I commend the SNP's sensible amendment—I have considerable sympathy with its main thrust and tone. In a sense, it is symbolic that I am able to agree with so much of it. However, I want to say a few words to explain the Executive's perspective and why we do not support the amendment.

We have a targeted approach. We have adopted milestones and are embedding the monitoring process. However, I do not think that sustainable development should exist in a vacuum, separated from other policy—it must be embedded in mainstream policy if we are to make real, radical shifts. We have good strategies in place on a range of issues, such as social inclusion, air quality, the national waste strategy, transport and the voluntary sector—and there will be more such strategies. Each of those strategies must deliver sustainable development and must reflect our key concerns about it.

The establishment of a super-strategy, above all those other strategies, on sustainable development is not the right way forward, as it would separate us from the radical shift that we must make. At this stage, we should reject that approach. However, I agree with many of the other points that the amendment raises, such as on analysis, obligations, awareness and developing mechanisms and targets. I say that in a constructive way but—I do not think that consensus means that we must agree 100 per cent—I wish to oppose the amendment for the reason that I have outlined.

I see the Presiding Officer instructing me to wind up—I shall begin to do so.

We are beginning to make sustainable development a reality, both in the Parliament and in the Executive. We have begun to ensure that Victoria Quay meets high environmental standards. The vehicles that we use in the Scottish Executive are dual fuelled, which brings pollution benefits. Every letter that we write contains a declared environmental profile.

The Parliament must also make the change; it must take sustainable development on board. It is important that each committee also does that—just as the Executive must address sustainable development, so each committee must make it a theme of the scrutiny process. The advisory group on sustainable development asked both the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive to take a lead.

Sustainable development is about striking a balance and taking decisions that the next generation will be able to live with. We must put into practice that laudable objective. A commitment to sustainable development will place us among the more advanced Parliaments of the world. The opportunity is open to us—we must grasp it. I commend the Executive motion to the Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament places sustainable development at the core of its work and commends the Scottish Executive for its commitment to integrate the principles of sustainable

development into all Government policies for the benefits it brings to the people of Scotland, now and in the future.

15:49

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I am grateful for the tenor and spirit of the minister's speech. It may come as a surprise to some in this chamber and elsewhere that I do not seek to take issue with the principles and intentions of the Executive's motion.

As I have previously intimated, to some incredulity from Labour and Liberal members, there are areas where it is my party's intention not simply to oppose, but to be supportive. There are issues that divide us, as in this morning's debate, but sustainable development is different. The concept requires us all to plan to create a better society. I hope that the minister will accept the sincerity of my remarks and I look forward to being able to provide the Executive with support and assistance.

I am grateful for the minister's comments about our amendment, but I wish to press it none the less. It has been proposed not just by the SNP, but by the World Wide Fund for Nature, which approached the minister earlier this week. The amendment is meant to be constructive and to flesh out the bare bones of the motion. It is intended to ensure that noble aspirations can be quantified and met, and that the rhetoric of this Parliament is matched by action in public.

What is sustainable development? Definitions abound, but I am taken by the one coined by the World Commission on Environment and Development, to which the minister referred in her speech. It defines sustainable development as

"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."

On that, the minister and I are united.

We are now in the 21st century and we all recognise that the earth's resources are finite. Generations ago, no thought was given to the possibility that some resources that seemed abundant would run out. That is not a condemnation of those who came before us, as they did not enjoy the knowledge that is available to us. They lived at a time when the prospect of exhausting resources was simply inconceivable. Just as, before Christopher Columbus, it was believed either that the earth was limitless or that people would fall off the edge if they went too far, until recently we were blind to the environmental disaster that was fast approaching. Times have changed, however. We have opened our eyes—where once we were blind, we now can see. We can quantify our world. We can calculate the resources that we have used and squandered and measure the limits of what remains. We can

quantify the damage that we have inflicted on our planet and the danger that faces it unless we change our ways.

Sustainable development is about more than environmental protection; it is about planning the interaction of our economy, our environment and our society to their mutual advantage. Those three elements cannot be examined in isolation. Their interaction needs to be in harmony. If we distort the balance, we run the risk of jeopardising one of the components, each of which is vital. That is why the promotion of sustainability must be an underpinning philosophy, not a mandatory policy to be applied rigidly without proper appreciation of its effects.

There are occasions when a particular policy may have negative consequences for the environment but must be implemented for economic or social reasons. Similarly, a policy may be economically advantageous but have to be rejected because of the damage that it would inflict on the environment and because it would undermine society. We cannot pursue short-term growth at any cost, because the future competitiveness of Scotland as a country in which we live, work and play depends on safeguarding our priceless environmental assets. A socially progressive policy, too, may have to be curtailed because of its economic or environmental impact.

Sustainable development is not environmental Luddism; nor is it the slash and burn of unrestrained free-market capitalism or unlimited social libertarianism. It is simply a sensible balance of environmental protection, wealth creation and social justice. United they stand, divided they fall.

Some small nations have already shown the way; where they have led, we must aspire to follow. The Netherlands, for example, has sustainability written into its constitution. Its commitment is exemplified by article 21, which reads:

"The public authorities shall endeavour to ensure a good quality of life in the Netherlands and to protect and enhance the living environment."

When people ask us why we need independence, I tell them to look at the Netherlands, and then to look at us. They have a constitution that has sustainability written into it. We have Trident on the Clyde and a nuclear industry that we neither sought nor need.

Let me give an example of where sustainable development should be pursued through a coherent national plan. It is widely recognised—and the minister touched on this—that many in Scotland suffer appalling fuel poverty. However, we have rich energy resources over which we have little or no control. We have a nation

jeopardised, and sometimes poisoned, by a nuclear industry that we do not need and did not seek.

We have been given an opportunity that we have not yet taken—an opportunity that could be even more advantageous than the discovery of North sea oil off our shores should have been. We are ideally placed to harness from nature what has been given in abundance by wind, wave and sun. We have a bountiful opportunity to harness an environmentally friendly resource for the national collective good, with substantial economic potential for socially liberating advantage. As a nation, we have an opportunity collectively to move away from mass exploitation of expensive, finite resources towards exploitation of energy resources close to home that are both sustainable and renewable.

We have been bequeathed greater advantages than many other nations. So far we have not used them, but abused other resources that cannot be replenished. Now we have the opportunity to leave a legacy of affordable, accessible and renewable energy for future generations. We have to aspire to utilise those resources socially, economically and environmentally for our benefit.

In Scotland, the number of people employed in the wind industry is 200; in Denmark, it is 10,000. We can create jobs. In Scotland, 15 per cent of our electricity comes from renewable resources, but in Norway 100 per cent does. We can create a cleaner, better environment. No longer should young and old Scots huddle around fires in winter, unable to heat themselves, never mind their houses, while other resources, which cannot be replaced by future generations, are squandered.

Scotland entered the 20th century with one in five people having some involvement with the mining industry; we enter the 21st century with one deep mine in Scotland, a landscape in the central belt that was savaged by that industry, and communities and individuals scarred and diseased by the pursuit of coal. We now have the opportunity to ensure that history does not repeat itself for our current energy resources. We can create a sustainable, renewable energy policy. We can and must build a better nation for a fairer world.

In summary, we are happy that the minister has raised this matter. She can rest assured that her worthy intentions have our support. Our criticism—if we have any—concerns the lack of detail and the limit of the aspiration. We believe that our amendment adds to the detail and provides the mechanism to achieve the worthy aims that she espoused.

I move amendment S1M-486.1, to insert at end:

"and urges the Scottish Executive, in order to fulfil that

commitment, to prepare, through consultation, a strategy for implementation including an analysis of principal issues to be addressed, an indication of the targets and standards expected to be met, arrangements for independent monitoring and strategic direction for those expected to meet such commitments."

15:57

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): I thought at times during Kenny MacAskill's speech that I had strayed into time for reflection or thought for the day. In his generally consensual and constructive mode, he says much with which I agree; we do not intend to vote against either Kenny's amendment or the motion. The tone of self-congratulation in the motion jarred a little, but the principal thrust of our amendment, which, the minister will note, recycles her words substantially, is to strike a note on planning and development.

There was much excitement before the establishment of this Parliament about what it might mean for planning. Planning professionals and organisations had great expectations. I do not suggest that those expectations cannot be fulfilled, but I point out that we have not yet had a debate on planning—we have not had an opportunity to discuss whether and to what extent the Executive intends to change the approach to planning. Planning was mentioned only briefly in the minister's speech today, and I hope that she will soon communicate the general thrust of the decisions that she will make in the current round of planning decisions.

We can all share a belief in the concept of sustainability. As the minister said, that concept was first publicised by the Brundtland report, was built into the Rio declaration in 1992 and has been a recurring theme of international gatherings and agreements since then. Since the early 1990s, our planning guidelines and advice notices have been systematically amended to take into account the essential mission of sustainability.

We do not think that there is any conflict between economic development and sustainability. Sustainability is a measurement by which economic development proposals might be judged, shaped or moulded. We are concerned that, in her approach to new planning policy, the minister should continue to reflect on the need to make land available for essential purposes. One of the successes of planning in the past decade and more has been the extent to which it has been possible to recycle brownfield land. We all share that objective, but there are occasions when recycled, brownfield sites cannot be found—for example for town-centre retailing, house building or economic development. It is important that we continue to have a commitment when necessary to use greenfield sites, taking sustainability as the criterion to select the sites. It is also important that

we measure and mitigate the environmental disadvantages and establish controls and conditions that balance development with sustainability.

Even in an economy that is considerably less heated than that of the south-east of the United Kingdom, there is urban cramming in many towns and cities in Scotland and tremendous pressure for development on every available scrap of land. We hear of land exchanging at prices that most of us find unbelievable—I have heard, anecdotally, of a site in Edinburgh selling for £6 million per acre. That is a serious distortion in our economy; it suggests the need for sensible development policies that will make land available for essential needs.

The City of Edinburgh Council's strategy of concentrating its development on brownfield sites but looking at a plan-led approach to releasing greenfield land in the south-east wedge is one that we should commend to all local authorities. When it is necessary to use greenfield or green-belt sites, that should be plan led and have built into it the transport criteria, such as the multi-modal corridors, that the Minister for Transport and the Environment has talked about on other occasions.

Many issues in addition to planning are relevant to this debate. We have had brief opportunities in Parliament to quiz the minister on statements she has made on air quality, waste management, the strategy for investment in water and the treatment of waste materials. We have not yet had a discussion on open-cast coal, quarrying or other minerals issues, but they are very significant for the environment. I hope that we will have the opportunity for a substantial exchange on all those interconnecting issues.

I emphasise that my amendment is lodged not in a disputatious tone, but to show that we accept and champion the principle of sustainability and welcome the ministerial group that the minister has established. I suggest that the Executive might wish to establish some openness by making the minutes or reports of the group's meetings available so that we all know where the debate is going.

Sarah Boyack: It is my intention to communicate the thrust of what we are discussing in the ministerial group on sustainable Scotland. I am looking at how we might do that through the Executive's website.

Mr Tosh: I thank the minister for that very positive statement, which allows us to conclude in a tone of considerable, broad agreement. We have only one, limited planet and we must pass it on to those who will come after us in as good shape as we can. In taking from it what we need, we must do the best that we can to minimise what

we take and to repair the damage of the past. In moving my amendment, I indicate an intention not to vote against the motion at decision time.

I move amendment S1M-486.2, to leave out from "places" to end and insert:

"approves the Scottish Executive's commitment to integrate the principles of sustainable development into all government policies for the benefits it brings to the people of Scotland, now and in the future, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to ensure that land and other resources will be made available for the economic development of Scotland."

16:03

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Today I have found out two things—that rhetoric can be at different levels and that it can be both consensual and aggressive. The contrast between the morning and the afternoon has been interesting.

I welcome what the Minister for Transport and the Environment said and much of what Kenny MacAskill and Murray Tosh said—much of their rhetoric was important in setting the tone of how the Parliament will deal with this issue. The Liberal Democrats welcome the commitment to and continued support for sustainable development and stronger environmental policies that were secured in the partnership agreement. The Scottish Executive is doing more for the environment than previous Administrations have done, but we must not be complacent. The Conservative and SNP spokesmen have illustrated how much more we need to do. In terms of giving a push to what the Executive is doing, that is important.

The key requirements for the environment are strategic environmental assessment and freedom of information. Those issues underpin much of what has been said today, particularly Murray Tosh's request for the minutes of the ministerial working group.

It has been difficult to define sustainable development; indeed, it may be foolish even to begin to try. I share the view of Scottish Environment Link when it argues that sustainability is a concept that policy makers should understand rather than waste time in attempting to define. I know that Sylvia Jackson is conducting a study on behalf of the European Committee into the European Community's sixth environmental action plan. That is the sort of practical work that I think will help this Parliament's understanding of the area.

The question that we must pose is: "Is Scotland sustainable?" Before today's debate, I read the 1996 study carried out by Friends of the Earth and funded jointly by the Scottish Office. It estimated that Scotland would have to cut its use of non-

renewable resources by 25 per cent within a decade. It suggested that we needed to address Scotland's continued reliance on fossil fuels, a point that Kenny MacAskill made—his point about renewables was also important.

As the report stated, we produce less than 10 per cent of our energy from renewable resources, whereas Denmark aims to get 100 per cent of its power from such sources by 2030. It also suggested that we needed to tackle the rate of traffic growth, which is one of the highest in Europe. Those are important themes, which encapsulate the difficulty of achieving the balance that sustainable development brings.

I have two practical points about renewables. I recently visited Scottish and Southern Energy in Perth—something that we in the Highlands and Islands still call the Hydro. The people whom I spoke to there said that an impediment to developing renewables is that, in those parts of Scotland where it is possible to generate wind and wave power, it is not possible to use the transmission capacity because that capacity simply does not exist. The electricity regulator's drive for cheaper power does not help generating companies to invest in increased capacity, nor does the regulator allow generators to create spare capacity in anticipation of renewable development. I think that the Executive has a role in changing that situation, and I urge the minister to consider that point in winding up.

Another difficulty is that the consumer may not be interested in green power; he or she wants cheap power. There is an added complication for environmentalists, who may oppose the development of renewable options such as wind farms in national scenic areas. There are competing demands and we must all be aware of them and try to work out the problems. The programme for government document, published last September, stated that the minister was committed to providing locational guidance on renewable energy development by the summer of 2000. That will be an important aspect of the debate.

My second point about renewables is this: *The Herald* reported on Monday that the value of glass from bottle banks is dropping to zero because the major company involved in recycling glass has found that the bottom has fallen out of the market, as the price of new glass is falling all the time. Local authorities face increasing difficulties because of such factors.

The progress that the Scottish Executive is making is important. When he winds up today, I would like the minister to outline the steps that have been taken to introduce the strategic environmental assessment in Scotland and what progress has been made. Parliament must strike a

practical balance between the increases that are needed in water quality and water charges for consumers, between increased power from renewables and the cost of electricity for consumers, and, as Robin Harper has said, between growing more organic food to satisfy consumer demand and the need for cheaper food. We must all toy with those balances and, irrespective of political boundaries, we must wrestle with those choices.

16:09

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I support the minister. One of the difficulties that I had in preparing for this debate was that the minister is making such rapid progress on all these issues that it is difficult to sort out from all the documents that we have been given which issues she has made progress on and which are still waiting to be done.

The Transport and the Environment Committee covers this part of the Parliament's work. Murray Tosh and Tavish Scott have illustrated that there is a great deal of consensus, enthusiasm and commitment on that committee. I am not even too far apart from Kenny MacAskill on many of the issues, except when he talks about the Kyoto agreement, because he never says how he will fund the commitments to that agreement or what the budgets will be.

In addition, the SNP manifesto for the election campaign had a commitment to the fuel duty escalator. The SNP was counting on that revenue to fund many of its commitments, yet when it produced a budget it forgot to include the escalator in it. That smacks of a lack of consistency and, although it may be unkind to say so, a degree of amateurism. The SNP should think about how it will present budgets in future, and how it will cost its commitments.

Mr MacAskill: Can Helen Eadie assure this chamber that fuel prices will not escalate in next month's budget? We may have to face a fuel duty escalator with a different name, given that the Deputy Prime Minister at Westminster talked about the hypothecation of money that might be raised from increased fuel prices. Is Helen Eadie saying that the fuel duty escalator, in some form or other, is not coming next month?

Helen Eadie: We have already announced modifications to the fuel duty escalator, as Kenny MacAskill knows. It will continue to be used to develop public transport, which is vitally important, as the minister mentioned. We have said that clearly, and I think that Tavish Scott and Murray Tosh demonstrated that in their speeches.

I am not sure exactly what Murray Tosh's amendment does. Our positions are not far apart.

Perhaps he would provide clarification.

Mr Tosh: Coming to a debate on sustainability when we had heard nothing from the minister on planning issues and other issues related to development, it was impossible to predict what she was going to say. Sustainability means many things to many people. Some adopt a much more intensely environmental approach than the relatively pragmatic approach that the minister has demonstrated to date. I wanted to make a mark for continuing economic development.

Helen Eadie: Thank you.

The magnitude of the work that we have ahead of us is such that, despite the best will of all of us, we have to commit to it absolutely, because news bulletins tell us about disasters on a daily basis, and inform us that we have to act globally. Scientists are telling us that the disasters stem from rising global temperatures, leading to increased rainfall, particularly in the west, and sea level rises. It is virtually certain that there will be more storms. The biggest challenge that ministers and parliamentarians face is that of increasing the public's awareness of these issues.

In the long term, if we are to make a difference, it will mean changes to our lifestyles but, in the short term, we must introduce many measures, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. That will require changes to the way in which we travel and how we consume energy. This is a big debate. We have to persuade people and get them to understand that this is not just about forcing people on to public transport. Big issues have to be talked about. In the early 1970s, work was done to ensure that we mitigated the worst disasters in the North sea oil industry. We can learn lessons from that.

I will conclude by making a plea for my constituents in Fife and Dunfermline East, where we have the legacy of the coal mines. The minister has talked about priorities such as social inclusion and joined-up government. I hope that when she addresses those priorities, she will give special consideration to the problems that my constituents face due to subsidence problems and the way in which the environment has been left.

16:15

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): The Government development strategy document states that

"the overall aim of all our policies for rural Scotland is to foster and enable the sustainable development of rural communities."

I am sure that all of rural Scotland hopes that the Executive will heed this advice soon.

Consider the situation in rural Scotland today.

Rural poverty is now a reality. Provisional farm income figures for 1999, published just four days ago, show that incomes have fallen, on average, by another 22 per cent to £3,600, which underlines the continuing crisis engulfing the whole of Scottish agriculture. Since agriculture remains the key industry in Scotland, it is still an important factor in the economic viability of rural communities.

Social exclusion is a rural problem. Studies show that disadvantage is widespread in rural Scotland and excluded groups form a large part of the rural and islands population. Rural disadvantage is compounded by isolation, lack of choice, lack of access to services and the higher costs of essentials. We are talking about the threat to rural infrastructure, the closing down of rural sub-post offices, garages and small shops, the lack of child care, the price of petrol and the price of food.

Compounding the problem is the lack of accurate measures of rural disadvantage, which has remained an issue without resolution for years, and which denies many communities much-needed access to funding. That suggests that the Government's policies are clearly not fostering and enabling the sustainable development of rural Scotland. I suggest that its policies are actively inhibiting the sustainable development of rural Scotland and are contributing to rural decline.

Across Scotland farmers and crofters are being called upon to contribute to the delivery of UK, and local, biodiversity action plan objectives. They cannot do that without adequate support. The rural development regulation of the Agenda 2000 common agricultural policy reforms provides the Scottish Executive with the opportunity to increase spending on agri-environment schemes, to provide essential support for farmers and crofters who farm in an environmentally sensitive way.

I call upon the Government to put into practice some of its alleged commitment to rural Scotland: to secure more and better-quality job opportunities and greater prosperity for rural Scotland; to improve the quality and availability of services and housing to enable local communities to retain population and expand the social and cultural infrastructure; and to safeguard, and where possible enhance, the natural heritage and environment of rural Scotland.

16:18

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): It is a great shame that there are not more people here for the first debate on sustainability in this Parliament.

I welcome the tone and content of Sarah Boyack's presentation. Members will not be surprised that I have certain reservations. I

welcome the inclusion of Kevin Dunion, but I hope that he takes a seat near the door of the tent. Sarah Boyack will get the allusion.

I have recently picked up a book—or a summary of it—co-authored by Amory Lovins, the guru of environmental development in the United States. It is possibly one of the most important books since "Das Kapital" and it has a very different way of solving the world's problems, which members will be glad to hear. It is a pity that Tommy Sheridan is not here.

The authors say that the central problem is that we treat the natural world, our atmosphere, rivers, seas, forests, countryside, topsoil and biodiversity as if those were valueless commodities. Because we do not have to pay for natural resources, they are apparently free to be used up. The result is that they are being used up, destroyed or polluted at an alarming rate. I will not depress members with the figures, with which many members will be familiar. This is also the central message of the British Government panel on sustainable development, which published its sixth and final report yesterday. That was very good work from Sir Crispin Tickell.

The authors of "Natural Capitalism" give four principles that we could adopt now. First, we could use scarce resources with radically greater productivity. An example is given of a firm that, by providing services rather than objects, has cut its use of resources by 93 per cent. Production could be shifted into closed loops, in which there is no waste or pollution. As part of a continuous service to their customers, businesses could change from not only selling products to also providing them. We could act to reinvest in restoring, sustaining and expanding the stock of natural capital on which we depend.

I was sad to observe that, apart from Irene McGugan, I am the first person in the debate to mention biodiversity. I underline my support for much of what Irene has said.

Every time it arises, I would like to challenge the old canard that organic farming cannot be productively competitive. When a farmer converts to organic farming, there is a 20 per cent drop in productivity. However, in a 20-year experiment in the United States, which compared organic farming with conventional farming, side by side, on the same pieces of land, the productivity of five crops grown on the organically farmed land was found to be equal to that of the same crops grown using conventional methods.

Until the new national planning policy guidelines have been introduced, I look forward to defending Edinburgh and Lothian green belts against Murray Tosh's philosophy. We need to overhaul the planning system. It may be that we will need a

new definition of green belts and other sites that need protection. Until that time, I can assure those people to whom I have hitherto given my support in this area that they will continue to receive it.

I am sad that Sarah Boyack was unable to call in the A701 for further discussion. The commitment to cross-cutting is admirable, but how powerful is the ministerial group? Can it overrule? Can it initiate? Can it demand evidence or action? How many members of that group are here at this moment?

Jim Wallace has defined sustainability as economic growth, social development and environmental protection—that gives me cause for concern. The environment was left very much until last in that definition, while the end of the commitment to straight economic growth was clearly placed in the conditional tense.

We have to look beyond the borders of our small country. If we are to have a fair and equal world, the west needs to reduce its consumption of the world's resources by up to 90 per cent. At the moment, one billion people live in abject poverty. The message is that a reduction can be achieved. We can make choices that can start to tip economic and social outcomes in a positive direction. It is beginning to happen, because it is a necessity, it is possible and it is practical.

I commend Kenny MacAskill's comments on targeting. We must have targets, because if we do not achieve actual reductions in the consumption of fuel or in the amount of traffic in this country, or a considerable increase in the amount of land that is farmed organically, we will be nowhere near being able to live with the rest of the world with a clear conscience.

16:24

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): If sustainable development began to rank as a key issue in the late 1990s, it is clear that, as we go into the new millennium, global survival depends on each one of us taking sustainability seriously. Friends of the Earth sees sustainable development in terms of a fairer share of resources, both at home and abroad. It is clear that business as usual will not achieve sustainable development. As stated previously, we require a balance between environmental, social and economic factors. Friends of the Earth put it clearly:

"A sustainable society should be in harmony with nature, socially inclusive and prosperous."

In 1992, the United Nations-sponsored Earth summit in Rio called upon the international community to develop new policies, as outlined in Agenda 21, to take our society towards a sustainable pattern of development. In response,

the European Community produced the fifth environmental action programme.

Central to the programme was the recognition that environmental legislation in itself is not sufficient to improve the environment. Developments in other areas, such as transport, energy, industry, urban planning, agriculture and fisheries, create their own environmental problems. As a result, much of the debate is now focusing on how it is possible to take account of environmental objectives across a wide range of economic activities, and the conflicts, trade-offs and tensions that that creates. We need to consider how to mainstream environmental concerns across all sectors of economic activity.

The European Commission has published a consultation document on the next stage of the process, which will result in the sixth environmental action programme. Today, between 6 pm and 8 pm, there will be an internet chat with Margot Wallström, the European Commissioner for the Environment, who asks the question, what sort of environment do we want for Europe? The European Committee of the Scottish Parliament is involved in the process and will take an active part in contributing to the sixth environmental action programme. In addition, the committee will take a proactive stance in making the action programme a reality in the context of the Scottish Parliament.

It is pleasing to see that three members of the European Committee are attending the debate. I would welcome further discussion with Robin Harper about the biodiversity issues that he raised.

At a local level, in my constituency, a recent meeting of the Stirling assembly examined the topics of sustainability, resources and waste. No shortage of ideas emerged, from Friends of the Earth, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Stirling Council and the citizens of Stirling constituency.

First is the need to consider long-term disposal options as alternatives to landfill, including composting schemes, segregated collections, material reclamation facilities and obtaining energy from waste.

Secondly, there is the need to establish effective co-ordination, both nationally and locally, between the various organisations. Locally, that might be co-ordination between neighbouring councils, the local enterprise companies, community groups, business and the waste management companies.

Thirdly, there is the need to address the cost issue, notably in terms of recycling processes. At the moment, it costs £18.75 per tonne to put waste in a landfill, including the landfill tax. That compares with an average cost of £33.50 per tonne for recycling. Furthermore, until the

necessary infrastructure is put in place, those with the recycling facilities can call the shots. It is not just a local issue; support will be needed from the Parliament.

Fourthly, and most important, we need to change the attitudes of the public. There must be massive investment in raising the awareness of sustainability among people of all ages.

There are many other things that I could have mentioned, such as sustainability and the national parks. Through my involvement in the European Committee, I will try hard to play an active part. It is up to each and every one of us to raise awareness about sustainable development and be active in doing something about it.

16:28

Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): As I came in, I picked up the little booklet "Scotland the sustainable?" and one item caught my eye:

"If sustainable development is so sensible, why is more of it not happening?"

We start with a question. I am sure that many people have their own suggestions as to why more is not happening. Yesterday, we had an interesting debate, which was initiated by my colleague Jamie Stone. We heard about the economic disadvantages being experienced in the far north, due to the lack of an adequate and safe road system. We cannot promote or sustain any meaningful development unless we have an effective and appropriate roads system.

Highland Council, which covers an area the size of Wales, estimates that it would require an investment of £100 million to improve its roads and bridges to meet the current European standards. That is not small change, and it illustrates the difficulties that we have in promoting—never mind trying to sustain—development of any sort.

The capital of the Highlands, Inverness, continues to develop at an alarming and remarkable pace. It is considered to be the fastest growing town in Europe. That is quite a distinction and one that I am pleased to acknowledge. I am sure that many people in the Highlands would be proud to be associated with that.

However, that development would not have gone on at the pace that it has—in fact, I do not think that it would have started—had we not, over the past 25 years, invested in the A9 and upgraded it from Perth to Inverness. That has made a remarkable difference, not only to the travelling public but to those who want to develop in Inverness, in the north and around the Moray firth basin. More significantly, it has attracted

international developers, which has helped to sustain the economy of the Highlands.

We need now to extend our vision beyond that horizon. We need to look north and west of Inverness. Yesterday, we heard about the difficulties in the far north; the same problems arise in the west. Surprisingly, we have overcome many of the main hurdles that could have prevented a similar sort of extension to our road system. We built a bridge at Kessock. We also built a bridge across the Cromarty firth and another across the Dornoch firth. I wonder why we stopped there, but that was the thinking at the time. Jamie Stone would have liked the improvements to have continued up to the far north. Those are magnificent bridges, with two or four lanes. Incidentally, they are all toll free. I wonder why that should be.

I suggest that any development, if it is to be sustainable, requires a basic infrastructure to help it to become established and to grow. The most essential element of that infrastructure is an appropriate and well-engineered road system. Without that, we cannot sustain the developments that we hope to attract to our rural economies.

16:33

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to contribute to this important debate, which I hope—unlike many debates on subjects such as sustainable development and other environmental matters—will not just have warm words, but will lead to lots of practical action to back up those words. I also hope that we can make a difference in this Parliament.

When elected eight or nine months ago, I knew that this job would involve a lot of paperwork. I lodged a parliamentary question asking when recycling facilities would be made available to MSPs. We got the recycling bins only this week. It took eight months for that particular measure to be delivered. I hope that we can improve on that.

Dr Jackson: I inquired into why we had only just received the recycling bins and I gather that the contract had to go out to tender. I do not know whether Mr Lochhead was able to find any other reason.

Richard Lochhead: Thank you for that intervention. It says quite a lot about the Government's policy.

This country has an abundance of natural resources, and hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on them. No country has a greater interest in sustainability than Scotland. Yet, down the decades, Westminster has had to be dragged kicking and screaming to put the environment on

the agenda. Measures that are now in place have usually come from the United Nations or from Europe. Westminster has shown little initiative.

The Scottish Parliament has to show initiative and to show that we can make a difference. Let us hope that we can offer the vision and determination that has been lacking in the past. The Scottish National party will, of course, support genuine effort from the Executive in connection with sustainability.

Sarah Boyack: Does Mr Lochhead think that there was a problem with Westminster because it is in London, or because of the political priorities of the Government at the time?

Richard Lochhead: Well, both. I am sure that the minister will not be surprised to know that I am about to come on to the difficulty with Westminster.

Although the SNP will support genuine efforts to achieve a sustainable Scotland, we are very concerned about the constraints on the Parliament's ability to meet that aim. The fifth point in the 10 action points outlined in "Scotland the sustainable?" mentions being part of the international dimension of sustainable development. It is a pity that, because Scotland is not independent, we cannot play a global role, not only to achieve a sustainable Scotland, UK or Europe, but to contribute to the wider world.

Sarah Boyack: Will Richard Lochhead give way?

Richard Lochhead: No, I have already taken two interventions. Surely it would be much more productive and valuable for Scotland to have a seat at the United Nations and to play a full role in UN organisations and in the European Union, which is far more concerned about environmental policy than the UK Government.

The seventh of the 10 action points in the document concerns energy. The opening line in the section on energy states:

"Energy policy is a UK matter. On the face of it therefore, there is little for the Scottish Parliament to do."

This Parliament needs control over energy policy to deliver a sustainable Scotland. Westminster's record on oil and gas shows that it has no interest in sustainable energy resources. For decades, the Westminster policy has been, "Get the oil out as quickly as possible."

The theme of the Government's documents is that, to deliver sustainability, we need to change attitudes in Scotland and Scottish society. However, how can we eradicate poverty when expenditure decisions and fiscal policy are decided in London? How can we tackle fuel poverty when energy policy and social security

policy are also decided in London? We do not even have our own representation in Europe to create a sustainable fishing policy. We would have much more influence than we do at present if we had our own member status in the EU.

Of course, Westminster keeps its grubby hands on Scotland's financial resources. Local government is expected to deliver local sustainability through Agenda 21 and other measures. However, local government is busy dealing with financial crisis after financial crisis. How on earth is it supposed to find the time for long-term thinking about and planning for sustainability?

I am sure that the well-used phrase "Think globally, act locally" has been mentioned several times. I can assure the Executive that the SNP wants Scotland to act globally, but that can happen only with independence. Furthermore, we want control of our own resources so that Scotland can act locally as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Before I call Maureen Macmillan, I should tell Parliament that recycling is a matter for the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and that the Presiding Officer will respond by letter to members who have raised points on the issue. I hope that that is helpful.

16:37

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands (Lab): I thank John Farquhar Munro for his speech on transport in the Highlands. Perhaps we in the Highlands and Islands have a different perspective on sustainable development from that of members from other areas of Scotland.

In the Highlands, we have inherited a desert landscape over much of our landmass, denuded of trees by man and denuded of people by remorseless landlords and harsh economic circumstances. However, that is not to say that we do not appreciate the beauty and grandeur of the landscape, the unique wildlife on our doorstep and its commercial value to our tourism industry.

We should not just conserve but regenerate the natural environment that makes the Highlands and Islands unique, and we should do so in such a way that it has a positive economic impact. For example, if we plant new forests that properly balance the proportion of native trees to commercial species such as Sitka spruce, woodland regeneration can provide a variety of forest-based industries as well as enhance tourism potential. Environmental tourism has potential for real growth. Woodland walking and wildlife excursions could be promoted more strongly by the area tourist boards and the Scottish Tourist Board.

However, it is crucial that the human population of the Highlands and Islands is conserved, restored and regenerated. Highland people have been one of the most endangered species in this country, to which the ruined croft houses from Mull to Sutherland are testimony. In the not too distant past, Highland people have even felt beleaguered by environmentalists, who seemed to wish to preserve the Highlands in sugar and to see any development only in terms of how wildlife would be affected. Consideration of how people might raise their standard of living seemed to get lost.

For example, it did not help Highland confidence to know that with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds having more members than there were people living in the Highlands and Islands, environmental organisations seemed to have greater influence on the Government than highlanders.

I am glad to say that there is now much more co-operation and understanding between environmental organisations and local people, but areas of tension still exist, such as the management of the geese on Islay and the worry of some crofters and farmers over the environmental requirements for European funding. We must not alienate crofters and farmers but, as Irene McGugan said, we must support them as they embrace the environmental dimension of land use.

The scope for sustainable development will be enhanced by the coming land reform legislation. Highland people are very conscious of their environment—one of the fiercest debates at present in the inner Moray firth is over waste disposal, and environmental bodies in Argyll and Lochaber are very concerned about recycling.

Robin Harper: Does Maureen Macmillan agree that it is astonishing that the Executive said that the land reform bill had nothing to do with the environment? Does she think that the bill should, perhaps, have something to do with the environment?

Maureen Macmillan: I am talking about sustainable development. When communities can own their own land, we will see such development.

We are looking for balance. Debates in the past have been about urban regeneration versus rural conservation, but rural areas include people, who are a vital economic resource and should not be overlooked. In rural areas, we can trade on our unique environment, but if we depend on primary industries—important as they are—we will not thrive. We must look at ways of using our environment to attract more business and industry, whether that industry be traditional or new, information technology-based.

We need diversification strategies to cope with

downturns such as the rundown of BARMAC. I believe that Highlands and Islands Enterprise is facing up to that challenge extremely well. We need to generate a broad economic base and a work force that is confident of its transferable skills.

The Highlands and Islands continue to see real growth. Inward investment has created 1,275 jobs from 18 projects. As John Munro said, Inverness is the fastest-growing town in Europe and is expanding by the minute. However, while there has been progress, towns such as Campbeltown and Wick, at opposite ends of the region, struggle to hold on to present employees or attract new ones, because of geographical barriers.

As Sarah Boyack said, sustainable development encompasses transport. In the Highlands, car dependency is a real issue. People and families on low incomes need to be given practical, cheaper alternatives that provide easier access to work, better access to urban centres and, most of all, choice to people in rural areas.

16:43

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): The debate has been very welcome, and many members have made good, fundamental points. I was pleased to hear that the minister's priorities will be to cut waste, reduce energy use and make travel more sustainable.

Revising building standards is a key way in which to improve the energy efficiency of housing. Even some newly built homes in Scotland have a poor national home energy rating and it is right that, for the present housing stock, we target the privately rented sector where the biggest gains can be made, not only in terms of energy conservation, but in improvements to health and to general levels of comfort. The phenomenon of excess winter deaths is unknown in Scandinavia, where the winter climate is harsher than ours but, critically, insulation and building regulations have been to a much better standard for many years.

We did not hear much about Agenda 21 until Richard Lochhead mentioned it. In my view, Agenda 21 needs a stimulus from the Executive. We need more community involvement and attention to local strategies, and positive moves to integrate them into mainstream policies.

I refer to a particular part of the economy, and to waste. The minister will know of my interest in a forecasting framework for aggregates; national planning policy guideline 4 states that increased use of secondary aggregates in construction is sound environmental practice. Perhaps the minister can tell us what stage research on current levels of recycling has reached, and whether the widely held view that there is a need for the

Executive to set targets for the use of secondary aggregates and construction waste has been upheld within that research.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that the member would be as thrilled as I was on a recent visit to Shetland to see the incinerator programme there. All waste from Shetland and most of the waste from Orkney is used to produce heat. What is left is also usable for road wear. Does he agree that other parts of the Highlands and Islands should follow the Shetland example?

Euan Robson: I agree with the member. More could also be done to use recycled building waste in construction.

I welcome the minister's comments on sustainable travel. She will not be surprised if I commend to her a railway for the Borders to reduce our dependency on cars and cut congestion in Edinburgh.

We often struggle to find adequate resources for energy conservation. Standards of service schemes in the energy industry are a start, but they tend to stand alone and are not linked to other Scottish programmes.

Resources can be raised through what we pay for our energy, excluding petrol. Between 1990 and 1998, industrial energy prices in real terms fell by 36 per cent for coal, 43 per cent for gas, 24 per cent for electricity and 23 per cent for heavy fuel oil.

In the same period, in the domestic sector, prices in real terms including VAT fell by 16.5 per cent for gas, 15 per cent for electricity, 4.5 per cent for coal and 37.5 per cent for heating oils. Even if a small part of those price decreases had been held back and used for energy conservation schemes, we could have spent millions more on energy conservation. I hope that Westminster will give the matter serious consideration, so that, if fuel prices fall further, some—though not necessarily all—of the savings will be devoted to energy conservation measures. Falling energy prices give stimulus to those who say, "Energy costs are falling, so I need not use energy as carefully as I used to."

The minister mentioned a number of the measures that the Scottish Executive has introduced to cut waste and energy use. The public sector has been successful. Since 1970, energy use in the public sector has decreased by 6 per cent. However, in the same period, energy use by commercial and other services has risen by 48 per cent. We must invite industry to consider how it will use energy more carefully in the years to come.

16:48

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I had the pleasure of being the inaugural chairman of the Association of Scottish Community Councils. One of the first things that we managed to do, in consultation with a certain Secretary of State for Scotland—who, I tell Richard Lochhead, was a Conservative—was to consider how best we could serve Scotland's needs. That is not a new phrase.

We got funding to disseminate information on Agenda 21 to all the community councils and, through them, to schools throughout Scotland, which gave the debate a real kick start. There was no political slant, no strings and no payback, except for the people of Scotland. It is a shame that people take swipes at others without looking at how things work on the ground. All Governments from time to time do things without claiming the credit.

I appreciated the minister's approach to today's debate. We, too, believe in holistic decision making, which Kenny MacAskill and Tavish Scott mentioned. It is important to understand that we must create a dynamic balance in Scotland. Various members have illustrated the need for a balance that is always on the move. I was particularly taken by the comments of Tavish Scott, who was the first to mention balance. To achieve sustainable development, it is vital to create a balance between the long-term security of our environment and the economic stability of Scotland's communities. That is a delicate road to travel.

That will not be an easy task, and I would suggest, before I knock any brownie points off anyone else, that we ought to be letting the people of Scotland know that the Scottish Parliament is a grown-up body that will take sustainable development on board, and which will work on a cross-party basis to the benefit of the balance that I have talked about. The differences that will emerge will be in the methods of delivery and possibly in prioritisation.

I like some of the vision of the Minister for Transport and the Environment, but I would like her to put some more flesh on the bones to achieve more positive, constructive debate on the subject.

To be a little nit-picking, I was disappointed today to read the Cabinet Office report to the Prime Minister, "Sharing the Nation's Prosperity: Variation in Economic and Social Conditions Across the UK". Scotland warrants a page. That is very green: it has not used up too many trees to get a page in that voluminous document. I find it unfortunate, however, that there is no mention of sustainable development. The Executive has

obviously had a major input into the page.

Helen Eadie: Can Mr Davidson confirm that there was no reference whatever to the environment in the Conservative party manifesto?

Mr Davidson: If Helen Eadie is referring to the Scottish manifesto, it talked about a sustainable economy. The word sustainable was in there, and it means, exactly as I have described, the dynamic balance that we have been discussing. If we want to put extra words in, I am afraid that that will cost a few more trees.

I was surprised that the minister also mentioned national parks. I have yet to be convinced, along with many people who live in certain parts of Scotland that are threatened with those beasts, that they will aid sustainability. I ask the minister to ensure urgently that her department takes heed of the sustainability requirements of the communities that live within the two proposed park areas. People from those two communities have written to me regularly; I received something in the post today from the Cairngorm area, again requiring urgent input, because other issues are at stake apart from environmental ones.

Kenny MacAskill's comments were pragmatic, and I congratulate him. He must have taken a Valium or something since this morning. I was surprised at one comment that he made, that he did not want a mandatory policy. He was glowing, however, about the fact that the Netherlands has such a policy in its constitution. Mr MacAskill will have to define what he meant by not having a mandatory policy.

My colleague Mr Tosh talked about the conflict—or lack of conflict—between sensible planning and economic stability. The minister addressed that in part, but we need to examine developments in the national planning policy guidelines more carefully. I hope that the minister will provide us with more information on that as she promises, and that Robin Harper will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate on that.

I also say to Robin that organic farming is a wonderful beast—I am a low-input farmer myself—but if we produce everything that way, the premium will go and the industry will collapse.

While sustainability is acceptable as a principle in environmental terms, we have to apply the word sustainable to Scotland's economy and to its ability to provide sustainable employment.

As I said before, we need a dynamic balance; we need carrots, not sticks, and I hope that the Parliament will continue to approach this serious subject in a consensual way.

16:53

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): There is obviously a broad consensus on the need for sustainable development, so I will not recycle all the platitudes. Instead, I will use my time to focus on an element of sustainable development that has been mentioned only in passing, although it has a direct impact on all consumers in our society: housing.

My colleague, Kenny MacAskill, who has been much quoted this afternoon, is noted in the Transport and the Environment Committee for citing European examples to inform the debate. I will take that liberty this afternoon. The Scandinavian countries, which can be said to have climatic conditions comparable to those of Scotland, have sustainable approaches to housing development that are streets ahead of ours. Norway, Sweden and Denmark have strategies for energy efficiency, and sustainable approaches are taken in all parts of the community.

In Scandinavia, there is a general philosophy of sustainable development. Sadly, in our country, as Sylvia Jackson noted, there is as yet no such commonly held philosophy. That is why I particularly welcome the minister's inclusion of an education representative on her panel.

Housing and community building have suffered for too long from compromise between quality expectation and supply cost. We must move on from that. I was delighted when, two weeks ago at a meeting of the Transport and the Environment Committee, the minister gave a categorical assurance that the purpose of the next review of the building regulations this summer is to improve insulation standards and energy efficiency for residential properties in order to meet the climate requirements in Scotland, tackle fuel poverty problems and improve the level of environmental emissions. That is admirable and to be welcomed, and I have no reason to doubt the minister's sincerity.

However, if the Parliament is truly committed to sustainable development, we must look further than that and I suggest that the minister discuss with her colleagues more innovations. We could consider expanding and easing access to direct grant aid for improving the insulation standards of existing housing stock. We could be really innovative and provide take-up grants for the installation of solar water heaters and for the use of renewable energy technology. I make those suggestions in a spirit of co-operation. I am sure that no members will disagree with the basic principles.

However, now comes the rub: it will cost money. While it is true that taking a sustainable and ecological approach to housing need not lead to

increased costs, it is also true that our choices are driven by cost. We select the cheapest materials and the smallest spaces. I speak from many years of experience in housing development in urban and rural locations.

It is likely that a commitment to sustainable development in housing will lead to increased individual unit costs. We have to take that on board. Allowances must be granted, to increase cost limits and grant funding for social housing, to cover the relatively small extra investment in housing stock. Not long ago, the Minister for Communities pledged that a number of homes would be built in Scotland in the next three years and promised that the extension of the right to buy would not result in a decrease in the number of social housing units. I ask the Minister for Transport and the Environment to fight to ensure that her sincere desire to implement sustainable development standards for our housing stock is not compromised by budget constraints and the need to ensure another department's credibility. Scotland's housing provision has suffered for too long from short-sightedness and—as the minister said—we must look at the future, not just the present.

It is not all doom and gloom, however. There are examples of sustainably developed housing schemes. There is one in the east end of Glasgow, where the innovative energy and insulation standards have resulted in an annual heating and water heating bill of less than £100. That is fantastic. That is what we should be aiming at: a real opportunity to combat fuel poverty.

While the minister's motion, with its noble sentiments, cannot be opposed, it is essential that true commitment is shown through a detailed strategy with stated Scottish criteria. That will please Helen Eadie. I ask members to support the SNP amendment.

16:58

The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety): There have been 14 speeches in today's debate. I will do my best to deal with them in the five or six minutes that I am allowed.

I compliment the main contributors this afternoon. Reference has been made to the volume of this morning's debate—I was over at parliament headquarters and was still able to hear the debate between Murray Tosh and Kenny MacAskill. We have finished with the Murray and Kenny shout-in and we should now engage in an afternoon period of reflection about how we make sustainable development the heart of the work of the Parliament, the Executive and other agencies.

I agree with what Linda Fabiani said. Many

areas were not touched on today, housing being one of them. One of the key challenges facing all of us in the Parliament is how we connect the changes that we want in housing to a sustainable approach to development. I know that many housing associations and local authorities across Scotland have done things that will encourage sustainable development. In my own constituency, through the local housing association, some good work has been carried out to promote sustainable development in housing.

I am winding up today because local government has a central role to play on this issue. One of the those who spoke this morning mentioned the time that it took to get a waste disposal bin to allow us, after eight months, finally to be able to dispose of paper waste. Rather than be pessimistic about that, I tried to shout across the chamber and say that from a small victory we can change the world. I hope that we can move on to more substantial issues.

Robin Harper mentioned two books—"Das Kapital" and another one. I confess that I have read neither. Perhaps I have read edited versions of one of the books, but I do not take them as the gospel truth—unlike his colleague, who is visibly not available this afternoon, for the debate.

Local government clearly has a role to play in the broad issue of sustainability. We are supportive of the work that is undertaken by local government as part of Local Agenda 21. As Euan Robson says, much of the work has to come from the local agenda rather than from the Parliament or the Executive, which might take a prescriptive view. Some of the most dynamic ideas have been pioneered through the commitment to LA21.

I have a list—which I do not have time to go through—of many authorities that have used the agenda as part of their corporate plans for local authority work over the next few years, and I commend those authorities. Not enough authorities are engaging in that, which is why the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has put together the sustainable action fund to work with agencies to deliver that change.

There are people in the gallery today from Forward Scotland, and I put on record my appreciation for the work that they have undertaken, for example, to develop sustainable investment for housing. Forward Scotland is engaging with other agencies, in particular with the East of Scotland Water Authority.

There is a broad consensus in the Parliament, and I touched on that when I mentioned the contributions of those who spoke earlier. We have an opportunity to implore and plead—Murray Tosh introduced biblical intonations this afternoon. One of the comments that was made was that there is

a lack of detail and a limit of aspirations. I want to summarise the best of members' comments before we conclude.

Sarah Boyack has made a strong commitment to renewable energy. We want to ensure that that will come before the Parliament again, in the near future, as we view it as a part of the process of change. We want to recognise that we are part of the European Community. One speech this afternoon seemed to suggest that all the good ideas came from elsewhere in Europe, not the UK. However, we can learn within the UK, as well as from Europe—not just from the Dutch, or, as some members in the recent past have felt, from the many contributions that Germany has offered to the issues of renewable energy and sustainable football development strategies. We can learn as much about that from south of Carlisle.

Tavish Scott touched on several issues that I want to address. We want to examine the work of Friends of the Earth, which was supported by the Scottish Office as it looked ahead to renewable energy issues. The fact that we have a key player such as Kevin Dunion—who has been involved in the process with such organisations in the past—strikes me as a positive endorsement of change.

Although I understand the concerns that Murray Tosh raised in the amendment that he put together, the amendment takes away the heart of the proposal that the Minister for Transport and the Environment put forward. Therefore, we cannot accept that amendment. Several members raised the issue of the role that the committees can play in developing an agenda for change on renewable energy and sustainable development.

There is enough available land in Scotland, if a strategic approach is taken. Many of our urban environments would benefit from brownfield developments, so there is no need for further encroachment into greenfield areas. We can deal with that locally. Sarah Boyack has also mentioned, in the past, that she wants to examine the planning and building regulations.

Several members mentioned poverty and sustainability in a rural environment. We should not address those fundamental issues only in this debate. I want to broaden the matter out—our social justice agenda is flexible and we will try to touch on those sustainable development issues in our national parks agenda. There are other areas with which we can concern ourselves.

I am conscious that I cannot touch on many points that have been raised because of the time, but they will be taken on board and the Executive will respond in writing to the members who raised them.

It is important to stress a philosophical point—we and Europe are interdependent. We should not

address such issues independently as a state. Many EC countries now have the kind of relationship with central European Government that the Scottish Parliament has with the UK Government. Those countries have pioneered radical strategies. It is not necessarily a country's political structure that determines whether it can deal with sustainable development—political will determines how sustainable development is dealt with.

There is broad consensus in the Parliament on the issues and on the strategy that Sarah Boyack has brought together. I recognise that there is good will behind the amendments that have been lodged, but I ask members to reject them both. Through the strategic teams, the Executive wants to bring forward developments in regard to some of the issues that have been raised in members' speeches.

I commend the motion in the name of Sarah Boyack.

Decision Time

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We move now to decision time. I notice that some members have not inserted their cards in their consoles. Members will please check that they have done so. There are no fewer than eight questions to be put tonight.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-482.1, in the name of Susan Deacon, which seeks to amend motion S1M-482, in the name of Kay Ullrich, on the national health service in Scotland, 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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 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)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Johnston, 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 70, Against 49, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S1M-482, as amended, in the name of Kay Ullrich, on the national health service in Scotland, 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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South 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)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (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 73, Against 15, Abstentions 32.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the debt owed to NHS staff at all levels in relation to their commitment over the winter period and through the flu outbreak; acknowledges that the hard work and outstanding commitment of NHS staff, better preparation and contingency planning than ever before, record levels of investment and effective partnership working brought about by the abolition of the internal market has enabled the NHS to deal effectively with exceptional pressures and unprecedented levels of activity over the winter period; and welcomes the commitment of the Scottish Executive outlined in Making it Work Together: A Programme for Government to work in partnership with the health service for the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is that amendment S1M-483.1, in the name of Mr Murray Tosh, which seeks to amend motion S1M-483, in the name of Mr Kenny MacAskill, on air passenger and freight links to Scotland, 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)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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 17, Against 103, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S1M-483.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend Mr MacAskill's motion on air transport, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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, 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of 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)

AGAINST

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)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 31, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S1M-483, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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, 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)
 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of 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)

AGAINST

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)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (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 87, Against 33, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the vital importance of air links and air infrastructure to Scotland and the Scottish economy and acknowledges the potential for economic growth through improved air links; notes that the future of air traffic control and associated issues are a reserved matter outwith the remit of the Parliament, but recognises that there are concerns and that the Liberal Democrats are opposed to the development of the air traffic control system by public private partnership; strongly supports a two centre strategy to protect jobs at Prestwick; underlines the need to give the highest possible priority to air safety, and further notes that during the second reading of the Transport Bill in the House of Commons on 20 December 1999, no Scottish National Party MP spoke in the debate, and only one voted against the second reading of the Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S1M-486.1, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S1M-486, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on sustainable development, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 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, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Johnston, 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)
 McGregor, 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 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)

McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 48, Against 72, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S1M-486.2, in the name of Murray Tosh, which seeks to amend motion S1M-486, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on sustainable development, 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)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnston, 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 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)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 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)

Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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 17, Against 103, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Before I put the eighth question, I advise members that we are running a little late. When we come to members' business, I ask those members who are not staying to leave quietly and quickly, so that we can get on with the debate.

The eighth question is, that motion S1M-486, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on sustainable development, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament places sustainable development at the core of its work and commends the Scottish Executive for its commitment to integrate the principles of sustainable development into all Government policies for the benefits it brings to the people of Scotland, now and in the future.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order. I ask that you check that the voting system is working properly, Presiding Officer, as it is evident that something has gone completely wrong this afternoon. Members of Executive parties have, en masse, voted to oppose the public-private partnership noted in Tavish Scott's amendment. *[Laughter.]*

The Presiding Officer: While a good try, that was a totally bogus point of order.

Rights of the Child

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We move now to the members' business debate on motion S1M-280, in the name of Elaine Smith, on the United Nations convention report on the rights of the child. I ask those who wish to speak in that debate to press their buttons now. The bad news is that I do not think that I have any chance of calling all those who wish to speak, but we will do our best. I ask members who are not staying to leave quietly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the recent publication of the second report by Her Majesty's Government on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; acknowledges the excellent work being undertaken by statutory and voluntary bodies at national and local level in upholding the Convention, including 'Parents Action for Safe Play Kirkshaws', an example of good practice in the constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston; affirms its support for the convention, and commits itself to working to ensure that it is fully implemented in Scotland.

17:15

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I am delighted that this motion has been chosen for debate this evening. I want to start by thanking the many members from across the political spectrum who signed in support of it, as well as those in attendance this evening. I believe that that shows a great willingness to improve the fundamental rights of children.

Although this is a member's motion that specifically mentions a group in my constituency, I drafted it with the full support of the proposed all-party parliamentary group on children's issues. The group is working to raise awareness of children's issues in a non-party political manner, and I am grateful for the help that Children in Scotland has given in pursuing our agenda.

The general assembly of the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November 1989. In doing so, it spelled out in an unequivocal manner the rights to which every child is entitled. In 54 articles, the convention establishes in international law that states that are party to it must ensure that all children, without discrimination, benefit from special protection measures and assistance; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, talents and abilities to their fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about and participate in achieving their rights. It is not only the most comprehensive instrument in human rights law—it is also the most

widely accepted.

The UK Government ratified the convention in 1991 and submitted its first report in 1994; the UN made various criticisms at that time. The second report was submitted in August last year and lists many initiatives for furthering the rights of children, such as the promise to eradicate child poverty, the emphasis on early-years provision and the introduction of key rights in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. One of our colleagues, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, who was then a Scottish Office minister, said that at the core of the act were the rights of children and the responsibilities of adults and public organisations to care for and protect them. More recently, the Scottish Office child strategy statement undertook to identify and take proper account of the interests of children when developing policies.

The ethos running through the convention is that of provision, protection and participation. The three key principles that should be applied through Scottish law and policy are those of non-discrimination, the child's best interests as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children and the child's view being given due weight. Mindsets need to be changed and mainstreaming of the interests of children must become second nature.

There is a common misperception that the convention takes responsibility for their children away from parents and gives more authority to Government. That is not the case. The convention refers to the role of parents and families directly and charges Government with protecting families and assisting them to meet their essential role as the nurturers of their children. Parents have rights with respect to their children, but those rights are linked directly to the need for parents to promote and protect their children's rights. Of course, translating child-rights principles into practice requires action by Government.

Many issues are involved in the debate on children, and I am sure that my colleagues will highlight some of them. I would like to focus briefly on article 31, which promotes the child's right to play. Last summer, I was invited to take part in the launch of Play Scotland's play agenda for the Scottish Parliament. The initiative challenges us to recognise that play is crucial to a child's physical and emotional health and well being, and calls for a multi-departmental approach to it.

I am keen to support that agenda, primarily because of my knowledge of and association with Parents Action for Safe Play in Kirkshaws. In Kirkshaws, parents worked against the odds to transform a local derelict site into a multi-purpose play area suitable for all, from toddlers to teenagers. The motivation was the apparent connection between the lack of facilities for play

and leisure locally and young people's becoming involved at an early age with alcohol, drugs and vandalism.

The group's achievement is an example of good practice, in that it incorporates key principles of the convention. The group has continued to pursue the provision of leisure activities within the play area and the wider local area, and it is now viewed as a model for others. I invite the minister, who has heard me speak in the chamber about the group, to visit Kirkshaws.

Although there are success stories, there remain, unfortunately, many areas in which this society is failing to meet its obligations under the UN convention. Particular groups of children, such as those in travelling families and children with disabilities, remain disadvantaged.

Shelter recently published a report that shows that thousands of children who suffer from homelessness are denied the right to play. There are children in Scotland who live in extreme poverty, and we do not need to look to the third world to see the exploitation of young people in the labour market. Last week, and again this week, "Newsnight Scotland" reported on the shocking scenes of young children working on the streets of Glasgow into the early hours of the morning. That practice breaks laws, directly contravenes article 32 of the convention and shows that our society fails to protect children. There must be multi-agency action to address that and to prevent children facing the dangers that are inherent in working in such conditions.

The second report recognises that there are distinct cultural and traditional differences across the UK and includes chapters on issues that arise in different parts of the UK. The report recognises that there are significant differences in the Scottish legal system, and that devolution will further develop diversity of practice.

Therefore, although we are already bound by the ratification of the UN convention, it is appropriate that the new Parliament should affirm its support and commitment to working continually to ensure full implementation in Scotland. The convention should be the main benchmark and inspiration for action at all levels of government.

Although I applaud the work that the Government has done in the UK, there is no doubt that there are gaps in the implementation of the convention. One way to address those gaps would be to have a statutory children's commissioner for Scotland. Such an office could provide a proactive monitoring mechanism for the development of policy, promote children's rights, and provide an annual report to Parliament.

The protection of human rights is by its nature an endless process, so there is always room for

improvement in the monitoring of performance.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Is the member aware that the Minister for Children and Education asked the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to examine the possibility of the appointment of a commissioner for children's rights? The committee said that it would investigate the ways in which such a post might be established.

Elaine Smith: I am aware of that. Although I am glad that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee is considering the matter, I ask the minister to undertake wide public consultation on the role of a commissioner, as the National Assembly for Wales is doing.

Our children are citizens in their own right. We must make every possible effort to meet their rights and needs. It is appropriate to conclude with the words of Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general:

"To look into some aspects of the future, we do not need projections by supercomputers. Much of the next millennium can be seen in how we care for our children today. Tomorrow's world may be influenced by science and technology, but more than anything, it is already taking shape in the bodies and minds of our children."

I hope that members will support the motion.

The Presiding Officer: I will call the minister to wind up for seven minutes at 17.40. Seven members would like to speak; how many will be able to depends on the brevity of others.

17:23

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): As a prospective convener of the proposed cross-party group on children, I welcome this debate on what is now the most ratified piece of human rights legislation in the world. The motion allows us to reflect on progress that has been made towards implementation of the convention. As Elaine Smith said, there is much still to be done.

In August 1999, it was noted that the UK Government's second report still fails to provide a comprehensive picture of how well children's rights are being met in Scotland. For example, do children have more rights in family law than they had before?

I ask the minister whether there are plans to compile up-to-date information on the situation of under-18s in Scotland. That base-line information would allow more effective monitoring of the implementation of the convention. To assist implementation further, I support calls for the Scottish Executive to establish a comprehensive implementation plan, with clear and specific targets, which the UN convention called for when the UK Government submitted its first report in

1994.

An annual progress report with statistical evidence, as Elaine mentioned, could demonstrate and evaluate how well objectives for children and young people are being met. The public in general, and children in particular, are largely unaware of children's rights and the UN convention, so there must be action to involve children and the public in learning about their rights. Direct services must be made available to children to support them in exercising their rights. I commend Angus Council for producing material such as "The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adapted by children for children", which makes the information accessible and widely available.

We are discussing our aspirations of how life should be for our children. The Scottish Parliament has a unique opportunity to put children's rights at the heart of decision making in Scotland. Let us make sure that happens.

17:26

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Elaine Smith on bringing such an important matter to the chamber. It is terrifying to see the images on television of children fighting adult battles, carrying AK47s and machetes, participating in wars that they are in no way responsible for let alone understand. That is the worst form of exploitation—a child's mind poisoned by hatred and violence is likely to produce an adult with a twisted and perverted inclination. Other images, of child prostitution, child slavery and close-up pictures of tiny frames of skin and bone dying in front of our eyes are set in front of us every day in our living rooms. Those children have no rights. That is why the UN convention of 1989 is so wonderful.

I would like to pay tribute to all the voluntary organisations—there are too many to name—that do so much worldwide to alleviate children's suffering. On this issue we should be helping others who do not have our stable democratic society with a relatively high standard of living to clean up their sometimes nightmarish backyards before we do a spring clean in our own, by comparison, slightly dusty premises.

Having said that, the situation here is not perfect and there is much to be done. I believe in the principle, which runs through the UN convention, that actions should be taken in the best interests of the child. For example, most parents are beneficial to their children's development and know best what is right for them, but in cases of abuse it is often in the child's best interests to be separated from damaging influences. Children must have the right to go to court, along with

others who can make representations on their behalf, to make their views known without fear of reprisal.

As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I have had the chance to talk to many disabled children and their parents. They are quite clear that, whenever possible, disabled children should be grouped among their peers in mainstream education and activities, rather than singled out for specialist institutions. Our aim should be to provide a level playing field of rights for all children, whatever their circumstances. Highlighting particular groups for special consideration or treatment is divisive and can lead to discrimination. Education, information, inclusion and compassion should be the bywords of our new Scotland, especially where children are concerned.

17:28

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I was very struck by Irene McGugan's phrase:

"aspirations of how life should be for our children".

It summarises the objectives of today's debate. The general issue is the waste of talent and opportunity as a result of poverty or deprivation. We can all come up with sob stories, every one about a real child who has had his or her human rights abused in our modern, wealthy and civilised society. I want to concentrate on solutions.

A good start, which is backed by various children's organisations, would be to draw together a national plan for children, with clear and specific targets. It must deal with the lack of safe refuges for children who run away from home, the position of children whose families become homeless, the age of criminal responsibility and the need for positive play experiences. The needs of children must be to the forefront across the board: in the Health and Community Care Committee, the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee and the Justice and Home Affairs Committee.

In Glasgow 40.7 per cent of children are eligible for free school meals; 41 per cent of Scottish children under five live in poverty, defined as half the UK average income. Those are cold figures, but they have significance for the children concerned and the whole nature of Scottish society.

At lunch time today, I met a director of a disablement organisation who told me about his hopes for the coming into force in April this year of the commission on disablement. He wants it to bring about a refocusing of the disablement debate in a way that no other mechanism can. That is an argument for the independent children's

commissioner called for in today's debate, who could focus the debate on the rights of children and move it forward.

If there are financial reasons why that cannot be done, why not appoint a broad-based Scottish human rights commission that could cover children's rights? There is growing support for that in the Parliament. If the new Scotland is to be effective, democratic and have depth and strength, perhaps the Executive should publish a consultation paper on these matters. It is a major agenda that will require targeted partnership between central and local government and the voluntary groups. I hope that the motion will get broad support from members and from the minister.

17:31

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): As I have been deeply involved in setting up the proposed cross-party group on children's issues, I welcome this debate and congratulate Elaine Smith on mentioning many important issues in her speech. In particular, I congratulate her and Mary Mulligan on the comments they have made in the past few days about the scandal of children who are working on the streets at night selling newspapers, while nobody seems prepared to accept responsibility for the fact that they are being put at risk.

I would like to spend a couple of minutes talking about something that is close to my heart—the involvement of children in decision-making processes that affect their own lives. I have spent many years campaigning on that issue, particularly in relation to article 12 of the convention. I trust that that article will be taken fully into account in the discussions on the proposals for the future of education.

Over the past couple of weeks, I have spent some time talking to children in my constituency as part of the initiative set up to encourage MSPs to hold surgeries for young people. I have attended a number of schools and I must say that the quality of the debate and the level of interest in what is going on in this Parliament shown by those children would put many of the adults out there, who take their views only from some of the nonsense in the newspapers, to shame.

Those children and young people have positive suggestions to make on drugs, on the provision of decent leisure facilities, on the environment and on how to involve young people more in the education process. They are interested in peace and justice issues and in some of the matters that Jamie McGrigor mentioned. They cannot understand why, in a world with great resources, so many of them are concentrated in the wrong

places and people are still starving. They were right to put politicians on the spot.

The children I spoke to were also interested in how to become an MSP. That in itself shows that the Scottish Parliament is perhaps sending out the right message about being more open and accessible.

I do not want to say too much more, because I would like as many people as possible to be involved in the debate, but I would like to mention again the appointment of a children's commissioner. I have campaigned for that over many years, written articles about it and spoken about it in various quarters, so I do not want to go over all that again.

We must propose something that gets that joined-up thinking right and cuts across all departments. If there is one thing that disappoints me still about this Parliament, it is the fact that children's issues are seen as the responsibility of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. I am on the Transport and the Environment Committee; there are children's issues to do with transport. There are children's issues to do with other areas of the Parliament's work. If we can take a lead and set an example in bringing together those issues, that would be a step forward for children's rights.

17:34

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I join other members in congratulating Elaine Smith on securing this debate. I want to raise an issue that is of particular relevance to article 32 and I have questions for the minister.

As Cathy Jamieson said, it is horrendous that young children are out working when they should not be, with no protection at all. Cathy said that this is a difficult issue to tackle; there is an EC directive on protection of children in employment, which could go a long way towards tackling it. The EC directive ensures that there will be risk assessments for children in employment between the ages of 13 and 18 and that a special permit will be issued to show that that risk assessment has taken place.

Implementation of those risk assessments requires local authorities to pass byelaws, which have to be approved by the Minister for Children and Education. Recent press coverage has told us of councils, especially Highland Council, that have been waiting six months for approval of the byelaws they have produced. I have a couple of questions for the minister on this issue. Why are councils waiting so long? How many more have produced byelaws and are waiting for the minister's approval?

That problem could be overcome by the

appointment of a children's commissioner, which is long-standing SNP policy. Members will know that Nicola Sturgeon—who, unfortunately, cannot be here this evening—has a motion before Parliament on that subject. I commend it to members and hope that all of us will support it.

Our having a children's commissioner might ensure that ministers comply with European directives and articles of the UN convention when it suits children, not just when it suits ministers.

17:36

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Elaine for introducing this subject for debate. As happened with the member's debate on domestic violence, I hope that this motion will be the subject of a full parliamentary debate and that we will be able to vote on some of the issues that have been raised.

I have only a short time, so I will concentrate on one or two matters. The report states:

"The Convention is not legally enforceable"

but it

"obliges countries that ratify it to undertake all appropriate measures for the implementation of the rights"

that children should have. I would like the minister to remember that when he considers the following aspects of the report.

The first is the part that deals with family environment and alternative care. It states:

"The Convention recognises and encourages the supportive role parents, other family members and the community play in raising their children".

I would like the minister to address the rights of grandparents who, sometimes, through no fault of their own, lose contact with their grandchildren because of divorce or separation, for example.

Jamie McGrigor raised the horrific issue of children in war. The Executive and the Westminster Government—regardless of political party—should not supply arms to countries that use children as soldiers. I watched a television programme about Sierra Leone. Perhaps other members saw it. I was disgusted by the fact that children there, some as young as six or eight, were drugged, dragged away from their parents and used as soldiers to kill. We must not be party to that. I beg the minister, on behalf of everyone in this Parliament, to tell Westminster that we say with one voice that we will not sell arms to countries that use children as soldiers.

The Presiding Officer: Thanks to three members withdrawing their requests to speak and commendable brevity on the part of those who have spoken, everyone who wanted to take part has done so. This is a model of how members'

debates should operate.

17:38

The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock): I hope that I will be a model of how one should reply to a debate, but I am not sure that that will be the case.

I welcome the fact that this debate is taking place and that Elaine Smith has secured it. I know that she pays a great deal of attention to how we can best provide for children and young people. This is a matter to which Parliament is rightly giving more attention. She raised many questions and made the point that this is an all-party matter. I want to enter the debate in that spirit. It is important that, when we discuss children's issues, we do so as far as possible in a non-partisan atmosphere, because we all aim to secure the best interests of the children we are here to serve.

I want to deal with as many of the points that have been raised as I can. First, I am pleased to reaffirm the Executive's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As members will be aware, the UK has been a signatory since 1992. Sam Galbraith made clear the Executive's commitment to the convention when the second UK report was published in August. The report had a separate Scottish chapter to reflect the situation in Scotland. Over time, I hope that we can develop that part of the report and pay more attention to some of the points that have been raised today.

Of course, the report was informed by the views of children. As often happens, Cathy Jamieson rightly pointed out how important it is to listen to those views. From my experience in recent months of listening to young people talking about the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill and about children's services and looked after children in the care of local authorities, it is striking how quick, articulate and pointed they are about the questions that we need to address as adult politicians. We have a lot to learn from those young people.

When we are thinking about future reports on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we will listen to children's view about the convention and establish how we can make progress on aspects of it in response to their views.

I will pick up on four points: employment and article 32 of the convention, which Fiona McLeod and others mentioned; a commissioner for children; and, if I have time, play and further thoughts on listening to children.

I hear what has been said about children in employment and the television images we saw last night and last week. Article 32 deals with the

economic exploitation of children and the control of child labour. It is a provision which, regrettably, the Tory Government entered a reservation to. I am delighted to say that the Labour Government has removed that reservation. Legal provision is now made for young people aged between 16 and 18.

We have also raised—from 13 to 14—the minimum age at which a child can be employed, unless it is expressly sanctioned by the education authority in byelaws. I will pick up Fiona McLeod's point about byelaws, which is an important issue on which local authorities are in the driving seat. Fifteen sets of local authority byelaws have been confirmed, the Scottish Executive is processing a further eight and we are waiting for a further eight to be submitted. We have written to local authorities reminding them of that, because their role in this is crucial. As a result of this debate, I will check on what is happening to the eight that are currently under consideration by the Executive. I will ensure that we do anything we can to speed the process up.

As a result of this debate, I will also ask more questions in the department about the enforcement of existing byelaws. There is little point in having byelaws, conventions and provision in law if enforcement does not follow. We can take employment much more seriously, because a framework of law exists to deal with it.

This is the first time I have had the opportunity in Parliament to make the Executive's position on the children's commissioner clear. I will spell this out in some detail. I am conscious that many calls for the examination of this concept have come from many quarters: from across the political parties in the chamber and from a range of voluntary organisations and other interests outwith the Parliament. The proposition is superficially attractive, but the Executive wants to be sure that the attractions are more than superficial. We want to ensure that support for the commissioner is for the same thing.

I have frequently been told about the need for a commissioner and the arguments for one have been put cogently, but people often give different descriptions of the commissioner's job. We must ensure that if we have a commissioner, everybody is on board about what that commissioner ought to do.

Many international comparisons are made in discussions about a children's commissioner. Other countries have commissioners and it is often argued that we should therefore have one too. We should certainly learn from other countries. I hope that the Scottish Parliament will listen more and hear what is happening in other parts of Europe and the world, but making simple comparisons can be misleading. The commissioners that are

referred to in other countries do different things. Other countries do not have the same support systems as we have for children's services. We must be clear that the commissioner—if we are to have a commissioner—will add something to the present situation and design of services.

The Executive wants to be clear that a commissioner would not replicate, usurp, or conflict with, existing arrangements. For example, how would a children's commissioner relate to the children's hearing system, which, after all, is unique to Scotland and highly regarded? We want to be clear about what the relationship would be.

How would the commissioner relate to the duties under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995? How would the commissioner relate to the local authority ombudsman, the health service commissioner, the parliamentary commissioner or other independent offices that have been established to protect the rights of citizens? We must be clear about how the work of the commissioner, if there were to be a commissioner, would relate to the voluntary sector, which does superb work in a variety of settings. We must ensure that any commissioner would not impinge upon the traditional and valuable role of the voluntary sector. We must be clear about how the commissioner would relate to parliamentary committees and the rights of MPs and MSPs. The proposition raises many issues on which the Executive would have to be satisfied before we could proceed.

However, I want to make clear that we do not have a closed mind. If a commissioner can genuinely add something positive to the existing range of provision, we are prepared to consider it. That is why, as Mary Mulligan said, we have asked the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to consider the issue—I am delighted that the committee is prepared to consider it in some detail. We stand ready to help it—perhaps, as Robert Brown said, by providing a memorandum on a range of issues that we think the committee needs to take into account.

The issues that I would raise need close and detailed examination in public. It is important that that is done in public, which is one of the reasons we have asked the committee to consider the proposition. We remain to be convinced, but we are willing to hear the arguments and to try to be satisfied about the points that I have raised.

Presiding Officer, how am I doing for time?

The Presiding Officer: Your time is just ending.

Peter Peacock: In that case, I will ask for indulgence and deal quickly with play before I conclude.

On many occasions, in questions and in

parliamentary debates, Elaine Smith has rightly mentioned play. I willingly accept the invitation to visit the group in Kirkshaws to see what it is doing. The scheme is clearly very worth while. Across Scotland, many other, similar, schemes are developing. We want to encourage them because play is central to much of what the Executive would like to achieve.

The benefits of play are clear to most people. It allows the youngest children to explore the world in all its manifestations. It allows them to develop physical skills. It allows them to develop their understanding of the world and to develop new social skills that enable them to co-operate and to work with others. When I was a professional youth worker, I saw how adventure play can help people to mature and to contend with a range of situations. I assure Elaine Smith and the Parliament that we are deeply committed to ensuring that play develops as a major part of our policy on children and their future development.

I undertake to write to other members who have raised points that I have not been able to deal with. We are glad to have had this debate and we are glad about the spirit in which it has been conducted. I hope that we will have further debates on children, their rights and their needs, and that we can continue to transform the lives of children in Scotland in the long term.

The Presiding Officer: I would like to respond to the minister's question about time. In adjournment debates in the House of Commons, ministers get cut off in mid-sentence when the half hour is up. This Parliament is more open and accessible and the occupants of the chair occasionally turn a blind eye to the ticking of the clock when we think that doing so is in the interests of the chamber as a whole. That was a good debate.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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