

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 23 February 2000
(*Afternoon*)

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23 February 2000

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 23 February 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We welcome to lead our time for reflection this afternoon the Reverend Watson Moyes, President of the Baptist Union of Scotland.

Reverend Watson Moyes (President of the Baptist Union of Scotland): The Baptist movement, whose people in Scotland I represent, was founded on the principle of tolerance. That might come as a surprise to members who have any awareness of the movement because we have, with others, sometimes been described as the religious right, as fundamentalists, as bigots, as self-appointed moral custodians and other such choice descriptions as one might expect in an open society.

However, my Baptist forefathers pled for freedom of conscience and sovereignty of choice. They found themselves in prison with other non-conformists for refusing to surrender conscience to the authority of state or Church. The freedom to decide how or whether to respond to God—or, indeed, to believe in God—was, to them, absolute and non-negotiable. That principle remains as it was expressed in the Baptist world congress statement that was given on the eve of the second world war:

"No person, no government, no institution, religious or civil, social or economic, has the right to dictate how a person may worship God or whether he shall worship God at all. In continuance of our consistent Baptist practice, we are imperatively constrained again to insist upon the full maintenance of absolute religious liberty for every person of every faith and no faith."

However, tolerance that is based on respect for conscience is vastly different from the colourless anything-goes attitude that effectively amoralses life. You may accept and respect people; you may defend their right to hold views with which you utterly disagree, but you retain the freedom to attempt to persuade them about your own freely held convictions. Is not that what an open society is? Baptist people, while defending the rights of others to hold their own convictions, have not hesitated to evangelise or campaign—witness such notable examples as Dr Billy Graham and Dr Martin Luther King. Christians present Christ as the way, the truth and the life; they believe that

certain things are contrary to God's will. Others are free to reject those convictions, but not to silence us.

All of that has to be set in the context of both our fallibility and our accountability to God. We try to hold our convictions with humility, with a degree of provisionality that awaits fuller knowledge and with the awareness that there is an ideal that we all fall short of and against which we are all judged. St Paul in Romans 14 says:

"Don't criticise others for having beliefs that are different from yours . . . After all, God welcomes everyone. Make up your own mind. Any who count one day more important than another day do it to honour their Lord. Those who eat meat give thanks to God, just like those who don't . . . Why criticise other followers of the Lord? . . . The day is coming when God will judge all of us. Each of us must give an account to God for what we do."

I conclude with a prayer. Lord God, grant us wisdom to know your truth, grace to walk in your way, strength to serve others, and humility to listen to and learn from them. Amen.

Modernising Government

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S1M-569, in the name of Mr Jack McConnell, on modernising government, and amendments to that motion.

14:35

The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell): It is a great pleasure to open the debate on modernising government—a fundamental objective of the Executive that should also be a fundamental objective of the Parliament.

Modernising government in Scotland is at the heart of the partnership's vision of a democratically renewed Scotland. The Executive is committed to the principles of modern government in Scotland. We are committed to creating 21st century government that will meet the needs of Scotland and our changing environment.

"Modernising government" is not some vague slogan. It is about people and their government meeting the needs of the 21st century. Government must be accountable to and representative of the people of Scotland, and it must deliver for the people of Scotland. We need government that works and listens. Modernising government is about providing a framework that will turn best practice into normal practice. We are committed to improving policy making, to developing responsive public services, to improving the quality of public services, to developing information-age government and to valuing public services rather than denigrating them.

The establishment of the Parliament has made government more open, accessible and accountable. The Parliament must be involved—as it is today—in the Executive's drive to modernise government, because the creation of the Parliament marked a step towards modern government in the 21st century.

The Scottish Executive's ambition is to ensure that the aims of being modern, open and accessible also apply to public services across Scotland. We must deliver real benefits to ensure that all arms of government—local and central, devolved and reserved—are focused on serving the citizen. We will set ourselves tough objectives, clear targets and a rigorous and far-reaching action plan.

We can be the catalyst in the process of creating efficient, modern, responsive government for Scotland throughout the public sector. It is a practical, pragmatic exercise, but it is based on a

clear vision. That vision is of people-centred services and a vibrant professional atmosphere in which we can attract the right calibre of people to public life. We need integrated one-stop services that are designed for the client, not for the provider. Our vision embraces and nurtures diversity, and is not based on exclusion and elitism. Our vision for Scotland's future must be built on confidence, and on high aspirations.

We should look ahead to where we will be 10 years from now. How will we prepare for that? We are constantly changing: the demands that people place on government are changing; technology is changing and government is changing. I want our public services to be world leaders. As politicians in a new, modern Parliament we should be aiming to be the best in the world, and our public sector employees and public services should be the best. Our challenge is to provide high-quality, efficient and responsive public services that deliver best value.

We will seek to provide services in different ways. We will look for economies of scale. We will adopt the best practice that we find elsewhere, whether it is in the private or voluntary sectors, elsewhere in the world, or in projects that are already running here. We will look to the drivers of change—of which there are many—such as the public's expectations, technological advances, and culture and social changes.

We must consider the bigger picture, because a lot of work is being done on that.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Before the minister moves on the other subjects, will he tell Parliament the mechanisms by which lessons will be learnt from different arms of government, and from the voluntary or private sectors? Will there be a unit in the Scottish Executive to carry out that function?

Mr McConnell: There is a central unit, but, in the culture that we are trying to encourage, I hope that all arms of government will be involved in the process. Modernising government and creating higher-quality and more efficient public services cannot be achieved by a few central individuals imposing their solutions on everybody. The public sector in Scotland—including local government, the reserved departments that operate in Scotland and arm's-length public agencies—must be involved.

The procurement supervisory board's model—which we have adopted and which involves different arms of government in one board—should be followed in the mechanisms that are introduced to pursue this initiative. I do not intend to specify those mechanisms today, because they should arise from the debate and from our developing dialogue with the Convention of

Scottish Local Authorities and other bodies outside our organisation.

The Executive has adopted an approach that is focused on outcomes such as the best possible social justice, better health care and better education, and which joins up all those services for the good of individual citizens. Our approach cuts across departmental portfolios and integrates policy consideration and implementation. That means closer interaction within the Executive and with people from outside it who have the knowledge and experience to make a difference. Such an approach has been used for cross-cutting priorities such as rural development, tackling drugs, promoting social inclusion and digital Scotland.

At its heart, our approach involves issues that are raised in today's amendments, such as decentralisation, best value, and open, accessible and accountable government. I hope that colleagues will be positive enough in the promotion of their amendments to allow us to unite in the chamber today.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Unlike Whitehall, we have ministers but no ministries. For example, the minister himself works with different departments within the Scottish Executive on issues such as local government finance and European structural funds. Does the fact that he has no actual ministry make it more difficult to exercise political control?

Mr McConnell: I do not feel any difficulty with that. In the new Scotland, the Parliament's more open, accountable and transparent system means that we and the people of Scotland can exercise more political control. That was what devolution was all about in the first place.

Central to that system is the fact that the Scottish Executive does not have a monopoly on policy making. In October 1999, the Scottish Executive announced a three-year funding package for the Scottish Civic Forum as part of its commitment to the new politics of participation. That concrete action was part of the momentum towards a more open policy process.

Civic participation is at the heart of modern government. We are consulting communities through the use of citizens juries and panels in the listening to communities programme. On public spending—a matter that is obviously very close to my heart—two pilot projects in Easterhouse and west Edinburgh are working to identify all public spending in those areas. We know that producing detailed information on local spending patterns can be an important step towards improving agencies' spending decisions and towards giving communities a greater say.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I welcome the minister's commitment to the reform and modernisation of local government in particular. Should such reform also extend to the issue of financing local government?

Mr McConnell: As Mr Rumbles knows, I am very keen to review and reform the system of local government finance to make it more responsive to Scotland's needs, and to ensure that the distribution of finance and the operation of guidelines are justified and transparent. We have begun that dialogue with COSLA, and I hope that it will be very productive in the months ahead.

In November 1999, I launched the Government procurement card for use throughout the Scottish Executive. The card replaces traditional paper-based ordering and it streamlines payment. The card provides a much more cost-effective means of purchasing low value goods and services by cutting paperwork and transaction costs for both the Executive and its suppliers.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr McConnell: I am sorry; I want to continue just now.

In January this year, I established a procurement supervisory board. No modern organisation can ignore e-commerce and the challenges and opportunities that it presents. It is vital that the Scottish Executive responds quickly and effectively to developments in e-commerce, and I have asked the supervisory board to set a date by which most of the Executive's transactions will be conducted electronically. Work is already under way on a number of projects. One of the first projects to be piloted will be electronic tendering for Scottish Executive contracts—that should be operational this year. I plan to make further announcements about e-procurement over the coming months.

Mr Swinney *rose*—

Mr McConnell: I have already let Mr Swinney in once.

Information and communications technologies are revolutionising the ways in which we live, work, communicate, and learn. Those technologies give enormous scope for organising Government activities in new, innovative and better ways. They make life easier for the public by providing services in integrated and more convenient forms. It is vital that we harness those technologies to deliver public services that are at least as good as those that consumers expect from private sector service.

Alasdair Morgan: Obviously, public services are at the heart of the motion. Can the minister

define public services? I presume that the national health service is a public service, but I am no longer clear whether all aspects of transport are public services. Is the retail trade a public service?

Mr McConnell: In the modern world, public services are hard to define. The easy definition is that which is owned or directly run by public or democratically elected organisations, but that is not necessarily the boundary that we should set for ourselves. We should be trying to influence those services that are delivered to the public by the private or voluntary sectors and which have an impact on, or a relationship with, our services at local or central Government level.

I do not want to put boundaries around what we do. We should take an open and inclusive approach to trying to improve the lives of ordinary citizens and communities in Scotland. While we should concentrate on our own facilities and services and get them right first, we must take a wider view if we are to make Scotland a better place in the longer term. Innovative investment in the right technologies will help those of us in the public sector to deliver the same improvements in service quality and efficiency for our citizens as commercial service providers deliver for their customers. The public expect nothing less, and it should receive nothing less.

Electronic delivery of services has begun. The General Register Office for Scotland is already offering customers the opportunity to buy its services electronically. Registers of Scotland—which is responsible for the main property registers—is computerising its data holdings and there are more examples in the wider public sector. In the national health service, all general practitioners' surgeries are linked to NHSNet. In Aberdeen and the Highlands, smart cards are being used by schoolchildren to buy school meals, which is helping to end discrimination and tackle bullying in school dinner queues. West Lothian Council is pursuing a project to set up a one-stop shop in Livingston involving a number of agencies, including central Government departments such as the Benefits Agency, the health board and the police. All of those examples are possible because of modern technology. The list could go on.

We have a target to ensure that all central Government services can be delivered electronically by 2008, but I am examining actively whether that time scale can be shortened. We are examining more convenient and quicker services for student support applicants through the use of the web and electronic entry of important information. However, for members of the public who are less enthusiastic about electronic service delivery, our vision must encompass doing business by telephone and face to face. We will not expect everyone to use the web or the internet

to gain access to public services. The web and communications are changing in ways that will open up new uses and make access the norm for the many, rather than the preserve of the few. For example, digital television is already with us. Public services could be made available through one of the many channels that are available to users—right into the living rooms of the vast majority of households in Scotland by the middle of this decade.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I agree, as do most people, with the principle of one-stop shopping and interpretive facilities. Does the minister recognise that citizens advice bureaux currently provide those services for many citizens? Does he acknowledge the resource constraints that Citizens Advice Scotland has to put up with? As part of his programme to modernise government, what plans does he have for co-ordination with CAS?

Mr McConnell: I hope that that was a serious point. CAS is one of the many organisations that do a great job at local level across Scotland, and it is important that we support it, but, like all public, voluntary and, for that matter, private organisations in Scotland, it is important that it operates within resource constraints. I do not want anything that I say to be construed wrongly as a comment on the current situation. Those who work in citizens advice bureaux, on a professional or voluntary basis, do a great job.

It might have struck members that I have spoken at some length about modernising government without touching on how reform of the home civil service will fit into this programme. We are working with the rest of the UK civil service to consider how we can create an innovative and modern civil service that reflects 21st century Scotland. Sir Richard Wilson, head of the home civil service, has agreed six key themes with the Prime Minister. Those are stronger leadership, better business planning, sharper performance management, a dramatic improvement in diversity, a more open civil service that brings on talent, and a better deal for staff.

Our civil service reforms will build on the strengths of existing services, rather than get rid of the excellent talent that we already have. We are determined to tackle diversity issues by stretching targets for increasing the representation of under-represented groups.

We need to continue to recruit directly at all levels of the civil service and to consider closely how we might develop an interchange programme.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the minister give way?

Mr McConnell: Yes, but this will have to be the last time, as I must move on.

Mr Stone: I thank the minister for being so cordial. He talked about the technological revolution and has just referred to the civil service. Does that revolution augment the argument that I have put forward in the chamber for the further decentralisation of the civil service to constituencies such as mine, and others?

Mr McConnell: I think that it does, and the Executive has guaranteed to consider such options on each occasion when possibilities might arise.

Vision and purpose will get us so far, but we know that as well as offering challenges to the wider public sector we need to create opportunities. That is why today I am announcing a £25 million modernising government fund. That will amalgamate existing funds into one fund to allow some of the best ideas in the public sector to become reality. The fund will progress projects that involve the innovative provision of improved public services and that contribute to modernising government in Scotland.

I look forward to receiving bids from a range of public sector bodies, including Scottish Executive departments and agencies, health authorities, non-departmental public bodies and local government authorities. I am excited about seeing many imaginative ideas being realised and acting as inspirations for the rest of the public sector.

Twenty-five million pounds will be available for projects over the next two years. The fund will cover investment only and bidders will be expected to contribute to each project. Successful projects might involve information technology, but they will certainly join up government and will invest to save. Details of that bidding process will be published next week.

I am sure that the public sector will not let us down. I hope that members of the Scottish Parliament will play their part in the process by ensuring that local authorities and other eligible groups in their constituencies know about the fund and that they think about how they can work together to attract the funding.

Twenty-first century government is about more than the Executive and the Parliament. It should not be inward looking, but should seek ultimately to encompass the whole of the public sector in Scotland. I therefore intend to seek input to and ideas for the modernising government agenda from all sources. I want to hear practical proposals about how that might be done and to encourage the impressive examples of best practice that already exist.

We will run workshops that are aimed at facilitating debate on the modernising government agenda and we will invite representatives of the public, private and voluntary sectors to take part.

Scottish Executive officials will organise a similar series of workshops for those who are involved directly in the provision of services.

I have said before that I want to hear all the voices in this debate, including those at the sharp end of service delivery, whether they are receiving or providing a service. Soon we will have on the Scottish Executive site a dedicated modernising government web page that will be used for discussion as well as for information. We have already set up an e-mail address to which comments and views on modernising government can be sent. That address is c21g@scotland.gov.UK. Members should remember that address and pass it on, but they should also remember that I am, of course, happy to receive comments by more traditional means.

In conclusion—

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)
rose—

Mr McConnell: I am sorry, I am concluding.

We must build support for our vision and make available the tools to modernise government such as the £25 million fund to match central resources to new and innovative ideas, the e-mail address and new website and practical workshops to pick the best ideas from professionals and the Scottish public. The creation of the Scottish Parliament showed what can be achieved when the collective will is put to a task. The Parliament must be an engine for change, for meeting new challenges, delivering new services, securing best value and for building government that is fit for the 21st century in Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Executive's commitment to high quality, efficient and responsible public services; supports developments to modernise and integrate government at all levels in Scotland, and welcomes initiatives that harness information and communications technology and put citizens at the centre of government in 21st century Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for setting a good example at the beginning of the debate by coming in under time.

14:53

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I assume from the Presiding Officer's helpful comment that I may use the surplus time.

The Presiding Officer: It was an encouragement.

Mr Swinney: I will try not to, in that case.

I feel under even more pressure today because I am conscious that we have been joined by the Serjeant at Arms of the House of Commons. His is

an even more threatening presence than yours, Presiding Officer. I mean that in the nicest possible way.

We are supportive of many issues on which the minister commented. I will come to those towards the end of my speech.

A tradition is developing in the Scottish Parliament that before members get anywhere near the debate, they hear most of it on the radio or television. On the radio this morning, a very helpful interview with the minister covered the issues that he has raised today. Even more helpful was an article that appeared in *The Sunday Times* at the weekend, which related to some of the issues that we are dealing with today. I appreciate that the past few weeks have been a pretty difficult time for the Executive, as it has done its duty by wrestling with a number of the problems of office. I am relieved that, according to the article in *The Sunday Times*, we now have a credible explanation for the problems.

Apparently, all the problems that the Executive has been wrestling with are the fault of the civil servants. The article says:

"A purge of senior civil servants is under way in the Scottish executive after ministers complained the old-fashioned attitudes of officials were thwarting the ambitions of Holyrood's coalition government."

Mr McConnell: Will Mr Swinney accept in good faith the statement that I made just five minutes ago that we want to build on the existing talent and strengths of the civil service in Scotland? Any representation to the contrary would be untrue and would certainly not be supported by the Executive.

Mr Swinney: I am grateful that the minister has put those comments on the record. I look forward to opening the letters page of *The Sunday Times* to read his refutation of that scurrilous article.

I was concerned because the article created what used to be known in the private sector, where I worked before entering politics full time, as a blame culture. We in the SNP do not have a blame culture; we generally take the view that anything that goes wrong is the fault of Michael Russell. [*Laughter.*] I do not want that to get into the thinking of the Executive.

Articles such as the one in *The Sunday Times* do not encourage us to believe that the Government is serious about the agenda of modernisation if that is how it is presented to the public. Nor are such articles the best way of encouraging our civil servants, who are responsible for the dispassionate implementation of Government policy, whatever the political complexion of the Government happens to be.

The article goes on:

"Up to a quarter of the 130 civil servants at the key rank

of 'head of division' are to be moved or offered early retirement."

Those people, about 30 of them, are to be replaced by a new group of people. The ideal candidate is described as

"a mid-thirties high-flyer, possibly with an MBA and hands-on senior management experience, who can demonstrate success in getting things done".

I know that there are tensions in the Executive, but I did not think that it would be necessary to construct an advert of that nature to suggest an alternative career to the Minister for Communities, who probably qualifies in all those categories.

Mr McConnell said many interesting things about the modernisation of government that the SNP supports. However, I have questions about a couple of the areas on which the minister has commented.

The first concerns the process of appointments in the public service. I know that the minister is working on a consultation paper on that very subject, which is working its way round the system. I am concerned that the Government's motion is rather complacent about the approach to some of the issues that are implicit in the modernisation agenda. There is a lot of rhetoric in the resolution with which it is difficult to disagree. However, reflecting on the events of last week and on the way in which the Executive has appointed judges in Scotland, one sees a discrepancy between the Government's rhetoric on modernisation and the need for new practice, and the rolling out of Government decision making in a host of different areas.

The Government would be taken more seriously on the issue of modernising government structures in Scotland if it were to introduce substantial proposals for changing the way in which some elements of our public processes are carried out. I was relieved to read in *The Herald* this morning a report of some comments made yesterday by the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice at the Hansard Society conference, in which he indicated that the Government is to publish before Easter a consultation paper on judicial appointments. Such a move is fundamental to today's debate, because it translates into action those aspects of the Government's agenda that concern modernising government in Scotland. Unless the Government proposes specific examples and initiatives to realise the rhetoric, it will not deliver on the wording in the motion.

The Government must present a substantial agenda of how it proposes to modernise government, not simply by Wednesday afternoon debates in Parliament, but by the practical application of politics and decisions. Last week, by appointing Lord Hardie to the bench in a manner

that was more akin to the 19th century than the 21st, the Government missed an opportunity to substantially advance the way in which an area of policy is handled. I hope that the Government has learned a lesson from that.

In a speech to the Eglinton Management Centre on 20 December 1999, the minister said that the public

“want us to make realistic promises and keep them. They want us to deliver on their terms.”

We would all be wise to follow that thought. Before the 1997 general election, the Labour party promised a post-election bonfire of the quangos. The Minister for Finance did not say that, although I am sure that he has said something similar. However, there has been no such bonfire. As the minister said in December, realistic promises must be kept. I am glad that he said that he will not restrict his areas of policy interest to the departments of the civil service, but will extend them across the Government community. There are vast areas of our quango and agency state that need to be brought in to 21st century to guarantee the delivery of the Government's aspirations.

When dealing with the local issues that are of concern to our constituents, all of us, regardless of our political background, will have been struck by how difficult it is to penetrate the quango state to find someone who is prepared to take responsibility for certain problems. In Tayside, the minister has sent in a task force to observe the activities of one of the health trusts. The fact that we have reached that point, after members of all parties expressed concerns about what was happening in the health service in Tayside, shows that measures of that nature have reached the end of the road. Ensuring that the actions of our quangos are transparent is essential to creating a situation where policy is responsive to the Government's agenda.

I want to talk about some of the issues on which the SNP shares common ground with the minister and suggest some ways in which we can advance his agenda.

Prior to the election, the SNP brought forward a document called “The Holyrood Project”, for which Andrew Wilson and I were responsible. It suggested that we did not necessarily have to spend more money on our public services, but that we had to spend money more effectively. We sought to suggest a process by which the Government—ideally an SNP Government—could bring forward proposals that would advance the debate about how we can effectively use our limited resources. We will always be under pressure to spend more money in certain policy areas, but we have to be confident that we are

spending our money as effectively as possible.

We suggested that a green paper should be published after the election setting out the basis for an investigation into the way in which money is spent and the way in which financial processes operate in the Executive. We suggested that the Government should consult widely within the public and private sectors on a range of measures to ensure maximum transparency in the allocation of public resources and to identify the standards of good and best practice and find ways of transferring best practice from one aspect of government into another, whether it be from local government to central Government, from the quangos to central Government or from central Government to smaller organisations.

I suspect that we have reached the moment to debate some of those issues. We have to apply, across the whole Government community, an approach that is designed to stimulate debate within various public sector organisations about the way in which money is being spent and the way in which service is being delivered. We have to be prepared to learn lessons from other sections of the Government community about the way in which that agenda can be progressed.

The minister has taken the approach—and he can correct me if I am wrong—of asking all Government departments to reflect on their own practice. Instead of that, we suggest that we should identify a core group of experts from the private, public and voluntary sectors and empower that team to evaluate the whole of the public sector community in Scotland. Its job would be to work out ways in which we could improve service and use technology and performance measurements to improve the effectiveness and the spending of public finances. That team could include senior civil servants, seconded council officials, private sector representatives and experienced people from the voluntary sector, who would probably have a lot to tell us about ways in which to make money go much further than is possible in some areas of the public sector.

That group could also bring forward a strategy to improve the effectiveness of the delivery of public services and public finances. It could produce something that SNP members bang on about an awful lot—a performance management strategy to determine whether we have had any effect whatsoever on changing practice in the Government community.

Mr Raffan: I have been following closely what Mr Swinney has been saying. Would he agree that we must learn from what is being done in other countries, not only in Europe but in the United States, where there have been so many policy developments related to budgeting and financial measures, performance indicators, and so on?

Mr Swinney: That is an important and helpful point. Such ideas have a role to play in the whole approach to this exercise that we are suggesting.

In addition, we must embrace the work of the committees, in reflecting on some of the issues in the Parliament. We must try to develop a constructive role for the committees in pressurising Government departments to reflect more and more on the way in which they are spending money and delivering service.

David Mundell: I shall make the point that I was going to make to the minister. After hearing about his website, I was tempted to let him know that I checked earlier today and the domain www.spin.com is still available if the Government is interested in acquiring it.

Is Mr Swinney aware that the Finnish Parliament has established a Committee for the Future, which seeks to view from the Parliament's perspective future developments in technology and their impact on society and government? It has already done a great deal of groundbreaking work, which this Parliament and the Executive might draw on.

Mr Swinney: That is an interesting idea that the minister may want to reflect on. He has more chance of being in Finland over the next few weeks than I have, and can investigate that issue.

I bring forward those proposals in relation to other arguments that we advanced before the election, in a spirit of helpfulness, to set out to the Government a way in which they could make this initiative much more effective and comprehensive and give it real substance. From what the minister said in relation to the £20 million or so fund that is to be allocated to some of the transitional aspects of the changes in practice that will be undertaken within government, I fear that the initiative that is being introduced is just an accumulation of the same old money that is in the Government system. The minister can correct me on that later, if that is not the case.

What concerns me is that it all sounds like the same agenda, the same glossy presentations, the same overviews in documents such as "Modernising Government News" from the Whitehall department, and "Wiring it up—Whitehall's management of cross-cutting policies and services", and not enough substantial change in practice.

I hope that the minister will take on board the issues that I have constructively set out in the debate. We are all for modernisation. We are determined to improve service delivery, service flexibility and responsiveness. We are determined to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to have a debate on the substance of extending value and how that can be achieved by the Executive.

We are determined that the Executive should not just occupy parliamentary time by asking, "Are we not doing a good job on some of the issues on which we have good ideas?" There should be a substantial debate about the Executive's performance, changing practice and leveraging more money into the public purse. That is why our amendment is important, in holding the Executive to account for the implementation of its strategy.

I move amendment S1M-569.1, to insert at end:

"and agrees that the Scottish Executive should pursue a programme to obtain greater value from existing public expenditure in Scotland, that targets for modernisation should be set against which the Executive should be monitored to assess its performance and that the Executive should take all necessary steps to ensure open, accessible and accountable government."

15:10

Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

I agree with much of what John Swinney and the minister have said. However, I find it quite disturbing that only six members of the Labour party and only two ministers have bothered to turn up to hear how their colleague will modernise the agenda in Scotland.

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): It is seven. Did you include me?

Nick Johnston: Maybe the member got lost at the back.

I hope that today's debate will provide a clear signal that Scotland is at last moving towards an agenda that we can all follow, an agenda that we can all embrace and that we can honestly say is opening up avenues that will help us, in a totally non-partisan way, to co-operate and to contribute towards a better Scotland. That is why, in this debate, the Conservatives will be supporting not only the Scottish National party amendment, but the Government.

We hope that the debate will clearly map out the way forward, to allow the emerging technology to be harnessed for the better governance of Scotland and to allow the institutions to be reformed. We hope that it will convert the Luddites that lurk within our public services and let them emerge confident into the new dawn, to set course down the road that devolution was surely meant to signpost—the new road into a streamlined Scotland, where waste and duplication is banished for ever and where the much-heralded cross-ministerial groups do away with budget wrangles and empire building.

I hope, then, that the minister will feel that I am being positive when I contrast the rhetoric with the reality. The rhetoric talks of forward-looking, more integrated policy making. The reality is muddle-headed U-turn after U-turn: on section 2A; on the

questions in the census; on road tolls; on tuition fees; and on public transport. The reality is a reversal of legal safeguards designed to protect our children and the promotion of codes of sexual behaviour in our schools that have no support and even less relevance to the majority of the Scottish people.

The rhetoric calls for responsive public services to meet the needs of citizens, not the traditions of providers. The reality is a politicised civil service; a reliance on special advisers; slashed public services; outdated schools; untreated and unrepaired roads; a justice system teetering on the brink of collapse; fewer police; higher crime; fewer prison places; rising drug abuse; and failing, underfunded hospitals. We have petrol prices that are almost the highest in Europe and our public transport is starved of investment.

The rhetoric calls for efficient, high-quality services, which aim for the best and in which there is value for money. The reality is an Executive devoted to bloated Government, with special advisers and press officers galore, costing more than £5 million a year. The reality is Labour-controlled local authorities—more than £1 billion in arrears—that are unable to manage their finances or to collect debt. Patients are unable to leave hospitals because social workers cannot find care. Traffic is reduced to a crawl because of lack of investment and a quarter of our secondary school pupils are nigh on illiterate when they leave school.

The rhetoric calls for information age government. The reality is spin; glossy brochures; reviews; more reviews; task forces—318 across the UK at the last count—that cost an estimated £20 million; wish lists and failure; focus groups; and priorities that have little to do with the priorities of the public and all to do with political correctness.

The rhetoric is public service that is valued and encouraged. The reality is a public sector that is demoralised and defeated, where teachers want to retire at 45, where many nurses would leave the profession tomorrow, where local government is reeling under the onslaught of trying to explain that less and less is coming from central Government and that either council tax must be raised or services slashed.

The reality, as John Swinney said, is the senior law officer leaving the public service and promoting himself to judge. What a fine example.

Alasdair Morgan: Mr Johnston is doing a good job of explaining how the Government has failed to address the legacy of 18 years of Conservative rule. Will he go on to explain what his party would do?

Nick Johnston: I will spend the next eight

minutes explaining exactly that. [*Laughter.*]

When Mr Morgan talks about the legacy of the past 18 years, does he mean sound public finances, an economy that is growing faster than any other in Europe—does he want me to go on and on? [**MEMBERS:** “No.”] On Friday, John Swinney encouraged us always to start a debate with a quote. I am afraid that I did not do that at the beginning, but I will do so now. On 20 December 1999, Jack McConnell said:

“Citizens now expect more from us as politicians – they quite rightly want us to make a difference. They want us to make realistic promises and keep them.”

I agree with those words. However, let us look at the reality.

The Scottish people voted for devolution to deliver better services, better health care, better schools and better employment prospects. When Tony Blair said before the 1997 election that things can only get better, did he really mean more crime, fewer police, higher taxes and poorer services? Was that his promise? If so, he has certainly delivered on it. When he said that there would be no tuition fees for students, did he mean that too? I suggest that honesty is lacking when rhetoric is king.

That was my positive contribution to the debate. I will now move on to address exactly what the Conservative party would do. What are the challenges that face any Government in any country, and the Government of this country in particular? Surely the biggest challenge is the need to change—to change the way in which we have always done things and to change cultures and attitudes. We must also change the public's perception of Government, which could be done simply by examining the working and opening hours of Government offices and facilities, in order to interact with people when they are available. We need to change the way in which we approach technology, to bring it to the forefront and to popularise it, to make it easier for all to use.

Most important, we must insist that the leaders of our political parties, civil service, local institutions and local government genuinely believe that we need to drive forward this new era. We need real changes in attitudes and structures, rather than accepting existing structures or the tinkering at the edges in the tourism review and the debate over Scottish Enterprise. We need a radical rethink that will allow public assets to be used better and a true partnership to change the suspicions of the teaching unions, for example, to allow progress to be made in education. We need a genuine attitudinal change in the health service, to ensure that the needs of customers are met and that expensive facilities do not lie unused.

We also need a clear understanding that

partnership with the private sector can only benefit both parties. If we take a fundamental look at the structure of local government in what we might call the backroom areas, is there any reason for the Government not to rationalise the payroll services? Do we really need 32 personnel and payroll managers? The Government should consider establishing a central secretariat, run by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, perhaps, in conjunction with the private sector. What about the 64 directors and assistant directors of education—my particular hobby-horse—who cost at least £4 million a year?

I am pleased that the minister acknowledged that the challenge will always be that any model proposed by Government must match the best in the private sector. Attempting to remain at the leading edge will always be a major challenge and credibility will always be an issue—dare I say, especially for this Executive? We must manage change to ensure that all sectors of society benefit and that no one is excluded or discriminated against. We can make change simple and redefine the scope of what is possible.

On this side of the chamber, we have always been in favour of change. When we were in Government, we established the citizens charter; we set firm targets and delivered on them. I look forward to hearing how the minister's party intends to deliver. We will support the Executive in change. We will play our part in delivering change, if the Executive will be honest about its handicaps, realistic in its rhetoric and rational in resolution.

I am pleased that the minister was not so cowardly as to blame civil servants. I also read the article—it is amazing that *Scotland on Sunday* used exactly the same words as *The Sunday Times*. I was surprised to read that 40 civil servants are about to be moved or offered early retirement and that 30 high-fliers are to be recruited, each earning £55,000 a year. High-fliers are obviously better rewarded than MSPs. The minister's assertion that he is stymied by civil servants obsessed with protecting their own patch does him little credit. He is in government and people look to him for a lead. The people of Scotland deserve no less and will accept no less.

Our amendment talks about decentralisation, regional differences and quality of service. That is the model that the minister needs to introduce. We need to see the targets, the performance indicators and the outcomes. Scotland will welcome the move towards 21st century Government.

I move amendment S1M-569.2, to insert at end:

"and calls upon the Scottish Executive to produce a clear model of modern and integrated yet decentralised government in Scotland, which recognises regional differences and measures quality of service."

15:19

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

This is a debate about ideas rather than politics. In the 1960s, when I first got involved in politics, one of the people who most influenced me was the late Bobby Kennedy, during his extraordinary run for the Senate in New York. When he opened or concluded his speeches he used to say:

"Some see things as they are and say why; others dream things that never were—and say why not?"

I later discovered that those words were taken from George Bernard Shaw. They were inspirational words, but they have been boiled down in the jargon of the 21st century, particularly in the States, to what is called "breakthrough thinking"—that we should not look just to the predictable future, but rather think what might be possible if circumstances were different. Bill Clinton and Al Gore have called it reinventing government. Jack McConnell and Tony Blair have called it modernising government. It is about innovation in the government process.

In my speech, I want to deal with the three Is without which innovation is not possible: information, indicators—which were referred to by Nick Johnston and John Swinney—and ideas. It is important that information is not just available, but easily accessible. Those who sit with me on the Finance Committee will know what is coming, because there is a difference between the Minister for Finance and the Finance Committee on some issues. In particular, there is a difference on the format of the budget documents. The minister has been very co-operative in many ways, notably with regard to the breakdown of the budget to level 2 figures—although I think that we need to go beyond that. However, there is also an issue of the availability and accessibility of information.

I was struck when Graham Leicester of the Scottish Council Foundation gave evidence to us as part of our current inquiry into the Treasury functions of the Executive. He produced an inch-thick budget document on the state of Oregon, and said that after studying it for an hour he knew more about the state of the state of Oregon than he did about the state of Scotland after three years of studying the equivalent documents. We have a lot to learn from overseas—not just from the States, but from Europe—about the way in which people there make information available and, crucially, accessible. The Finance Committee is having a bit of a ping-pong match with the Minister for Finance, but I am sure that he will see the strong logic that underlies the stance that we are taking and that we will resolve our minor dispute before too long.

It is a widely held view that the Scottish Executive has placed less emphasis on the structure of output and performance indicators to

test whether money is being well spent than has the Treasury in Whitehall. There might be reasons for that. In Whitehall, there is almost institutionalised antipathy between the Treasury and the big-spending departments. In the Scottish Executive and between its departments, there is more of a collegiate—perhaps too cosy—relationship. When the public service agreements setting out the indicators were agreed in 1998-99 between the Treasury and Whitehall, an outline structure of indicators was agreed between the Treasury and the Scottish Office. We might need to reconsider the indicators that we have in Scotland. That is important, particularly given that we are so tightly limited in what we can spend by the Scottish block.

In that context, it is worth mentioning the benchmark system that is used in the state of Oregon and which has become extremely well known in the States. At a time when the state was in a slump, the administration developed a strategy for economic transformation of the state, which resulted in the creation of 92 benchmarks by which performance could be measured. Each department and public agency in Oregon was asked whether it had primary or secondary responsibility for those indicators. When more than one department or agency said that they had primary responsibility, they were asked how they co-ordinated and worked together—joined-up government, the very thing that the minister and all of us want. If none of them said that it had responsibility, there was clearly something wrong with the system and responsibility was allocated. That has helped to produce joined-up or holistic government in the state of Oregon.

The state of Oregon is also developing a uniform method for departments to report to the state legislature on benchmarks, efficiency and effectiveness measures. All their indicators can be compared, which is also important. As a result, the culture of government in that state has slowly but definitely changed so that people now think in terms of long-term goals, collaboration, performance and results. They have all looked in the mirror. Because of the performance indicators, there is a much more effective approach to joined-up government.

My next point is about ideas. As I said in my intervention in Mr Swinney's speech, we must look at what other countries are doing. In the Finance Committee, we had evidence recently on how Northern Ireland does things and on the Netherlands as well as the USA.

The National Governors Association, which is one of the most powerful bodies in the USA, spends two thirds of its budget on ensuring that any initiative taken by a governor is readily accessible to governors in other states. The

openness and sharing of ideas is extremely refreshing and not something that we experience to the same extent here.

Andrew Wilson: There is more that is tangible in Mr Raffan's speech than in all the Executive's proposals. Does Mr Raffan share with me and others, not just in the chamber but in the public gallery, a sense of embarrassment that we are spending a two-and-a-half-hour debate on a tautological topic, on proposals that we cannot even discern from the Government on the idea that we should modernise government—which we all agree with—when there are major issues of state that demand attention?

Mr Raffan: It is important that the Parliament is a forum for the exchange of ideas. The debate has been constructive so far and I do not want to inject party politics into it. I am trying to produce some ideas in a non-confrontational atmosphere, which is what the Parliament is expected to do. We must do that, whatever the opinion polls say, such as that ridiculous poll in *The Scotsman*—it seems to think that to pull the young plant out of the ground and examine the roots every three months is a way of measuring the Parliament's effectiveness. Let this institution settle down—Westminster has taken 700 years and even now it is far from perfect. In a Parliament that is only seven months old, we must look at ideas from other countries and cherry-pick and implement the best of them.

The National Governors Association produces an impressive series of reports called "Ideas That Work", which we might well study. Another idea from a policy institute in one state is a competition every two years inviting individuals to write in with ideas for better government. As a prize, six to 10 winners are given the resources to develop their embryonic idea into a fully fledged proposal. We should run something like that here.

I am surprised that the Minister for Finance did not refer to the Civic Forum—some of us wonder where it has disappeared to. I hope that it will be up and running soon. I attended something similar on Saturday—the effective Stirling assembly, run by Stirling Council and involving the community councils and voluntary sector organisations in Stirling.

In conclusion, I quote Professor Robert Reich of Harvard, who, first, was Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration and then head of the Office for Management and Budget. I am sure that the Minister for Finance would like to model himself on Professor Reich. He was asked:

"What about the Cabinet? Are they power centres too?"

He replied:

"Some of them. It depends. Mostly not. They're out of the loop." Then he smiled and pointed to his 'phone: 'This is where the loop begins. This is the loop. Right here. Office

for Management and Budget. This is where all the centers of power meet up. It's power central."

In the Scottish Executive, the minister, as Minister for Finance and with his other responsibilities for management, personnel and policy development, is power central. He is at the hub of the Executive and I am sure that he will make the most of it.

We need to be open to new ideas and the minister must be open with us. We should not have to force him to make information accessible; he must make it available and easily accessible. Equally, he must be open to the fresh, new and innovative ideas that parliamentarians and, more important, the public can bring forward. If not, what is the point of this Parliament?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We now enter the general debate. I will allow speeches of up to five minutes, including interventions.

15:30

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): In my more extreme moments, I say that modernisation is a meaningless word and that just as Herbert Morrison said that socialism was what Labour Governments do, now modernisation is what Labour Governments do. However, the word can be meaningful, if we recognise that there are not only outdated structures, practices and attitudes, but alternative routes to modernisation.

The first Labour politician I ever came across who used the word modernisation was Ken Livingstone in the 1980s. Now, my friend John McAllion, who I hope will speak soon, claims to be the most radical moderniser in the Labour party in Scotland, although I might challenge him for that title.

On a more serious note, however, the most important modernisers in my lifetime were the feminists who, from the 1970s onwards, did so much to begin to transform attitudes and structures in society, although clearly there is a long way to go.

All of us will agree that devolution was one of the great modernising acts of the Labour Government since 1997. We are privileged to be at the cutting edge of modernisation. The way in which the Parliament is beginning to work is an example, certainly to Westminster and no doubt to many other Parliaments throughout the world.

We come under a lot of criticism—there was an item on "Newsnight" last night—but I believe that the committees are beginning to work and to deal with legislation in a new and more effective way. The debate on the census last week was a small precursor to events to follow.

Andrew Wilson: The member raised the issue

of last night's edition of "Newsnight". Has Mr Chisholm had direct contact with his constituents who appeared on the programme? Do they have an issue with the member, or is the issue wider than that?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have frequent contact with my two constituents whom I was pleased to see getting coverage on "Newsnight" last night.

I think that we would all agree that one of the modernising acts of Labour at Westminster was to get rid of the House of Lords. The debate at Westminster is about what kind of second chamber to have, to which my reply is that here we have only one chamber. However, the only way to justify that is to handle legislation differently, which we are beginning to do.

Power sharing is the next stage of democracy. One of the great achievements of this Parliament is the enhanced role for committees and outside people—Jack McConnell referred to the Civic Forum.

The other simple but vital fact is that this Parliament has a much higher percentage of women members than Westminster and most other Parliaments in the world. On the Labour side, 50 per cent of members are women. That fact, combined with moves to do something about the number of women and representatives of ethnic minorities on quangos, which Jack McConnell has also initiated, is an important part of modernising government.

The motion refers to integration. We should acknowledge that joined-up government is starting to happen within the Scottish Executive, although there is still a long way to go. One of the features that has bedevilled government in this country for decades is departmentalitis, which must be challenged.

At local level, too, we need far more joined-up government, with different bodies—local authorities, health boards and other agencies—working together. The Government has started that process through its community planning agenda, but there is still a long way to go. The democratisation of quangos is another change that must happen at local level.

We can claim to be ahead of Whitehall on many of those initiatives. We should also be proud that we are prepared to be different from Whitehall. I was slightly amused that the Scottish National party amendment refers to the need for targets for modernisation. I am sure that John Swinney will know—although some of his colleagues might not—that targets for modernisation are one of the obsessions of new Labour in London and a feature that Labour in Scotland has decided is rather a mechanistic approach to the modernisation agenda. I thought that that was slightly ironic.

Mr Swinney: Mr Chisholm tempts me to enter the debate. How can we judge success or failure if we do not have some form of performance measurement?

Malcolm Chisholm: It is important to establish what we mean by modernisation. I would like to move on to a main feature of the motion—the modernising of public services. It would be helpful to describe what we mean by that. We have a chance, in Scotland, to do that modernising slightly differently. That is what devolution is all about.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The member uses the term “modernising”. Does modernising include proportional representation for local authorities?

Malcolm Chisholm: I suspect that on that issue, John McAllion would claim to be the leading moderniser, because he would definitely support proportional representation for local authorities. I have come to support proportional representation for this Parliament and I now support it for Westminster; I am also minded to support it for local government, although I have not quite firmed up my position on that to the same extent. However, the point illustrates that modernisation means different things to different people.

On public services, we should feel free to strike out on a slightly different route, because we have the power to do so. For local government, best value is at the centre of the debate. I bear some responsibility for that, having started things off three years ago. Now that we have a Scottish Parliament, we have an opportunity to proceed with best value with less of the obsession with competition that is the hallmark of best value in Whitehall.

Now that devolution has been embraced, the challenge to all parties is also to embrace democratisation and diversity. If we do that, we will begin to have the new politics for the new Scotland that we have all dreamed about.

15:37

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): In the five minutes that I have, I hope to make three or four positive points. The modernisation of government is not just about information technology; it is about ensuring that government is open, accountable, transparent and honest.

I want to raise a couple of specific points from my experience of dealing with quangos both in the health service and in the enterprise networks. I would like the minister to investigate these points and to come forward with proposals on them.

The first relates to procurement and, in particular, to consultancy contracts—and I speak

as someone who has been in practice in economic consultancy for about 12 to 15 years. When there is a contract from a central Government department, it is advertised openly and people can declare their interest in it. A shortlist of consultants is drawn up so that they can be interviewed for the job. However, with the quangos—and, in particular, with the enterprise networks and the health boards—that is not the way that it works. The people who work there decide on a short list of consultants who will be invited to tender. That system is wide open to favouritism and, in the worst cases, to corruption. I ask the minister to look—as part of the Government's modernising agenda—at the process of procurement and, in particular, at the process of procurement of consultancy contracts in the quangos.

We are not talking about a small amount of money. Last year alone, the total consultancy budget of Scottish Enterprise was about £30 million. The minister should investigate that process and come back with some detailed proposals on how it can be cleaned up and made proper and accountable.

My second point relates to discrimination. In this Parliament, we quite rightly outlaw any kind of discrimination in relation to race, sexual orientation, ethnicity and so on. I am not making a cheap party political point, but in Labour-controlled councils the length and breadth of Scotland, if people are known to be active in, or supportive of, another political party, it can very often rule them out of a job or out of an invitation to tender, for example. That happens not only in local authorities, but in the pyramid of other organisations in which local councillors are involved—organisations such as local enterprise companies. I know of examples of people being told that they did not get a particular job because of their political allegiance—not because they could not do the job, but simply because of their political allegiance. Such discrimination is as unacceptable as any other kind of discrimination in a modern society. I would like the minister to address that issue as part of the modernising agenda.

On quangos, there are two points on which the minister does not need to wait for the consultation exercise to be completed—he can put better practice in place. First, in relation to the role of the existing Commissioner for Public Appointments, only about a third of public appointments in Scotland currently come under her ambit and the code of conduct and open, democratic, transparent process of appointment that she insists upon. I ask the minister to bring, at the stroke of a pen, every public appointment within the ambit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. That would send a loud and clear signal to everybody in Scotland that we would

have an open and transparent system of appointment.

Secondly, I draw the minister's attention to the criteria laid down in "Modernising Trust Ports—A Guide to Good Governance", which have been adopted by the Scottish Executive as well as by the Government in London. Three of those criteria should be applied to every public appointment henceforth. First, appointments by vested interest should be replaced by a system of open competition. The members of too many quangos, or their subsidiary organisations, are appointed by a self-sustaining old boy network rather than being appointed in an open, transparent and competitive way. Secondly, appointments should be for a limited period, so that people are not on a board for 12 or 15 years as if it were their private fiefdom. Thirdly, the performance of individual board members should be monitored and assessed before they are reappointed.

In relation to the other interests of board members, members should consider the example of the current chairman of Lanarkshire Development Agency, who is also chairman of Lanarkshire Health Board and has about 12 other board directorships. That is unacceptable in a modern democracy.

I say to the minister: modernise government, but clean up government. Send a loud and clear message by taking steps that would put an end to the old boy network, which has run—and in some parts, ruined—Scotland for the past 50 years.

15:43

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): Keith Raffan said that Westminster took 700 years to settle down. We do not have 700 years; it is doubtful whether we have seven years. We must achieve things far faster.

Aristotle divided government into three classes: first, monarchy, the form of government that allows sovereignty to be vested in one individual; secondly, the aristocracy, or the form of government that is confined to a select portion of the community that is supposed to possess a peculiar aptitude for its exercise; and thirdly, democracy, or the form of government that is retained by the community and exercised directly, as in small republics of ancient Greece.

The ancients considered that each of those was liable to a particular form of corruption. They said that monarchy tended to degenerate into tyranny. They said that aristocracy became an oligarchy—supreme power was placed in the hands of a small, exclusive class of individuals. Does that remind members of anyone? They said that democracy descended into mob rule, followed by anarchy.

Aristotle must have had the gift of second sight in some of those matters. Let us consider the partnership agreement of May 1999. Labour reckoned that it could not form a minority Government, yet for almost three years in Glasgow District Council I had the privilege of leading 25 Conservative councillors against a combined opposition of 48. We were told that we would not last six days; we lasted almost three years. The Liberals were panting for power. Do not forget that somebody must be almost 85 years of age to have lived under a Liberal Government.

A basic principle put forward by this somewhat loose coalition stated:

"Our first priority is to make the Scottish Parliament work for the people of Scotland."

Good—I do not disagree with that.

The partnership agreement also stated:

"We are committed to the Scottish Parliament introducing a new style of politics based on partnership and consensus-building."

But partnership and consensus with whom? It does not always seem to be with the people. Is it with Tony Blair and Millbank?

I quote further from the agreement:

"We are committed to ensuring that local and central government in Scotland is representative, responsive, participative, open, efficient and decentralised."

Goebbels could not have done better with that wording if he was still around. Let us examine that pledge, and some of the individuals involved in its implementation.

Step forward, Wendy Alexander, a political Boadicea if ever there was one. "Section 28 will be repealed," she cried, despite the vast majority wanting it to be retained. Where was the consensus on that occasion?

Step forward, Susan Deacon. A few weeks ago, she delivered a speech on the national health service that made most of us wonder whether she was on the same planet.

Step forward, Sarah Boyack. She announced a public inquiry on the Glasgow south orbital route. Everyone on the south side of Glasgow, in East Renfrewshire, in Eaglesham and in East Kilbride, has known about the related problems for at least three decades. They want action now, not public inquiries.

Step forward, Jack McConnell. In a keynote speech on 20 December 1999, to which John Swinney referred, at the Eglinton Management Centre here in Edinburgh, he said:

"We want to ensure people are not just interested spectators, but are directly involved through consultation and civic participation."

That is good stuff. Which spin-doctor thought that up? But something has gone wrong, as he added:

"The Executive have a catalytic role to play in this."

Listen to this bit:

"It is not a role that involves dictating to others."

Still, Jack made that speech five days before Christmas, so the season of good will abounded.

Labour has failed with its new tuition tax, with rising waiting times for hospitals, with fewer police officers and with rising crime. As for the bonfire of the quangos that we have heard about, Labour has run out of matches.

Under Labour, the size of the Government has increased dramatically, with 22 ministers responsible for Scottish matters compared with five Scottish Office ministers under the Tories. Labour can appoint up to 12 spin-doctors; the Tories had only two special advisers.

Jack McConnell asked where we would be in 10 years' time. I will tell him: Jack will be in opposition, with a much reduced force compared with what he has now.

Step forward, Donald Dewar, that tribune of the people, sometimes described as the father of the nation. What about the people of the nation? An ICM poll yesterday—Keith Raffan referred to it in scathing terms—said that 91 per cent of respondents, when asked how much had been achieved by the Scottish Parliament, said that little or nothing had been achieved. There is no need for me to be scathing about that poll—it is simply far too high a percentage, even allowing for margins of error. We must take note of such things.

A source close to the Executive is quoted as saying that

"the Government's problems are attributable to its modernising programme grinding to a standstill . . . We are supposed to be modernising education while keeping the teachers on board. We are supposed to be reforming the health service and putting it back into the hands of local people. There is no doubt that the Government's ambitions were too great: we've run into trouble on reforming social housing in Scotland, and no one expected the sharp reaction against proportional representation in local government within the Labour Party."

Donald Dewar, whose popularity hit an all-time high nine months ago, is now sheltering in his political bunker, surrounded by weavers of spin. Donald should show some Braveheart; he should not ignore the people. It is not just about the Labour party, but about the future of Scotland and its people.

This day, we require appropriate action, not words. Providing it is the former, we will support it, but we will keep a careful watch. When we are discussing modernisation, we should remember

not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

15:48

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): That was an extraordinary speech, Presiding Officer. I am not sure that the images that were conjured up—of Wendy Alexander as Boadicea, of Donald Dewar as Braveheart, of Susan Deacon as a spacewoman, or indeed of the panting Liberals—contribute very much to a reasonable debate about modernising government in Scotland in the 21st century. It was entertaining, even if it was not very enlightening.

John Young: I am glad that Mr McAllion was listening.

Mr McAllion: At least I was listening—that shows that some people listen.

I think that it was Sam Galbraith who, in this chamber, accused me of being more new Labour than he was, an accusation that I would obviously reject. In some respects, Malcolm Chisholm is right to say that I am a moderniser, especially in comparison with some of the dinosaur elements in new Labour. For example, I passionately believe that we cannot have modernised government in a 21st century Scotland without electoral reform. By electoral reform, I mean proportional representation at every level of government: local government, the Scottish Parliament, the Westminster Parliament and the European Parliament. That is not to say that I agree with the systems of proportional representation that are used at all those levels—the system used at the European level is not one that I would like to see maintained in this country.

I passionately believe that voters in the 21st century must be given real choices between political parties. I would like them all to vote Labour, but it is their right to reject what I want and to do what they want. If people want to vote for the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, the Scottish Socialist party or even the Tories, it is their democratic right to do so. The idea of a multi-party democracy has never played much part in the British constitution, but those who still cling to the British constitution must wake up to the modern reality of multi-party democracies across Europe and the world. That is the future and the road that we must follow.

As a Labour supporter, I resent those people who tell me that I cannot have the Labour Government of my dreams and that there are only two choices: new Labour or the return of the Tories. That is unacceptable; it is the old thinking. That position tries to defend a political system that was at its peak in the 19th century and which consisted of two main parties representing everyone—there was no choice. In the modern

world, people must have real choices, not simply a choice between political parties that say the same things.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I was caught by John McAllion's suggestion that there are only two choices in Britain—Labour or the Tories. Does that mean that he would prefer an independent Scotland, where the electorate would not face that choice?

Mr McAllion: If John Swinney ever replaces Alex Salmond, it will be new Labour John Swinney replacing old Labour Alex Salmond. There would be no real choices, even in an independent Scotland—the choice would be much the same as the one that currently exists in Britain.

People should have a choice about the economic future. They do not want all the political parties to believe in free-market capitalism; some political parties must challenge capitalism, believe in a transition to socialism and have a chance of getting elected. The voices of those parties must be heard in this assembly. It is important that the Scottish Socialist party is represented in the Parliament; its members should be here because they represent a constituency in Scotland. It is equally important that the Greens are here. There are people who believe that environmental sustainability is far more important than economic growth and yet their voices are not heard in the four mainstream parties. Those voices should be heard. In a genuine democracy those parties should be elected to the Scottish Parliament. If that makes me a moderniser, so be it.

The motion refers to a commitment to high-quality, efficient public services—nobody would disagree with it on that. However, Jack McConnell also spoke about “responsive” public services. I am not sure what “responsive” means. If it means accountable, that is fine. Those who deliver public services should be accountable, through the mechanism of democratic elections, to those who use the services. That means that, if we want high-quality public services, we should be funding the services that are delivered by elected local authorities, by publicly owned organisations such as water authorities, and by community-based organisations such as housing co-operatives.

However, because most of the parties in the Parliament agree with joining the single currency, we have to conform to the convergence criteria, which severely limit our ability to publicly fund those publicly accountable services. That is why private finance initiatives, private-public partnerships and privatisation have become the flavour of the new century—not only in Scotland, but across Europe. Things that used to be beyond the pale for most political parties in this chamber are now accepted because there is no other show

in town.

We should not allow that to happen without a challenge. We have the biggest ever hospital building programme in Scotland and, as always, those hospitals will be built by the private sector. However, for the first time, those hospitals will also be owned and operated by the private sector. The same is true for many of the new schools that are being built across Scotland. Next month, the World Trade Organisation will meet to discuss how to open up competition in the provision of services. How long will it be before the WTO starts telling our Government that doctors, nurses and teachers must also be made open to private competition?

We are on the verge of taking a serious and big decision, which will affect people in Scotland for a long time. Before we take such a decision, we should have open and honest debate about its implications. That debate is yet to happen; when it does, I hope that it will take place in the Scottish Parliament.

15:55

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I will focus on the system of judicial appointments and on openness and accountability, which the minister mentioned, and independence, which he did not. Those are fine democratic words but in judicial appointments, the application of law and the disclosure of advice there has in practice been secrecy, minimal accountability and dependence on the patronage of the Executive. That must change.

For example, there was the failure to disclose legal advice during the Ruddle affair and the failure to disclose the advice on the application and impact of the European convention on human rights, despite the many questions that I and others lodged. A third example is the application of European Community law to deferred student fees. It is purported that EC law excludes the right of Scottish students to deferred fees at institutions other than Scottish universities. The Parliament has been asked to accept that on trust. If the Executive is on solid ground, it should, in the interests of openness, present its evidence either in a paper or in debate.

I wish to speak about the accountability of the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General. To whom do they owe a duty? I know that recent leaks have made this issue history, but I want to make it plain that it looks bad if the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General owe their jobs to the Executive, even if they are the right men for the job. The nature of their positions gives rise to a conflict of interests.

On 31 August, in evidence to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, the former Lord

Advocate said:

"Another important role for me as Lord Advocate is that, with effect from 1 July, I am professionally responsible for the office of the solicitor to the Scottish Executive. That office provides legal advice and a full range of legal services to the Scottish Executive."

He stated:

"The concept of collective responsibility applies to my role in the Cabinet as legal adviser".

I can appreciate that. However, he also said that the Scotland Act 1998

"provides that the Lord Advocate continues as the head of the system of prosecution and deaths investigation in Scotland." —[*Official Report, Justice and Home Affairs Committee*, 31 August 1999; c 39-40.]

A conflict of interests is built into those roles, as was demonstrated in the Ruddle case, in which the Lord Advocate as adviser to the Cabinet gave advice on the application of ECHR, but in the courts acted as a prosecutor in the public interest. He could not be both things. It was unedifying to see the Lord Advocate sitting on the front bench defending the Executive in the debate on Ruddle. It did not do the Scottish justice system any favours.

On the matter of independence, I appreciate the historical background but am obliged to Annabel Goldie for what she said at the meeting of the Parliament on 17 February. She said that the Parliament

"had placed a magnifying glass over every sector of public activity in Scotland." —[*Official Report*, 17 February 2000; Vol 4, c 1257.]

Three cheers for that. What one sees through a magnifying glass is not always edifying, however. It was not good to see through a magnifying glass Lord Hardie leave unanswered questions—as well as an untidy desk and a swinging chair—to cross the short distance over the cobbles outside the chamber to the comfort, security and £100,000 of the judicial bench, having undergone a rigorous interview with himself. That not only brings the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive into disrepute, it brings this Parliament and the system of government into disrepute, which to me is far more important.

I am glad that the First Minister is not here because I know that he does not like newspaper cuttings—he has an allergy to them. Thanks to the media—God bless them—I sometimes find out what will happen in this Parliament. I read in *The Herald* today that the Deputy First Minister

"gave a clear hint during a speech in Edinburgh that changes to the arrangement for appointing judges will be proposed".

However,

"no action has been taken so far and an executive

spokesman suggested last week"—

another handy leak—

"that future appointments would be made on the recommendation of the new Lord Advocate."

Mr Raffan: While Christine Grahame is launching an attack on the way in which judges are appointed, will she say what the SNP's detailed policy is on how judges should be appointed?

Christine Grahame: I am coming to that—I am even going to compliment the Liberal Democrats on this.

At the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee away back in August, the Minister for Justice said:

"I can inform the committee that the consultation"

on a judicial appointments committee

"will get under way before the end of the calendar year and that we will consult widely." —[*Official Report, Justice and Home Affairs Committee*, 31 August 1999; c 22.]

That has not started yet.

That brings me to my point about modernising government and the position of the parties. In their manifestos for the elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP made a firm, unequivocal commitment to an independent judicial appointments committee, which would be determined by this Parliament. We should also give the Conservatives their due: although their manifesto does not contain such a commitment, it has two pages on justice and crime. I do not know what happened to the new Labour manifesto, but its only reference to justice is buried under the heading "Rebuilding Communities" and reads "tough approach to crime".

I am glad that the Labour party has converted to the commitment made by the SNP and the Liberal Democrats to an independent judicial review of the appointment of judges, which will bring the whole system into repute. However, I have to ask which edition of the national papers will inform me of the review's specifics. In other words, what is the timetable?

16:01

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am very happy to support Jack McConnell's anodyne motion on modernising government; I am also quite happy to support the anodyne amendments. However, it is open to question whether debating anodyne motions and amendments in this way is all that profitable. It might be better to have a debate on improving government to allow us to get on with the task.

My remarks are not party political. In fact, they

might be seen as anti-establishment, but that is because this establishment carries on regardless of the views of other parties. If we are to improve the network of government in Scotland, we must give a real boost to the voluntary sector, which is an essential ingredient of the community. However, because of consistent cuts in local government expenditure over many years, the voluntary sector is seriously underfunded. We have to find a way of channelling some of our limited funds into securing continuing core funding for that sector so that it can provide services such as local sports activities and citizens advice bureaux and play its part in the community and in local government.

Furthermore, we need to take local government seriously. It is a fact of life that the people at the centre—whether politicians or civil servants—have a low opinion of local government. We have to challenge that opinion. Although I accept that many things are wrong with local government—such problems are splashed across the papers day after day—it contains many good people who are delivering good services. However, there should be a proper, fair voting system that allows people to choose between individuals as well as parties, which would mean the introduction of the single transferable vote.

Local government must be adequately funded, which it is not. Although additional sums of money have been focused on some priority areas, local government services in other areas are getting worse and worse. We must examine local government finance in the longer term—not just the issue of distribution, although that is a major issue, but how to provide adequate resources so that local government does not depend so much on central Government.

Finally, local authorities are keen to be given powers of general competence and the capacity to lead community development and planning effectively. With the co-operation of the private sector, health boards and other bodies outwith local government, local authorities could make a real contribution to leading such development.

Fergus Ewing: Does Donald Gorrie share my surprise that when, at the outset of the debate, the minister said that £25 million would be devoted to modernising government, he gave no detail on how that money would be spent? I ask that because Donald raised the issue of the lack of funding for the voluntary sector and local government. Does he agree that we should have had a full statement of how that £25 million will be broken down so that we could have had a proper debate? In the absence of that, would not it have been better if some of that money was devoted to local government and the voluntary sector?

Donald Gorrie: Jack McConnell's announcement that money is available is welcome. It is up to him how he produces the details of it, and then we can comment—adversely or otherwise—and make constructive suggestions on the details of his scheme.

My next point concerns government at the centre, which means getting better co-operation between the Executive, the civil service and the Parliament. Because of its Westminster background, the civil service regards MSPs as the enemy. Civil servants work for their departments, and regard other departments as the enemy, too. I sympathise with ministers' difficulty in achieving joined-up government, but we should create a new climate. We should have a concordat between the Parliament, the Executive and the civil service, so that there is a more open and co-operative atmosphere in which civil servants can provide their knowledge and ability to help, for example, our committees, and to improve performance at the centre.

We must also build up this Parliament. The Executive has a great capacity for building itself up—all Executives do—but it is difficult for us to build up this Parliament, because we spend a lot of time abusing one another and fighting one another at elections. In committee, if we desert our party line and, because of the arguments that we have heard, opt for a commonsense approach, we are never quite sure whether other people will do the same. We have to build up confidence in one another. There is great scope for improving this Parliament and our support for it.

On recently rereading a biography of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman—a much underrated Liberal statesman—I was struck that, in accepting the leadership of his party, he said that, although he was a dedicated Liberal, he was more dedicated to promoting the House of Commons. We must take that attitude. We are here to promote this Parliament and we must co-operate in doing that.

16:08

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Much has been said today about modernising government. That is at the heart of the Executive's undertakings, as is reflected in the motion.

We must ensure that the culture that we are promoting is inclusive and transparent. Modernisation must be for a purpose. That purpose is to deliver high-quality, accessible public services and to tackle inequalities in our society. We must promote social justice and renew confidence in our democratic structures. Surely no one will disagree with those aspirations. Those aspirations must also apply to quangos, which must be open, transparent and inclusive and work

in partnership with others. They must be accountable for the services that they provide, and they must be set targets, just as other public services are.

Modernisation is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Indeed, if those political aspirations are to mean anything, constant change will be inevitable. Government at all levels in Scotland exists to serve all the people of Scotland, and partnership between all levels of government will be as important as partnership between other agencies. Twenty-first century government will be about openness and accountability. We had to modernise at the constitutional level before we could tackle modernisation at the practical level. We are about bringing government closer to the people who are affected by it. In my constituency, Kirkcaldy, the local council, Fife Council, has a local office network that does exactly that—it delivers to the local community services that are accountable, accessible and relevant to those who are served.

Government is about working in partnership with other bodies and external agencies to ensure that we meet the needs of our communities. In my constituency, the local council and the colleges, along with external agencies, have set up a network of six opportunity centres, which give advice to people who want to return to training or need advice on their next step.

People within our local communities are unconcerned about which department delivers the services, or indeed what performance indicators that department meets. They are concerned about where the services are delivered, how accessible they are and whether they are relevant and of a high quality.

Our Parliament is inclusive; we have ensured that decision making is not remote and is not done behind closed doors. The same rules must apply to all public bodies. People want more from public services, in terms of quality, responsiveness and customer focus. Much has been said today about joined-up government and joined-up policies; if such policies allow us to deliver high-quality, relevant services to the most disadvantaged within our community, they will have succeeded.

Our programme for government is aimed at improving materially the quality of life for individual Scots. We must encourage innovation and creativity within local and central government, identify and remove the blockages that prevent the public sector from being innovative, and—this is important—put the citizen at the forefront of what we do. If we do those things, we will help to make sense of change and understand how, through change and working together, we can achieve our aims. That approach will stand us in better stead than grand designs will. If we can look back to

examples of people who have benefited from change, we will know that we have succeeded.

We stress the need for partnership and joined-up policies. I believe that the Executive has a catalytic role to play, not a role that involves dictating to others. That role involves leading by example, which will involve benchmarking what we do. It will involve facilitating discussions and debate, and fostering and developing the relationships that will allow us, in partnership with others, to bring forward the truly modern government that we all desire.

16:12

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank the minister for introducing a topic for debate that has clearly captured the imagination of the chamber this afternoon.

In the context of today's debate on modernising government, "local government" should, of course, mean exactly that: the local governance of an area based on that area's priorities and needs. What it means in the context of today's Scotland, however, is government at a local level, or the local implementation of central Government policy.

In recent years, the increase in central Government control of our local issues has been one of the major trends of UK Governments. I am afraid to say that, even under devolution, that has continued. Increased hypothecation, new burdens and central Government expenditure guidelines all serve to increase central control over local government and to reduce local government to no more than an arm, or an agency, of the ruling Administration. That is a great pity.

In December, the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities wrote to all council leaders in Scotland, stating:

"COSLA has indicated to ministers that the issuing of guidelines is an unnecessary centralist measure that conflicts with the spirit of the Government's own modernisation agenda".

In a debate on modernising government, it seems strange to hark back to the past, but what Labour's so-called modernisers forget is that not everything in the past is bad, and that to be modern one often has to draw lessons from what has gone before. In Glasgow, modern local government was being practised more than 100 years ago. The great municipal projects such as the Glasgow water works were built to meet local needs and to resolve local issues. Through time, electricity, gas and telephone supplies were all established to meet local needs, by a local authority that was able to command the resources and support of the local community.

In the days when the national state infrastructure

was small, local corporations took the lead and developed the services and facilities that were required to meet communities' needs. If the city fathers of Glasgow were to come back and visit the marble halls of the current city council, they would not recognise what is happening there as local government. They would find a council that is in thrall to central Government, that has little or no leeway and that has had many of its major powers hived off to quangos and other Government agencies.

Even when an increase in the powers of local government is proposed, such as the proposals to increase local authorities' strategic role in the development of social housing, that increase is tied to the individual local authority having to give up one of its primary purposes, that of being a landlord. Those same city fathers would be astounded to learn that the council had no real power to raise its own revenue and was entirely at the mercy of central Government diktat as to how much it could raise through its own council tax.

Some may argue that that is a good thing, given the track record of certain local authorities. On the whole, however, it is disgraceful that local authorities, which have local mandates and are locally accountable, cannot make decisions for themselves. It is doubly unfair that those local authorities that have been the most sensitive to the situation that they are in and which have managed their budgets best are punished and are unable, even with the consent of their electorate, to raise the necessary revenue to avoid cutting vital services, as has happened in Aberdeenshire.

It is deeply ironic that local councils are free to determine the cuts that their services and staff have to face, but are unable to raise the revenue required to protect those services. I spent seven years as a local councillor and it occurred to me on more than one occasion that the only real freedom that local authorities have left is the freedom to sack their own work force and to cut their own services.

When the McIntosh commission reported, it was acutely aware of the situation. It wanted local government to grow and develop and argued for more effective decision-making processes and more democratic accountability. John McAllion and Donald Gorrie have touched on that. The SNP was happy to concur with the McIntosh recommendations on issues such as proportional representation. It is a pity that this most modern of reports has been cherry-picked by the Administration and that new Labour has set its face against some of McIntosh's radical proposals.

I believe that modern government is local democratic government. We should be sending the signal to local government that we are prepared to work in partnership with local

authorities. In return for reform, we would be prepared to increase their role and powers. As part of a democratic covenant, we would be prepared to end the role of quangos and agencies and ensure that every decision is accountable to the public. That is the least that the people of Scotland can expect and that is what they demand from the Executive.

16:16

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):

Like my comrade, Malcolm Chisholm, I believe that the real modernisers were the first feminists. Indeed, my sisters continue that fight for equal opportunities and social inclusion for all; we can certainly learn something from them.

I would like to speak about modernisation and delivery of services through local authorities in the 21st century. The Local Government Committee is reviewing the delivery of those services through the McIntosh report. We are asking councils to examine their structures, to consider the number of committees that they have and whether they need that number and to think about whether a cabinet system would work better. We are asking them to question whether they are really getting value for money and, if not, why not.

Donald Gorrie mentioned powers of general competence; we are asking local authorities whether they really need them. Some councils say yes and others say no. We want to find out whether councils are involved at the very centre of community planning and, if not, why not.

Most important, we are asking local authorities how they link with local communities. On Monday, I was at a COSLA dinner at which Stirling Council was given an award for the way in which it has encouraged community councils to participate in local activity. We should broaden the range of people who are eligible to join community councils and encourage their participation in all local authority areas. We should encourage local committees that involve young people, older people and people from ethnic minorities. We must examine how councils link with voluntary organisations and with other public bodies such as the health boards.

Local authorities have signed up to a leadership forum, led by Alastair MacNish, which is examining efficient delivery of services. That forum consists of the 32 council leaders, Frank McAveety, Wendy Alexander and me as the convener of the Local Government Committee. At forum meetings, as one might expect, the ministers and the council leaders do not always agree. However, Wendy Alexander and Frank McAveety go along to those meetings and stay for the whole day; they are involved in the work

groups and in the question-and-answer sessions.

The councillors will tell us to a man—and it is nearly always a man—that they have never had that kind of experience before. The Westminster style is that people have to make an appointment with their MP; they are lucky if they are able to meet a minister for 20 minutes, most of which time the minister will spend looking at his watch. After that, people give the minister a list of questions; if they stray from that routine, they are out the door quicker than expected. Our ministers are to be commended on their initiative; what they are doing is different, positive and, I think, good. A covenant has been established through COSLA between local government, the Executive and members of the Local Government Committee.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Does the member agree that an independent review of local government finance would assist the system of modernisation?

Trish Godman: The Local Government Committee has considered that but I am not prepared to announce at this stage what our recommendations will be—I see that my colleague on the committee, Kenny Gibson, is laughing at me. Every leader of Scotland's councils has said to us that we need an independent review of local government finance. I have told them that that might be true, but it might not result in the councils getting more money, although I suspect that it would.

Proportional representation has been mentioned. Richard Kerley is examining the electoral system, along with remuneration for councillors, where and when people can vote and efforts to encourage women, young people and people from ethnic minorities to become councillors. The committee awaits his report with interest.

We must not modernise simply for the sake of modernising. There must be a purpose, and that purpose must be to deliver good-quality public services, to tackle inequality and to promote social justice.

Consultation is one of the core values of this Parliament. We have to ask ourselves how we are consulting. The committees are independent of the Executive and I think that they are beginning to get teeth. I know that the public think that we should have changed the world in the first two months of the Parliament and should now be sitting about doing nothing, but we would have been criticised if we had tried to move too quickly and had not consulted properly.

I am sure that John McAllion will agree that the Public Petitions Committee has been used by many of our citizens, even though it seems to have been used by one citizen more than any

other. Receivers of services are being cross-examined by the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee. I believe that the committees of the Parliament are involving Scotland in government.

We are encouraging links with the private sector. I do not believe that public is all bad and private is all good. The public sector workers and councillors are highly motivated and dedicated people. They should have no fear of the committees scrutinising their work.

I believe in the delivery of services by local government. I want the Local Government Committee to work closely with local authorities, but they must move into the 21st century with us. The fact that most of them are doing so can only be good for a modern Government in a modern Scotland.

16:23

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): The late Nicky Fairbairn once said that Scotland was fortunate not to have a Government. Sometimes, in the depths of poorly attended debates such as this, I begin to see his point. I find it difficult to see the purpose of having a debate when we are unable to discuss the spending of the £25 million to which the Minister for Finance referred at the outset because we have no idea how it will be spent. No details were made available and our only information comes from a Scottish Executive source who was quoted in *Scotland on Sunday* and the Scottish edition of *The Sunday Times*. I endorse Donald Gorrie's view that ministers, rather than anonymous Executive spokespeople, should make statements to newspapers. Would life not be a bit more simple for our ministers if that practice were pursued?

The last phrase in today's anodyne motion says that the Government's initiatives

"put citizens at the centre of government in 21st century Scotland."

I have dealt with the cases of a number of citizens whose lives have been ruined by government in many of its forms. Not many people find their lives affected by government in that way, but when people run into trouble with a quango, a department of the Government or a cross-border authority, they know all about it.

Two of my constituents, Alasdair Stoddart and his partner Birgit de Foort, have for several years run a business in the constituency of my friend John Farquhar Munro. Their business is in Fort Augustus, but they are my constituents, which is why I have taken up their case over the past few months.

Alasdair put in an offer to buy his premises from

the head landlords, the Fort Augustus monks. His was the only offer, and it was a good one, but the British Waterways Board sabotaged it. It would not withdraw a clause of pre-emption that entitled it to buy the property for the nugatory figure of £3,000. It sabotaged the offer because Alasdair needed that clause to be removed in order to proceed.

Alasdair's offer was then gazumped by the British Waterways Board. Nothing illegal took place, nor would I suggest that it had, but given that BWB is a cross-border authority, I wonder whether that is the way in which we expect Government bodies, which are publicly funded, to act. Is that what we mean by putting citizens at the centre of government? Is that what we mean by modernising government? If it is, I want nothing to do with it.

I mention that particular case, but I have taken up many such cases. In writing to the bodies concerned—and, I am afraid to say, the ministers concerned—I have found that the response is uniform. There is a doctrine of ministerial and civil service infallibility. I made mistakes in my previous life as a lawyer. That probably does not come as a great surprise to members, but when I made a mistake I had to do two things: first, I had to say I was sorry I made that mistake; secondly, I had to put it right at my expense. When a mistake is made by the Government, a quango, a local enterprise company, Historic Scotland or BWB, what happens? Who pays for the mistake? Not the Government, but the individual.

Persuading the civil service that Sir Humphrey can make mistakes seems an impossible task. Nevertheless, one sometimes tries the tack of saying that further information has come to light that would allow the Government to review its decision, in order to save face. Will that happen? Not a chance. Try that approach with the department of rural affairs, arguing the case of farmers who have lost a whole year's payment because they have made a mistake when filling in a form—a mistake that Ross Finnie has admitted is often of a clerical nature. Result: fined £10,000.

Someone has to commit a pretty serious crime to be fined £10,000, but have I been able to persuade Ross Finnie, whom I respect as an individual, or his civil servants, even to agree a meeting to discuss any of those cases? I would mention names, but I have been asked not to do so and respect the privacy of the individuals involved.

I believe that it has been useful for me to air this point, on which I have strong feelings. If the Executive really wanted to modernise government, it would introduce clear procedure that allow such decisions—which ruin individuals' lives—to be reassessed by an independent person, by another method, by a fair means, to allow the citizens of

our country justice so that they feel that they really are at the centre of this Government.

16:28

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): The central issue of this debate is the relationship between the Scottish people and their elected representatives at all levels. I am not proposing that we debate the merits or demerits of the various electoral systems, all of which have their advantages and disadvantages. More important than that is the way in which we arrive at open decision making and the way in which we develop a system of consultation that is seen to listen—that does listen—and takes on board what has been said. That is essential if we are to break down the cynicism towards the political process that is evident in Scottish society and seems to surround all consultation processes.

I want to share an anecdote from my experience as convener of education in South Ayrshire Council. More than two years ago, we entered into consultation over the closure of three schools. Two of them were rural and one was urban. Parents in the local communities were outraged, and were certain that consultation would be as it had always been—that the council had made up its mind to consult for a month before doing what it jolly well wanted to do anyway. However, during that consultation I was convinced that we should do otherwise.

One member of the community spoke to me about the importance of those schools and convinced me that they were right. Not only did we change our minds but, by using video-conferencing, e-mail and other new technology that was available to us, we were able to overcome the educational problems and allow the pupils to work with pupils of the same age in the larger school. Through listening, through being shouted at and through taking part in the debate, we came out with something much better—which would not have happened if we had not consulted and if we had not had to make difficult decisions.

Consultation is important, because it gives politicians the opportunity to be taught by the electorate. I seize the opportunities in the modernising government agenda for us to get out and learn from the people we represent.

Last week, consultation on the tourism strategy was mentioned in the chamber. All sides recognised that contributions from the public and from the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee had shaped that strategy. As members know, I was happy that consultation had influenced a Government strategy. It was disappointing, however, that when the debate was reported in the press no mention was made of

that. All that was mentioned was that Fergus Ewing attacked the Government on this, George Lyon attacked it on that and Mary Scanlon said so-and-so. The fact that consultation had taken place and that the strategy was widely welcomed by people of all political parties was ignored, and all the combative stuff and the negative comments were reported. That is seen as the way in which politics operate in this country. We have to overcome that.

Real, consultative, open government does not mean that we do not have leadership or that we do not know our own minds.

Bruce Crawford: I accept what the member says about open and consultative government, but does she agree that it is a bit disappointing that modernising government is not seen as being about much more than structures? It is not always about redrawing the shape of Government departments, associated departments or quangos, or about re-engineering the procedures of Government departments. It should also be about people.

I am surprised that we have not heard more from the minister and others on the Government benches about the operating environment in which people work, whether we have positive operating cultures and whether we can create an environment in which people feel valued. As well as the consultation that the member rightly mentioned, should we not hear today about how we deal with the people in our organisations? Unless we do that, whatever structure changes we make, delivery will not happen.

Dr Murray: That is what the modernisation agenda is all about: it is a vision of the relationship between the Government and the people it represents. That is core to the whole process. I do not want the process to be interpreted as lack of leadership. People say, "You are listening only because you do not know your own mind. You ought to be a strong leader and go out there and get them telt." That is the old view of politics.

We must have a system of government that is relevant and important to people; which takes on board their opinions; which listens to them and which is seen to listen to them. It is vital that we do that, to restore confidence in our political system. Unfortunately, confidence has been damaged over the years. A terrible cynicism about politics at all levels has crept in. We see that in the turnout for local government elections. It is important that we do something to restore confidence in our political system. Modern, open government is one way of doing that.

16:34

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): When I looked

at the motion and the amendments, my first thought was that I could tell that they were drafted by a man—all motherhood and apple pie and nothing about the practicalities, such as who will make the pastry and who will buy the apples.

However, the debate has moved from the broad brush to the detail; some of the detail is very good indeed. Specific issues have been raised; some good ideas and some good examples have been proposed. In four minutes, I can only skim over some of the points that have been raised and maybe touch on one or two of my own.

Good modern government should be a real partnership between elected representatives and the electorate. Casting a vote is the fundamental way in which people participate in politics yet, according to a survey of access to polling places carried out in 1997,

"only 27% cent of Polling Places have at least one polling station without reported barriers to physical accessibility."

That is clearly unacceptable—to achieve the fine objective, we must get the practicalities right.

Good modern government should be a real partnership between elected representatives and the people on whose behalf they take decisions, with respect and a willingness to listen on both sides. The framework of the Scottish Parliament, with its emphasis on consultation before and during the legislative process, can deliver that. The challenge is to put that into practice thoroughly and conscientiously.

It takes a lot of time, effort and ingenuity in real consultation to penetrate through to the people who do not put themselves forward, who are too busy, too tired, too lazy, too disenchanted, too remote or too hopeless to make their voices heard. What about our citizens who cannot read, who cannot read English or who do not have a fixed address—are we sure that we are reaching them? Are we asking people directly about the services they use or are we making assumptions about who can speak for them? Are we sure that we are not overly influenced or having our judgment clouded by those who shout loudest?

As long as we keep asking ourselves those questions and taking practical steps to answer them, I do not think that we will go too far wrong. We must keep faith with the people who engage with us and take seriously what they tell us, even if it is sometimes unpalatable or difficult to address. Nick Johnston's remarks about U-turns, when the Executive has listened, were both unhelpful and unfair, while many of Elaine Murray's comments were apposite.

Good modern government should be a real, equal partnership of elected representatives at all levels. Each level has its own responsibilities and

should be directly accountable to its own electorate, which is why I firmly believe that we must undertake radical reform of how local government is elected and funded. That is a really important point but, with only four minutes, I shall leave it at that, although it is interesting to note how many members—Donald Gorrie, John McAllion, Kenny Gibson and Trish Godman—have touched on it.

Good modern government should be promoting real partnership between all service delivery agencies. I welcome the increasing recognition that is being given to the importance of valuing all the players on the field. We should strip out all public-versus-private dogma and concentrate on trying to be objective and on practical outcomes. We value the vast voluntary contribution that is made to providing services, which the statutory agencies simply cannot pick up. However, value must translate into money, a point highlighted by Donald Gorrie among other members.

Good modern government takes decisions based on good information. Modern technology gives us enormous potential to collate, analyse, use and share information. Collecting information and conducting research is not cheap, but it is money well spent, ensuring that future spending is better directed and more effective. Good information will also help us to measure whether we are beginning to achieve equality of treatment and opportunity for all the different sections of society.

Good modern government should be judged on good information—we should be open and honest about what we are doing and how and why we are doing it. Part of that is down to us providing the information and facilitating access to it. Inevitably, part of it is down to the media reporting fully and fairly and disseminating information—Elaine Murray made a good point about that. Part of it is down to the electorate—to people who take the trouble to be both well informed and prepared to get involved and talk back.

I would like to offer a wee passing thought about disseminating information in a way that combines electronic wizardry and a human touch. There must be ways of using the unique penetration of the Post Office into all the airts and pairs of Scotland better than we do.

We have enormous opportunities to make the government of Scotland better. That is what devolution was about, and I am glad that we are rolling up our sleeves and getting down to it.

16:40

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to declare my registered interest in British Telecommunications, in case that should be

considered relevant to any part of a very interesting debate—it was not the debate that I imagined. Today's speeches have been among the most wide-ranging we have heard in the Parliament. I enjoyed in particular those made by John McAllion and Donald Gorrie; Fergus Ewing also spoke with much feeling. I welcome Elaine Murray's comments and hope that the new, positive attitude that she talked about will be reflected in the letters column of the *Annandale Herald*.

In the debate on the knowledge economy, I declared myself to be excited about the possibilities for Scotland to take advantage of new and emerging technologies. I am equally excited about the prospect of modern and integrated government. That is one of the most fundamental issues for this Parliament and for Scotland, and it is a great pity that so few members have chosen to participate in the debate. That reflects the need for a change of emphasis among politicians across the piece. There were also relatively few members present for the debate on the knowledge economy; it will be interesting to see how many are here at 9.30 tomorrow morning for the debate on e-commerce.

My excitement is tempered somewhat by the concern that the multitude of separate debates that are being held, fronted by different ministers, suggest a traditional stovepipe approach to these issues on the part of the Executive. Despite what the Minister for Finance said, the public has seen little outward manifestation of the connectivity and so-called joined-up government that is needed if real progress is to be made. Modern and integrated government is inextricably linked to our success as a nation in taking advantage of e-commerce and our ability to create a knowledge-based and skills-based economy.

I, more than most members in the chamber, would argue about the extent to which this Parliament, the Executive and all our organs of government can learn from business. Managing change is still the biggest challenge for business, hence the plethora of management consultants, courses, books and journals—even then, it does not always get it right. None of us should underestimate the challenge of changing government—national, devolved and local. I do not underestimate the challenge that Mr McConnell has been set. That is why we need clear and measurable targets and a clear vision of where we are trying to go. For business, the driver for change is the changing market, the need to stay in business and the need to boost shareholder value. Some of that change is thought through, some is forced on it by immediate crisis. I want to cite two examples from business that I think are helpful.

The first is Marks and Spencer and highlights the need for change in government even though what is being done seems to be okay—to be producing good enough service and results, even though there is no commitment to continual change. Just as in business the market moves on, so the global situation in which our country finds itself moves on, leaving complacency and stagnation exposed. It is particularly difficult for a Government organisation that considers that it is doing all right to move on. That is why we need to set targets—not just cost targets, but quality of service targets for output; customer satisfaction targets and, as Bruce Crawford suggested, employee satisfaction targets internally.

Targets are no good unless we are clear what we want to achieve. My second example, Wal-Mart, is particularly interesting for us in Scotland because it is a world-leading company yet it was set up and developed in Nowhere, Arkansas. The clarity of thought in the organisation and the clear sense of direction of everyone in it has driven Wal-Mart forward.

I agree that public services, especially core public services, are different from business, not least because the obstacles to change that the Government faces come from so many institutional blockers. Institutions are a fourth 'I' to add to those identified by Keith Raffan. Many of the things discussed by Parliament cannot be achieved by it because they are global or Westminster matters, but it is within our power to achieve world-class government in Scotland. If we set targets, have clear objectives and work together we can be a centre of excellence in government.

16:46

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I would like to open by saying that I have enjoyed a very interesting and informed debate, but I was brought up not to lie, so I will not do that. The motion and the intent behind it can be supported by all parties. It is clear that we all agree about the modernisation and improvement of government at all levels. I hope the Minister for Finance and his colleagues will join us in voting positively for all aspects of the issues that have been brought to the debate this afternoon. I question, however, whether it was two and a half hours of substance.

I seek clarification from the Minister for Finance on something John Swinney raised—the report in *The Sunday Times* this week, which must have raised very serious worries for grade 5 and other senior civil servants in Scotland. They are employed to manage and can do so very well if they are allowed to do so; it is a question of political leadership. That the announcement that a quarter of them will lose their jobs came through

The Sunday Times is in itself questionable. Were those people told beforehand or did they first know through a briefing to *The Sunday Times*?

Mr McConnell: Mr Wilson was in the chamber when both Mr Swinney and I spoke, but he was clearly not listening. For the third time this afternoon, that article is inaccurate. The civil service reforms are being spurred on by the good work that is already being done in partnership with the civil service but recognise that good talent is always needed and improvements will have to be made.

Andrew Wilson: I hope that the Minister for Finance will take the opportunity of correcting *The Sunday Times* and of disciplining or at least bringing to heel the person who is described in the article as the Executive "spokesman", who got Mr McConnell's face and line into the paper. That is not a good way in which to run a substantial machine such as the civil service.

There has been much of value in the debate—from Mr Chisholm, Mr McAllion, Christine Grahame, Mr Neil and others. I hope the minister will address local government reform when he sums up. I agree that devolution should be continued to local government level. Will the minister let us know whether he agrees with Mr McAllion and Mr Chisholm on proportional representation for local government? If it is good enough for the Scottish Parliament, why is it not good enough for local authorities?

Mr Chisholm, as always, brought up the important issues of equality and gender. On that point, it is useful to note that fewer than one in 10 members of North Lanarkshire Council, which is based in the minister's constituency, are women. That issue can be addressed only by root-and-branch reform of the Lanarkshire Labour party or by proportional representation.

The convener of the Local Government Committee told us that 32 local authorities—every local authority in Scotland—have made submissions to the committee backing the need for an independent review of local government finance. It is notable that of those 32, 17 are controlled entirely by Labour and that Labour is involved in the Administrations of a further five. There is, therefore, unanimity across the local government community in Scotland in favour of an independent review—a modernisation of local government finance.

I take on board Mrs Godman's point that that does not necessarily mean that there will be more money, but a review would show that the Government is committed to listening to the consensus view of the local government community and, I suspect, of the chamber, on proportional representation and the need for an

independent review. I hope that the minister can comment on that in his summation.

Mr Raffan: I strongly support Mr Wilson's point. The problems that have been caused by this year's local government finance settlement and the clear structural problems in the current formula underline once again the fact that McIntosh was right and that we need an independent review. I hope that the Executive will think again.

Andrew Wilson: I am tempted to say that electoral and financial reform for local government would have been a more substantial motion for discussion, given that local government handles so many of the issues for which the Parliament has responsibility.

Jamie Stone of the Liberal Democrats brought up civil service reform and, more particularly, civil service dispersal, with which my party has agreed for some time—as did the Conservatives during the election. I am sure that the Labour Administration agrees with it, too. If all parties agree that there is nothing to stop civil service administrations, even the top levels, being located around Scotland, we should start to walk the walk rather than talk the talk. Let us hear some ideas for action and put in place a plan to take the matter forward.

The problem that has stretched throughout the debate is that the minister says much of value, but there is nothing tangible into which to get our teeth and against which we can measure. That is why John Swinney's amendment is so useful. We must know what the Government seeks to do with the funding. Where is the money going? Where is it coming from? We must know that before we can act as a legislature to examine the issues. That is extremely important.

It was Malcolm Chisholm again who said that modernisation is what Labour Governments do. I suspect that, come the election, we will see that quote on leaflets in Leith. To make that meaningful, however, we need to see the detail of the Government's plans. If £25 million of scarce public resources has been allocated to modernising government, perhaps from recycled cash, that is fine, but we need to know what it is for, where it is coming from, and what targets it seeks to achieve.

We have much in common in the chamber on this subject. There is much that can be taken forward, particularly on local government financial and electoral reform. We must back the case for the Parliament to lead a modern Scottish system of governance. If the minister is gracious, as I am sure he always is, he will accept John Swinney's point that all parties have something to bring to the debate. In particular, he will acknowledge John's contribution to that during the election campaign

and in his speech.

I hope that there will be consensus behind the amendments as well as the motion. I urge everyone to back the amendment.

16:54

Mr McConnell: This has been a helpful debate, but it has shown that while we might all be in favour of modernising government, many of us are not too sure what that means. I hope that in the chamber and in committees in the months ahead, the debate will be moved on further than it has been by some of the contributions this afternoon, however enjoyable most of the debate has been.

A number of points were made and some were more relevant than others. As a number of members said—Keith Raffan referred to this early on—it is important to take on board ideas, wherever they might come from. That is an important principle. The Executive is following it and the Parliament should follow it. We will not modernise systems of government in Scotland if we do not take an open and inclusive approach.

It is important to discuss in some depth the various points that were made about local government, quangos, judicial appointments and other matters, all of which have been the subject of other debates in the chamber.

It is interesting that Mr Wilson suggested some motions that we might lodge for debate—he and his party move so many motions for debate on reserved matters, rather than on the topics that he suggested. I would welcome a change of heart from the nationalist front bench.

As Marilyn Livingstone said, we need modernisation of government that has a purpose, and not modernisation for its own sake, as a slogan, or as a woolly idea. It should be purposeful. It should improve services and ensure that our schools are delivering for the challenges of a new century. It should ensure that our health service is improving our health and that we wipe crime off our streets. It should ensure that we have houses that are fit to live in and that all those services—local and national—are working more closely together and are responding to the needs of local communities. At the end of this debate, all those fundamental objectives and principles remain as strong as they were at the beginning. In the months ahead, I hope that members will be willing to consider projects in their areas that might deserve support from the modernising government fund and from other existing funds.

Mr Swinney *rose*—

Mr McConnell: I will address this point first. It would be wrong to spell out in detail—as Fergus Ewing suggested—how we might spend the

modernisation fund, when we are inviting people throughout Scotland to put forward programmes and suggestions on how to spend it.

We will modernise government in Scotland only if everybody is involved. If everybody is involved, projects will arise in communities throughout Scotland and in departments at central and Scottish Government level. Those departments, communities, councils and other public bodies will propose projects that will work, and that will invest now for savings in the future and improve the working together of Government.

Mr Swinney *rose*—

Mr McConnell: That is a fundamental objective, and it would have been destroyed if details had been spelt out today. I hope that Mr Ewing will recognise the importance of that objective, especially for the area that he represents.

Mr Swinney: There is a common complaint among people who get involved in the bidding process for particular tranches of Government funding. By the time they have gone through the bureaucracy of preparing their bid, many of the advantages that they sought have been dissipated by the bidding process. Will the minister give a commitment that, in this process of modernising, he will modernise the approach to the bidding process to lessen the administrative burden on local authorities?

Mr McConnell: That would be good. Mr Swinney will be pleased to know that—in that spirit—the modernising government fund amalgamates two funds that had to be bid for in the past, thus simplifying the process to one set of bids.

I meant what I said in my opening speech: when bids come in for that money, I want them to represent other levels of government working together. I do not want existing services to bid for money that will substitute for money that they already have. It is important that we initiate change in a way that gets different levels of government working together. The fund can provide resources for that purpose, and I hope that it will do so.

There were a number of contributions to the debate that, frankly, I did not understand. I thought that the contributions on participation, co-operation and partnership were especially relevant. I was disappointed with the front-bench speeches from both of the Opposition parties.

Andrew Wilson *rose*—

Mr McConnell: It is important, when we are trying to change the system of government in Scotland and to prepare it for the future, that we do so in a way that includes and involves people, and that builds a culture in public service that is

positive and forward-looking rather than negative and carping—which was the tone of many of the speeches.

Andrew Wilson: We addressed the issues.

Mr McConnell: I am happy that Andrew Wilson addressed the issues, but it is important that we acknowledge the contributions that were made. The list of criticisms and complaints that came from Nick Johnston did not reflect the motion or his amendment. I would have been prepared to accept that amendment, despite the fact that it calls wrongly for a “clear model” of modern and integrated government. I do not think that there is a clear model. We should have diversity of approach—different approaches at different levels of government and different approaches for different outcomes.

Therefore, I think that to have one model would be wrong. However, I would have been prepared to accept the Conservative amendment if it had been put forward in positive terms and with a series of ideas about how such a model might work in practice. That did not happen, so I think that members should vote against the second amendment.

Andrew Wilson *rose*—

Mr McConnell: I am coming to Andrew Wilson’s point.

The first amendment was in similar terms. I do not agree that we can set clear targets for modernisation in such a general and vague way.

It was insulting to say

“that the Scottish Executive should pursue a programme to obtain greater value”

when we are clearly achieving that already. We are working in that direction and we are being criticised by Mr Swinney’s competitors for the future leadership of the SNP, who do not like the efforts that we have made to build efficiency and better value into our budgets.

It would be wrong to accept that amendment, because no positive speeches were made from the nationalist front bench on it.

We could have had a more positive debate that looked forward. In looking forward, I would like to look back to the opening statement of this partnership Executive. When it was launched in May last year, Donald Dewar and Jim Wallace said:

“We recognise the challenges of the new politics. But let us also recognise the prizes: stable and co-operative government—accountable, close and responsive to the people; innovative government which is open, welcomes good ideas whatever their source and encourages participation; integrated government in which solutions are sought and found across departmental and interest-group

boundaries."

Those are noble objectives, to which we can all sign up. They are objectives that—if this Parliament endorses them—could lead to better public services in Scotland and modern government that will make us fit for the 21st century.

I commend the motion to Parliament, and ask members to oppose the two amendments.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now come to business motion S1M-584, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

The decision on that motion is being taken today to cover proposed changes to tomorrow's business. The motion is set out on page 3 of the bulletin.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees

a) the following revision to the Business Motion approved on 17 February 2000:

Thursday 24 February 2000

3.30 pm	the Executive debate on Gaelic should be replaced with a Debate on the Standards Committee Report on the Code of Conduct
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and,

b) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 1 March 2000

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
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<i>followed by</i>	Executive Debate on Local Government Grant Distribution—Local Government Finance Order; Special Grants Report on Asylum Seekers; Special Grants Report on Kosovan Evacuees
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<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
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5.00 pm	Decision Time
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<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business—debate on the subject of S1M-563 Johann Lamont: Drugs Strategy
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Thursday 2 March 2000

9.30 am	Non-Executive Business—Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party
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<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
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2.30 pm	Question Time
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3.10 pm	First Minister's Question Time
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3.30 pm	Executive Debate on Gaelic
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<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
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5.00 pm	Decision Time
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<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business—debate on the subject of S1M-474 Richard Lochhead: Grampian Television
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Wednesday 8 March 2000

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
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<i>followed by</i>	Non-Executive Business—Scottish National Party
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<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
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5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business—debate on the
 subject of S1M-557 Patricia
 Ferguson: International Women's
 Day

Thursday 9 March 2000

9.30 am Executive Debate on "Created in
 Scotland—The Way Forward for
 Manufacturing in the 21st Century"

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business—[Mr McCabe.]

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that
 motion S1M-584 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Orders (Suspension)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We
 now come to motion S1M-585, in the name of Mr
 Tom McCabe, which seeks agreement to suspend
 standing order rule 10.7.1 for the duration of the
 debate on the local government grant distribution,
 which will take place next Wednesday.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to suspend Rule 10.7.1 of the
 Standing Orders for the period of the debate on the Local
 Government Grant Distribution—Local Government
 Finance Order; Special Grants Report on Asylum Seekers
 and Special Grants Report on Kosovan Evacuees on 1
 March 2000.—[Mr McCabe.]

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I have
 four questions to put to the chamber as a result of
 today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-
 569.1, in the name of Mr Swinney, which seeks to
 amend motion S1M-569, in the name of Mr
 McConnell, on modernising government, be
 agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (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)
 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)
 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 42, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-569.2, in the name of Nick Johnston, which seeks to amend Mr McConnell's motion, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (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)
 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)
 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)

ABSTENTIONS

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 39, Against 62, Abstentions 4.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-569, in the name of Jack McConnell, on modernising government, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Executive's commitment to high quality, efficient and responsible public services; supports developments to modernise and integrate government at all levels in Scotland, and welcomes initiatives that harness information and communications technology and put citizens at the centre of government in 21st century Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-585, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the suspension of rule 10.7.1 of the standing orders for the duration of the local government grant distribution debate next week, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to suspend Rule 10.7.1 of the

Standing Orders for the period of the debate on the Local Government Grant Distribution – Local Government Finance Order; Special Grants Report on Asylum Seekers and Special Grants Report on Kosovan Evacuees on 1 March 2000.

Clydeside (Regeneration)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The final item of business today is the members' business debate on motion S1M-531, in the name of Mr George Lyon, on the regeneration of the Clyde. This debate is to be concluded after 30 minutes without any questions being put. Members wishing to speak in the debate should press their request buttons as soon as possible. I see three names already. I ask those not staying for this debate please to leave quickly and quietly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that in the Clyde, Scotland has a magnificent international icon which can be marketed globally to promote enterprise and tourism in the region; recognises also that investment in and modernisation of transport infrastructure on the Clyde is a prerequisite for the economic and social regeneration of the area's communities and that the absence of fast and efficient ferry links on the Clyde is one of the contributing factors to social exclusion in the area, and calls for a thorough and fundamental review of the current infrastructure's shortcomings with a view to developing a long term strategy that can exploit the potential of the area and which can meet the needs of communities on the Clyde in the 21st century.

17:06

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to raise some of the issues facing the communities surrounding the River Clyde. As the motion clearly states, the Clyde was an icon of past years, and it clearly needs modernisation of its transport infrastructure as an essential prerequisite for the economic and social regeneration of the areas and communities surrounding the Clyde.

In the years following the war, the Clyde was the transport highway for the communities that bordered the river. It brought prosperity to all and linked every community together. I understand that more than 70 destinations were dotted up and down the Clyde, linked by the paddle-steamers: Glasgow, Greenock, Rothesay, Port Bannatyne, Tighnabruaich, Kilmun and Dunoon, to name but a few.

In those days, of course, the paddle-steamers plied between all the communities and brought economic prosperity to many of the island communities in particular, in the form of tourists. I can still remember the paddle-steamers queuing at Rothesay pier, laden with people. I recall seeing the paddle-steamer coming into the pier: often, the passengers would run to one side, and they were in danger of capsizing the boat.

Those days are long gone, and the idea of tourists or people from Glasgow or Greenock

taking holidays on the island communities doon the watter has disappeared. The decline has taken place over many years, and it is time that it was turned round.

We are now at a turning point in the development of the Clyde, and I believe that new thinking is needed. Too often, we see the Clyde as a barrier, instead of a potential liberator of the communities surrounding it. Believe me, it was a great liberator of those communities in the past, and it was the transport highway that brought economic prosperity, revenue, tourists and everything that the communities needed to survive economically.

There are real opportunities to be grasped. As I said, we are at a turning point in the debate on the future of the Clyde. Sarah Boyack has already announced the potential setting up of a Highlands and Islands transport passenger authority. The Caledonian MacBrayne network would be brought under the control of that authority. That is to be welcomed.

We are also at a crucial stage in the debate on the future replacement of the vessels that currently ply the Clyde between Dunoon and Gourock, and between Rothesay and Wemyss Bay.

The redevelopment of Gourock pier has also been proposed, which I am sure one of my colleagues, who represents that bit of the world, will speak about in his contribution. There are also proposals to develop the inner harbour in Rothesay, and to construct a marina at Sandbank. Many regeneration projects have been undertaken and are at a crucial stage.

I believe that all those proposals have a common theme: that of the regeneration of the communities around the Clyde, to refocus from the past towards the future. What is required to deliver that future is a common vision, and indeed a common strategy to underpin that vision. Transport, tourism and leisure are and should be brought together to look towards the future and to decide how to develop the communities around the Clyde.

I can announce that, to facilitate that, Duncan McNeil, Allan Wilson, Jackie Baillie, Brian Wilson from the Scotland Office and I are setting up a Clyde coast initiative to consider how to regenerate those communities. We will bring together organisations that are interested in developing the Clyde, such as local enterprise companies, local authorities and community organisations. I ask the minister to work closely with the Clyde coast initiative and to discuss with us the future of the regeneration projects that are under way.

We also need to see movement on the Gourock-Dunoon discussions. Before Christmas, we were

promised that a paper on that would be published and that a debate would take place. We need to widen the debate.

The issues that I have already raised in relation to Rothesay, Gourock and the marina development at Sandbank are part of an overall vision of the development of the Clyde. I hope that the Executive is willing to work with the Clyde coast initiative in developing a vision for the 21st century.

17:11

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): The Firth of Clyde is surely one of the most beautiful waterways in Europe and I am anxious to ensure that regeneration includes the enhancement of the physical environment as well as industrial and leisure developments. Much has already been done to rid the Clyde of decades of pollution. Last Saturday, I spoke to a constituent who told me that he had caught two sea trout just above Port Glasgow, and there have been reports of salmon in the River Gryffe.

We frequently hear about the economic significance of the Highlands and how that has been brought about by tourists who fish and sail or, as they say, just mess about in boats. In recent years, similar recognition has been given to the Clyde in relation to the tourist industry.

The lower Clyde, part of which flows through my constituency, has suffered dreadfully from the decline of the traditional industries and ancillary work. I do not have time to list those industries, but the loss of superb skills and the poverty inflicted on those who lost their jobs and on their families tells a miserable and dreadful story.

In contrast, Inverclyde Council and others deserve praise for their remarkable efforts in developing the waterfront. Those who have not visited the waterfront should do so. I am sure that Duncan McNeil will talk about the tall ships event, which I understand Glasgow is bidding for the next time round.

Despite the decline of the shipbuilding industry, I am proud to say that the excellent yard, Ferguson Shipbuilders of Port Glasgow, is still building specialist vessels. I hope that CalMac will be giving it some orders soon.

Today's papers report the proposals for high-speed ferries between Glasgow city centre and Greenock, Dunoon, Rothesay and Brodick. The high-tech vessels to service those routes will open up a new concept for the river. The regeneration of the Clyde is clear.

As in Greenock, the whole area of the Clyde at Port Glasgow will change significantly if the planned redevelopment of the waterfront goes

ahead. The plans include shopping, housing and ferries, providing, initially, freight traffic to Ireland. I hope that eventually there will be provision for passenger travel to and from Ireland, both north and south. Think how quick the links to the north of Scotland, the airport and the central belt will be from a ferry terminal at Port Glasgow.

The regeneration of the Clyde must include the lower Clyde. As I have said, new housing, shopping and ferries that link with Northern Ireland and elsewhere will provide jobs and regenerate a run-down area. It can only enhance the tourist industry of the Clyde and the island of Ireland. I hope that the Executive will support the exciting new initiative.

Can I join the guys in that initiative?

George Lyon *indicated agreement.*

Trish Godman: Thanks. I thought that, being a woman, I had been forgotten.

17:14

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): I want to thank Mr Lyon for bringing this matter to the attention of the Parliament. Like Trish Godman, I welcome the setting up of a group to address the regeneration of the Clyde. I hope that the group will include MSPs of all parties and genders so that the initiative has true cross-party support.

Up and down the Ayrshire coast there are towns whose livelihoods have depended on their proximity to the Clyde. Largs, Saltcoats and the island communities of Arran and Cumbrae are all places where tourism is the mainstay of the economy. If those towns and islands are to compete in the contemporary tourism market, we must ensure that targeted assistance is directed toward the promotion of tourism on the Clyde coast.

However, I want to speak about another Ayrshire town, Ardrossan, whose economy was based primarily on its status as a port rather than on tourism. I will read a brief description of the Ardrossan of today:

"The town has come a long way from the time when the first settlers lived in dugouts. Today it is a thriving seaport shipping grain all over the globe."

Why, then, should I single out Ardrossan as a place desperately in need of the benefits that regeneration of the Clyde would bring? The answer is that the thriving seaport to which I have just referred is the Ardrossan that is situated 152 km south of Adelaide in Australia. It was named after Ardrossan in Ayrshire, but it is thriving while Ardrossan in Ayrshire, unfortunately, is not. Ardrossan in Ayrshire has consistently high rates of unemployment and increasing numbers of long-term unemployed.

If towns such as Ardrossan are not to be allowed to die, Scotland's parliamentarians must ensure that the Clyde is regenerated and that the people of the towns that owe their existence to the Clyde can once again know hope instead of despair.

17:16

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): As a native of Saltcoats, I feel at home in this debate and I welcome the idea of regenerating the Clyde coast. However, as the member for Govan, I want the regeneration of the Clyde to include the rest of the Clyde and, in particular, the centre of Glasgow.

I always think that my constituency runs from Harry Ramsden's to the Clyde tunnel. It is a scene of dreadful dereliction, although improvements have been made and there will be further improvements. We are told that the former garden festival site, Prince's dock, is to be the main focus of regeneration by Glasgow Development Agency, as the BBC and other organisations move there.

The old dry dock—I recommend a walk there because it is an amazing sight—is about to be redeveloped commercially. Many good things are happening. I hope that in discussing the Clyde coast we will include the upper Clyde so that it can all happen together—a great deal still needs to be done.

As we try to regenerate the upper Clyde, we must retain our heritage. There has been a tremendous amount of destruction. The dry dock is the only remaining part of our history. I hope that the Parliament and Executive will apply pressure to ensure that any development will preserve some of our history.

I hope that we will regenerate that area of Clydeside as every other major city has regenerated its rivers. We should remember that we want to bring employment to the people who live there. My tremendous fear for Govan is that the BBC, a film studio, and digital equipment people will move there, but they will bring in the work force from outside the city. We will be faced with the constant problem that, although many jobs are created, the unemployment figures do not go down because the people who take those jobs come from outside.

As George Lyon's motion mentions, we need river taxis and ferries to regenerate the Clyde.

My time is running out. I want us to consider this issue as a whole: the Clyde coast and Saltcoats, which is my birthplace, as well as the Govan constituency, where I now live. If we do that, we will certainly regenerate this great river.

17:20

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): My first job, in 1971, was for a coastal shipping company based in Glasgow. I well remember unloading cargoes of grain at Meadowside and scrap at Rothesay dock, and I remember heavy lifts at Finnieston quay.

In an article in *The Independent* magazine in February 1989, Ian Jack—one of the best-known Glaswegian journalists of that era—conceded that

“civic chauvinism and great injections of public money have made the best of a bad job.”

However, he considered that

“the result is little more than a brightly embroidered shroud . . . Today the river, which for 200 years gave Glasgow its purpose, lies dead and empty; an ornamental pond for the mortgageable classes whose semi-detached houses brighten up the landscaped banks in new English brick.”

He then commented that, although the same thing had happened in London's docklands,

“at least one kind of international trade had replaced another, today's money for yesterday's commerce. Glasgow has had to fall back on self-advertisement and history”.

The word “international” strikes me as important when we consider this great river about which so many songs and so much poetry have been written. Glasgow's past was built on the foreign tobacco trade, then on the Hong Kong taipans who traded in tea and other more dubious goods. That was followed by the building of the mighty ships that were the envy of the world. The fact that the Clyde has no international deep-sea trade is blamed on peripherality, but we should turn peripherality into an advantage.

The return journey between the Clyde and north America is 6,000 miles, compared to 9,000 miles from any other major port in the UK. Any export, including whisky, costs Scottish companies far more because it cannot be exported directly from a Scottish port and, therefore, carries a premium. There have been some experiments such as the Rostok Atlantic line, but not enough effort has been made to give the Clyde the deep-sea links that would revive the area's fortunes.

Sarah Boyack's recent announcement of a £4.5 million freight facilities grant for Ayr harbour to encourage the carriage of timber by coastal shipping echoes my suggestion in a speech in September. Far from being a dying business, shipping is experiencing a revival, especially as it is an environmentally sound way of moving goods. Shipbuilding might also be able to make a recovery on the Clyde.

Although I am glad that GEC Marconi will build the new type 45 destroyers, which will secure the future of thousands of jobs, I want more commercial ships to be built there. Both Ferguson Shipbuilders and Ailsa-Troon Ltd are building small ships again.

Hunterston is probably the best bulk handling installation in Europe; it can discharge the biggest bulk cargo ships in the world in a matter of three days. It is a good distribution centre and we should be thinking about exporting bulk cargoes as well as importing them. Why not think about exporting wood chips to Japan, for example?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Mr McGrigor, I do not think that you are going to get to the end of your script. I will give you another 30 seconds.

Mr McGrigor: I agree with George Lyon's point about the importance of tourism. Dunoon should be a main gateway to the Highlands and Islands, but we need good, flexible, fast and efficient ferries to cover islands such as Arran, Cumbrae and Bute. There has already been a trend of investment in the Clyde, such as the millennium link project, the developments at Pacific quay and the cities divided by rivers in Europe—or CIDRE—project. However, to enable that money to filter down the river, we need a better infrastructure and a better system of water transport.

17:23

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I want to echo Gordon Jackson's approach and come at this issue from the Glasgow end of the Clyde. As a Glasgow MSP, I feel that it is important to recognise Glasgow's position as the hub of the region and to recognise that, in many ways, it is the road to the isles. Many people come to Arran, Bute and the Ayrshire coast and most of them come through Glasgow. Glasgow has 9,500 hotel rooms in a 10-mile area and there are 1.5 million tourist trips to the city every year.

As Gordon Jackson mentioned, the key to the problem is what we do with the inner-city Clyde. My friend and colleague, Christopher Mason, is the chair of Clyde Maritime Trust, which has restored the SV Glenlee, the tall ship at Yorkhill dock. The trust has provided a very nice but underused restaurant and visitor centre, which is next to the exhibition centre in an otherwise fairly long derelict area on that side of the river. We need the attractive and comprehensive inner-city riverbank facilities that have been developed in cities such as London.

As we missed the opportunity to develop the garden festival site, the Glenlee could be a focal point, particularly with the exhibition centre nearby. However, we need other facilities such as tourist

attractions, speciality shops, gardens, cafés, pubs and marine attractions, and there must be effective transport links—not least walking and cycling links.

Above all, this area—from Dumbarton Road down to Partick—needs residents, perhaps through community-based housing association developments that involve current residents.

All of those are complementary to the transport issues that George Lyon talked about, and would begin to turn Glasgow's face back towards the neglected Clyde, which has been for so long the heart and soul of the city.

17:25

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I will refer to the lower reaches of the Clyde. I support George Lyon's motion. Everyone here would agree that the river is a great natural asset to the communities that lie on it. It was the basis of my constituency's past success, and it could be the basis of its success in future.

The potential benefits of regeneration are clear. A boost would be delivered to the economy of the west of Scotland by fast and regular passenger links from Ayrshire to Gourock, on to Greenock and the waterfront, and then to Port Glasgow and Paisley. I apologise to Lloyd Quinan for the fact that all those places are on one side of the river, but I did not have time to think about them.

A river link between Greenock and the airport at Paisley would broaden the transport base of the lower regions of the Clyde. Better transport links would make it easier for businesses to locate away from the main centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and would open up Argyllshire. To realise those benefits, we need to consolidate the current unsatisfactory services. The continuation of the Gourock-Dunoon service is important to us. Major new developments are being built around that transport hub, so that service is integral to the project. We can do a lot more.

John Farquhar Munro is not here, so I will get this point in, because he did it to me last week. I am sure that members will agree that the headquarters of Caledonian MacBrayne must remain in Gourock. He will read that in the *Official Report* tomorrow.

If we look to the future, I believe that the benefits will be realised only if we work together and that has already started. Argyll and Bute Council, Inverclyde Council and quangos are looking at the issue. There is a responsibility on the Executive and on the Parliament to take that point on board and to move this matter forward. The potential is great, and we look forward to making progress.

17:27

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank George Lyon for bringing forward this debate. I have asked ministers a number of questions on the development of the Clyde.

As George said, we are at a crucial point. The main reason for that is the development of the millennium canal link, which will allow sailors from northern Europe to travel all the way up the Firth of Forth, through the canal and out into the Firth of Clyde. That will give them access, for the first time, to some of the best sailing in the world. That offers great opportunities, not least in the industries of ship chandlery and repair. On my side of the river—the north side of the river—we still have apprentices who operate on small ships and yachts, but we are desperate for jobs. Other important issues on the north side of the river are the development of the national park and of Drumkinnon bay.

While we need access to Braehead and to the airport, we also need access to the River Leven, up to Loch Lomond. An integrated transport system operating from the international terminal at Glasgow airport—or west of Scotland airport, as it should be called—that would take one directly to Loch Lomond, or up the west coast, or down to the Ayrshire coast, is to be welcomed, and we should work towards that. However, the key issue is that the Clyde must surely be the largest river in western Europe that is not used as a free road—it must be remembered that the river is a free road.

We have problems with trains and transport on the north and south sides of the river, although I have to tell Duncan McNeil that the problem is slightly worse on the north side, particularly regarding road transport, because we have three major choke points on the A82 that clog the whole system. If we had a properly operating pleasure and commercial transport service on the Clyde, we could address a great number of problems.

17:29

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): In response to the points raised by Gordon Jackson and Trish Godman, let me say that the purpose of setting up the Clyde coast initiative is to be inclusive and to look at the problems of the Clyde estuary and the river in its entirety, not to do so from a particular angle.

As the member for Cunninghame North, I know that the river Clyde and its estuary have long since had a major impact on the lives and lifestyles of my constituents.

In the debate last week, I spoke about tourism, which features heavily in the regeneration of the Clyde. The minister said, in summing up:

“Indeed, Chay Blyth stated that the Largs Yacht Haven, which I have visited, was one of the best-kept secrets in British sailing.”—[*Official Report*, 17 February 2000; Vol 4, c 1198.]

Chay Blyth's words are worth quoting again; although they were spoken in connection with Largs yacht haven, they apply more generally to the river and its basin.

Allied to the niche market of sailing, in Millport and Largs we have the ideal venues for the traditional day trip or weekend break, which can be marketed throughout the UK, and more widely, as part of a longer Ayrshire trail that incorporates Burns country. In Arran, we have the epitome of green tourism. In Ardrossan, we also have the potential for a gateway, or a third leg for international transport.

As George Lyon said, transport is the key to the area's economic regeneration. High-tech, fast and convenient river transportation would open up all those areas, and many more, to wider use, making the Clyde coast once more an attractive place for people to live and invest in.

The Clyde is one of the world's great waterways and much more could be done to promote the area as a whole, rather than in a fragmented way, as has arguably happened in the past. The group that we propose to form will bring people together to exploit that potential.

I am very interested in the proposals for additional sea links that were mentioned and I see no reason why fast commuter services the length of the Clyde should not complement and supplement the existing ferry network. Maritime and tourism amenities also need to be upgraded as part of a high-quality marketing strategy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: My thanks to all members for making their points so succinctly and speedily. I call Alasdair Morrison to sum up the debate.

17:32

The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison): I congratulate Mr Lyon on securing today's debate and providing an opportunity to explore a number of important issues in relation to transport infrastructure on the Clyde and the effect of transport on the area's environment and economy and the residents' quality of life.

I welcome Mr Lyon's announcement about the Clyde coast initiative and would welcome the opportunity to meet the members who are involved in it as soon as possible. I also welcome Trish Godman's important announcement that sea trout had been caught very recently just outside Port Glasgow.

On Jamie McGrigor's history lesson, for the sake of decency I will stop short of lambasting him and his party for the way in which they decimated our merchant fleet over 18 miserable years.

To return to the motion, I can assure members that the Executive attaches high priority to the issues that it mentions. Transport goes to the heart of our vision for Scotland and we are committed to delivering an integrated transport system that meets our economic and social needs and puts people first. Our transport policies aim to deliver sustainable, effective transport that addresses the needs of all in society, whether they are ferry or car users, public transport users, pedestrians or cyclists. That means providing genuine choices for all, whether we live in rural or island communities or indeed on the Clyde.

The Executive is implementing a wide-ranging, balanced and integrated strategy to deliver that vision. The strategy embraces all modes of transport and empowers local people to play a key part in achieving those goals. The strategy involves both short-term and long-term action and its priorities include: investing in Scotland's key inter-urban links; improving public transport at the local level by working with local authorities to build on the first round of local transport strategies; and using the public transport fund to deliver improvements across Scotland, including six projects totalling over £20 million in the Clyde area.

The priorities also include facilitating seamless integrated travel across our public transport links, by delivering a national transport timetable, greater through ticketing and electronic online booking systems in Scotland, such as the Scottish Tourist Board's Ossian project and Caledonian MacBrayne's new internet booking initiative.

A further priority is to meet the distinctive needs of Scotland's rural communities, including building on the success of the £14 million rural transport fund and sustaining air and sea lifeline services to the Clyde and the islands. Those issues have been raised by many members this evening.

I want to focus particularly on ferry links on the Clyde. The Executive recognises the importance of fast and efficient ferry links and their role in the social and economic well-being of the areas concerned. CalMac provides vital lifeline services on routes including Gourock to Dunoon, Wemyss Bay to Rothesay, Largs to Cumbrae and Ardrossan to Brodick—all those routes are on the Clyde, in case anyone needed to be reminded.

Our commitment to the maintenance and improvement of such vital ferry services has been demonstrated by a number of positive initiatives. We have made available £14.8 million in subsidies to Caledonian MacBrayne for 1999-2000. That is

the highest ever level of subsidy and is aimed at keeping fares as low as possible. We have also asked Caledonian MacBrayne to review the success of its CFARES policy, which has operated since 1992. In doing so, the company will consult all those with an interest.

The company has been active in developing service proposals, including proposals for a new sheltered-water vessel to serve the Mallaig to Armadale route and, it is planned, to provide improved cover for winter overhauls on the Clyde. I am pleased that Caledonian MacBrayne was recently able to ensure the continued operation of the local authority service between Gourock and Kilcreggan until the Strathclyde passenger transport executive's longer-term role is clarified.

The Scottish Executive has made available an extra £20 million, which flows from the last comprehensive spending review, to enable the company to build two new ferry vessels. As Trish Godman said, both orders were won by Clyde shipbuilders, Ailsa-Troon and Ferguson. The company's service developments continue apace through its corporate planning process, which sets out the company's strategy for five forward years. We will also be considering Caledonian MacBrayne's plans through to 2003-04 as part of the spending review during the summer. As you would expect, Presiding Officer, I will not become involved in the altercation between Duncan McNeil and John Farquhar Munro.

Before I leave Caledonian MacBrayne, I must refer to a point raised by George Lyon—the Highlands and Islands transport authority. That important development was first mooted by Brian Wilson many years ago and was put on the political agenda by Calum MacDonald when he had responsibility for transport. It is now being progressed, as George Lyon said, by Sarah Boyack. He said that CalMac would be devolved to that authority. I think that, as the discussion progresses, we will find that parts of CalMac will be devolved to the authority, but those issues will be determined during the period of consultation that Sarah Boyack has instigated.

Allan Wilson mentioned fast and efficient ferry services. I suspect that he was referring to the Clydefast proposal to link the Clyde coastal towns of Brodick, Rothesay, Dunoon and Greenock using fast modern ferries. I understand that a meeting was held on 17 February, involving Renfrewshire Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Glasgow Development Agency and Enterprise Ayrshire, to discuss updated proposals and the possibilities for funding market research. I believe that Scottish Enterprise is considering the proposal and will respond to Clydefast's request in due course.

Mr Lyon called for action to market and promote the Clyde globally. The Executive fully recognises the tourism potential of the Clyde. Several partnership initiatives are already under way to attempt to exploit that potential, including the Clyde sea loch trail, the Bute tourism management programme and the Dunoon and Cowal area initiative. The Clyde is also featured in the Scottish Tourist Board's 2000 main overseas guide and is promoted as a location for sailing and cruising.

In conclusion, Presiding Officer—and I have no idea how much time I have left—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are spot on, minister.

Mr Morrison: Thank you. The measures that we have set out, on ferry services and more generally, will ensure that the travel needs of people who depend on fast, efficient and, in most cases, lifeline ferry services continue to be met. Our policies are designed to cater for the short term and the long term. The Executive is committed to building on the momentum and to ensuring high-quality, integrated ferry transport to secure the economic and social well-being of all areas that depend on it, including the Clyde.

Meeting closed at 17:39.

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