

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 23 March 2000

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## Scottish Parliament

*Thursday 23 March 2000*

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

### Infrastructure (Public Investment)

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The first item of business this morning is a debate on motion S1M-676, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on public investment in the infrastructure of Scotland.

After the four opening speeches, I will call the maiden speaker, John Scott, from the constituency of Ayr. We should establish the tradition that maiden speeches are not interrupted and are reasonably non-controversial.

09:31

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** This debate is about rebuilding Scotland. It is about the investment in Scotland's infrastructure that this week's budget failed to address. The purpose of today's debate is to put into a proper context the question of how best to fund Scotland's public service infrastructure.

The objective of the Scottish National party in lodging the motion is to show that, far from delivering the optimum level of public service within the devolved settlement, the Lib-Lab coalition is selling the people of Scotland short. Devolution was meant to be about home rule, but this Government is not even operating the home rules well, in Scotland's interest, and the away rules of Westminster place intolerable restrictions on our abilities as a nation. Scotland needs to be rebuilt—we need houses, schools and roads, which must be built well, making good use of public money.

I will speak about the area in which I work most—housing. Since 1997, new Labour has spent £116 million on new housing partnerships. In the first two years, only 695 units were completed—either modernised or new build. If that same amount had been spent by local authorities, based on an average of 20 units of new-build housing per million spent, a total of 2,320 units would have been completed in the same period, or 7,500 units would have been fully modernised, or 23,000 homes would have had new windows and new central heating.

Council house building has almost ground to a halt. In 1998, the last year for which figures are available, there were only 86 new-build council houses in Scotland.

According to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the 75 per cent clawback rule for local authority capital receipts has meant that 30,000 houses have not been modernised; 5,500 window replacements have been cancelled; and 9,500 central heating systems have not been installed. The 75 per cent clawback rule was brought in by Michael Forsyth, continued by the Labour party and carried on by the Lib-Lab Administration.

Those figures are by no means unique if one examines the spending records of the governing coalition. We are told in press release after press release about its spending plans—money is announced, reannounced and announced again. Cuts are trumpeted as increases and standstill budgets are heralded as breakthroughs. It is the policy of spin over substance and the politics of massage and finesse.

When members debated the local government finance settlement recently, the discomfort on both Labour and Liberal Democrat back benches was palpable. Labour and Liberal Democrat members knew that the SNP's accusation was accurate. They knew that the settlement was not a real-terms increase, but a real-terms cut. They knew that the accusation was true because they saw the reality in their own constituencies. If any one of them was unaware of the situation, the humiliating defeat of the coalition parties in the Ayr by-election would have brought even the most obstinate believer in Lib-Lab spin to their senses.

The accusation that is often levelled by members of the Lib-Lab coalition against me and other SNP members during these debates is that we refuse to say how things would be paid for or that we make rash spending promises. We are either damned as profligates or condemned as cowards. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am tempted to use the intemperate language of the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning in the post offices debate to describe the accusations levelled at the SNP. I fear that, if I were to do so, I would fall foul of the Presiding Officer.

Before I enter the substance of the debate, I wish to challenge some of the allegations, so that those who peddled them can take the opportunity to retract what they have said and to put the record straight.

I refer first to Mr Raffan. On 16 January, he listed a series of promises that the SNP had allegedly made. He said that I had committed the SNP to an extra £175 million on housing. He failed to mention that the £175 million was part of our spending commitments and had been costed at the most recent election. He added that figure to an alleged list of SNP commitments in the full knowledge that the commitment was merely a reflection of a manifesto pledge.

We should examine closely what is being said. Both the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Communities have said in the chamber that the SNP would write off the estimated £920 million of Glasgow City Council's housing debt. We have long presented a case that, under independence, we would transfer the local authority debt. Under devolution—

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

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will continue.

Under devolution, we have said that if we were to use the same funding mechanism as the Executive to relieve that debt—not a penny more, not a penny less—it would free up to the city council an extra £104 million in revenue every year. That revenue figure, along with the existing £20 million that Glasgow currently spends on capital from revenue released from earlier debt packages, would give an annual capital spend for the city of £124 million. That would bring in more than £1.2 billion of investment over 10 years, without stock transfer and at no greater cost than the current Executive proposal.

**Hugh Henry:** Fiona Hyslop said that devolution was meant to be about home rule. Can she confirm that all the spending promises made by SNP spokespeople over the past few months will be delivered in the event of an SNP Administration, in a devolved Scottish Parliament with a devolved budget?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am glad that the member has identified that the SNP will be the Administration. I am more than happy to go through the spending commitments that I have made—[MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] We are offering real, constructive opposition, real alternatives and real suggestions. That is the theme which I wish to carry forward today.

I would like to carry out a critique of the current Administration. This week, the Minister for Communities announced what she described as great news for Scotland's tenants. That great news was that local authorities would be allowed to borrow the princely sum of £155 million. Not only was that borrowing consent announced as if it was extra money from the Government, but it was announced as if it was an increase. In real terms, it was a cut on the previous financial year.

That announcement was made as if it was the best deal in ages when, in reality, at today's prices, investment in Scotland's public sector stock has fallen from £687 million in 1989-90 to £320 million in 2000-01. Even that £320 million includes £110 million from councils' own revenue. Put bluntly, councils are having to divert money away from repairs and maintenance to subsidise a collapsing capital programme. Add to that the 75

per cent clawback rule and local authorities next year will lose a further £165 million in capital receipts.

Scottish local authorities are suffering an effective double whammy. Their income from capital receipts is falling dramatically, and the Government has cut the amount that councils can borrow to pay for their capital programme. Instead of being great news for Scottish tenants, the announcement is grim news for Scottish tenants.

In my speech in the housing debate on 13 January, I called for increased flexibility in the way in which local authorities are given permission to borrow, in relation to the housing revenue account. I was mocked by Tavish Scott of the Liberal Democrats—that was unfortunate. However, I was heartened to receive support from an unexpected source: the Labour-oriented Institute of Public Policy Research. In the IPPR report on the private finance initiative, published last week, John Hawksworth, who is head of macro-economics at PricewaterhouseCoopers, argued for greater fiscal autonomy for local authorities, and that the example of the financial freedom of the Post Office could be applied to councils. He said that

"it seems perfectly possible that this discretionary granting of additional financial freedoms could be extended on a case by case basis to other public sector bodies such as beacon councils and other high performing public sector organisations."

Beacon councils do not exist in Scotland, but the principle is the same. Indeed, it is very much in line with the benchmark standards that the SNP has argued would help direct housing policy. Where a council has a sound business plan and a proven track record, it should be allowed to borrow what it requires to get the job done. Even local authorities that did not pass that test could set up arm's-length companies to enable that within the current regime without changing the existing Treasury rules. Again according to Mr Hawksworth,

"Immediate candidates for such treatment would include local authority activities (for example housing and local transport) that can be transferred into arms-length companies".

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** Yesterday, the SNP made great play of requiring ministers to be honest and give full answers. I hope that that applies to shadow ministers, too. Will the member give us figures for what public debt she thinks is reasonable and how it should be dealt with?

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is an important point. If we consider what we are capable of delivering within the Maastricht criteria, we will still be able to allow the public sector authorities to use the money that we have. What is important is using the money that we already have.

**Mr Davidson:** Will the member give us a number?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I can tell members that 60 per cent is the rule on Maastricht criteria. We are currently well below that and there is room for manoeuvre. Currently, we can provide local authorities with enough resources—using existing resources—for the investment.

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Will the member give way on that important point?

**Fiona Hyslop:** No, I want to carry on.

It is important that the arm's-length public companies are able to borrow under the same commercial freedom rules under which the wholly owned Post Office is allowed to borrow. The income streams of such companies would not come from taxation, so they should not be subject to crude Treasury caps.

It is clear from Mr Hawsworth's comments—and he is not necessarily a supporter of mine—that existing Treasury rules would allow that to happen. There is no reason why local authorities cannot borrow the money that they require, apart from the fact that the Executive is not prepared to negotiate with the Treasury or to consider new and imaginative ways in which to help local authorities to meet their funding needs.

I would like to move to the arguments put by COSLA for the abolition of section 94 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 consents for local authority borrowing. Those are the consents that local authorities get from the Scottish Executive for borrowing for public works. Those borrowing consents count twice: first, when the money is borrowed and, secondly, when it is repaid. That is clearly an anomaly and one that could be easily remedied by the Executive. COSLA estimates that ending that practice would release an additional £360 million to be spent on our schools and roads.

That change would be directly in line with the Treasury's moves towards resource accounting and budgeting. Under that new regime, the concept of accruals accounting would be introduced; major capital expenditure would be accounted for over the lifetime of the expenditure. Put simply, if one borrowed £30 million to fund an asset with a lifetime of 30 years, it would be accounted for over the 30 years, rather than at the time of transaction, which is what currently happens. The Executive could move to that system if it chose to do so. All that would be required would be for the Executive to think creatively—to think outside the box.

Quite apart from creative thinking, the Lib-Lab coalition is failing in a fundamental way. It is not fighting Scotland's corner in discussions with the

Treasury. To meet the Maastricht criteria, the ratio of net debt to gross domestic product cannot exceed 60 per cent. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has introduced a self-imposed cap of 40 per cent on that ratio, arguing that he needs the flexibility of an extra 20 per cent in case of rough times ahead.

According to the IPPR, the gap between the current debt to GDP ratio and the chancellor's self-imposed cap is £75 billion. That is an estimated £15 billion per annum across the UK for the next five years. The IPPR report says that we would have had the scope

"for all the PFI investment and more to be financed 'on balance sheet' had the government wished to do so".

That is on a UK basis.

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** Who would be responsible for that debt? If the Government were responsible for guaranteeing the debt, the plans would not work—the money would be part of the national debt. That would hardly be an economically responsible move.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Well done. Allan Wilson has identified the issue. We have a war chest of £60 billion or more that could finance this. If the Scottish Parliament was a real parliament, with real powers—[*Interruption.*] That is the point of the debate. Let us consider the scope and powers that we have. Even within the context of devolution, the SNP is suggesting practical examples of things that could be done.

**Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Fiona Hyslop:** No, I want to push on. I have already taken several interventions.

I understand that the chancellor might be saving all this money for a rainy day. However, as far as Scotland's public services are concerned, it is pouring outside—and in many schools it is pouring inside. That is the charge that I level at the Executive. There is more than ample room for manoeuvre in the fiscal armoury—all the Executive has offered us are the blunt ideological weapons of stock transfer and PFI. I suggest to the chamber that that is a set of circumstances that would not be allowed to develop under an SNP Administration.

I would like to refer now to the chancellor's budget. If ever there was a missed opportunity, it was that budget. Not only could the chancellor have relaxed the fiscal tightening that I have detailed, but he could—as was called for by the Deputy First Minister—have opened that war chest of nearly £60 billion over the next five years. He could have announced a huge investment in public infrastructure to repair the damage of the past 20 years, but he failed to do so.

Over the next five years, the London Treasury will collect £20 billion in Scottish oil revenues—one third of Gordon Brown's war chest.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab):** At which prices? Today's? Tomorrow's?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Those are Treasury estimates.

That war chest is not Gordon Brown's war chest: it is the people's money, not the chancellor's. Despite that, the extra spending in Scotland will be less than £400 million. He has left the economy stuck in a sterling straitjacket, in which the pound has appreciated against the euro by a massive 35 per cent since 1996, crippling manufacturing and exports.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** What will be the implications of increasing public expenditure to the degree that the member suggests? What would be the impact on interest rates and interest rate expectations? What would be the impact on the pound? What would be the impact on our economy?

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is very interesting. The same kind of expenditure that would be happening under the private finance initiative is happening under the public-private partnerships. Both have an inflationary impact. All that is happening is the replacement of one way of funding public investment with another.

Increases in revenue spending on education have been announced, but we have yet to hear the Scottish version. I am not sure whether we will have an emergency statement on education. From what we can gather, any increases will be swallowed up by cuts that Labour has imposed at local authority level. For example, on education, the increase in spending in Scotland should be around £90 million—but when compared to local authority funding in the last year under the Tories, there will be a cut of £540 million in local authority funding for next year. On transport, the Scottish share should be around £25 million—that is barely a quarter of the more than £100 million that has been cut from next year's Scottish transport budget when compared to the budget in the last year under the Tories. That figure of £25 million is a fraction of the estimated cost of the strategic roads review.

There may be those who are locked in the oncoming headlights of the chancellor's spin. However, we should expect the Scottish Executive to stand up and fight for Scotland's infrastructure so that we can build a better Scotland.

Let me give the Executive a five-point demand from the SNP. First, open the £60 billion war chest to support public services. Secondly, increase the freedom of local authorities to borrow the money that they need—all of which would be within the

Maastricht criteria and is money that is available now. Thirdly, relax the 75 per cent clawback rule to free a further £165 million for public housing. Fourthly, abolish section 94 consents. Fifthly, set up feasibility studies into public service trusts to replace discredited PFI schemes.

Ken Livingstone says that he will use a bond system to pay for investment in the London underground. Is this coalition admitting that it does not have the courage to do here what the London Assembly naturally expects to be done in London? Ken can do it, but the Executive cannot. We want this Parliament to be a normal Parliament, with real powers. That means powers to use public money sensibly for public works to rebuild Scotland. Our Scotland, crumbling under this Administration, can be rebuilt—but not under this Government.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that, to enable Scotland to become a dynamic, prosperous country prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, priority must be given to the provision of quality affordable homes, a high standard learning environment for children, and modern high quality communication links; notes the difficulties facing Scotland's public services and infrastructure, and calls upon the Scottish Executive to consider ways to increase the scope and powers of the Scottish Executive and the Parliament to provide necessary funding.

09:49

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander):** We in the partnership welcome this debate, which comes less than 48 hours after a Labour chancellor has delivered new support to the health service at around twice the historical average. We welcome this debate 48 hours after a Labour budget that brings a massive boost of £300 million to Scottish spending this year and over £2.4 billion over the next four years. We welcome this debate because it offers the opportunity to acknowledge the fact that, when it comes to social infrastructure, Scottish families now look forward to public spending surpassing its highest ever level in real terms in Scotland.

The budget is a tribute to the effective management of the economy. Let me remind the Opposition benches of the achievements—stable inflation, the lowest unemployment for 20 years in Scotland, the highest employment levels for more than 30 years in Scotland, and GDP growth above the European average.

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Ms Alexander:** Not at the moment.

That success has been built on a disciplined approach to public spending, which is now creating the basis for sustained investment, built



on sustained growth. That is not just any old public spending, but the right spending. When Labour came into office in the United Kingdom, the cost to the public purse of debt repayment was more than the entire sum that the rest of the country spent on its school system. We have laid the basis not only for growth, but for the sustained investment in public services that the Tories were never prepared to make. We are proud of the fact that over £1,000 million of capital projects are now being built in Scotland and that that is being done by a range of public and public-private sector partnerships.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)**

**(Con):** In relation to the Conservatives' record on the infrastructure, does the minister accept that the First Minister has adopted several of the PFIs that were instigated by the Conservative Government? Further, does she accept that, in doing so, the First Minister has embraced—admirably—the concept of PFI and made a significant contribution to the health infrastructure to which she alluded?

**Ms Alexander:** There is a role for public and private investment working together, but unlike the Conservatives, we have built in a number of guarantees on the efficiency of the spend and for the workers.

When the SNP—the party that leads the debate today—starts to lecture us on economics and public spending, let us remember its record. Economics is rather dangerous territory for the nationalists, and credibility is in short supply on their benches. Perhaps Fiona Hyslop is here today because if Alex Salmond were leading the debate, he could tell us whether he still believes his comment, made last year, that 50p personal taxation is not a disincentive. If Alex Salmond were here, we could ask whether more than doubling the income tax burden on families in Scotland would meet the public infrastructure requirements that the SNP now wants.

Perhaps John Swinney would be a better bet. If he were here, he could tell us whether interest rates in an independent Scotland—[MEMBERS: "He is here."] I am sorry, John. Should those interest rates continue to be set by the Bank of England?

Andrew Wilson has joined us today. If he were leading for the SNP, perhaps he could pull out his calculator and tell us the latest estimate of the size of the Scottish deficit this year.

**Andrew Wilson:** According to the Treasury red book and the forecast for oil revenues that it contains, Scotland contributes—and will continue to contribute—more to the Treasury than it will get back over the next five years. Do not take my word for it; the London City firm Chantrey Vellacott DFK concludes the same thing.

**Ms Alexander:** The same firm rubbished the SNP's plans last year.

A host of other SNP economic experts are here today—Fergus Ewing with his pet plan for the relief of small businesses; Kenny MacAskill with his new roads; and Kay Ullrich with her hospitals. None of those plans has been costed, but reality has led to some pruning of the money tree in recent months. We heard this morning from Fiona Hyslop that no longer does the pre-election promise to write off £1,000 million in housing debt hold. Instead, we have an admission that the Executive has got it right.

**Fiona Hyslop:** When the SNP first suggested that one of the ways of dealing with housing debt in Scotland was to transfer the debt to the national Government, the suggestion was described as fantasy economics. Now the Executive has adopted it. Will the minister admit that she has adopted that principle and that the way in which she will fund transfer of debt will apply to this Parliament, the next, and the next? It will be funded from the proposals that are being put forward now. It is the same money and the same proposals. Does the minister agree?

**Ms Alexander:** Fiona Hyslop has confirmed that she no longer proposes the write-off of housing debt, but she is proposing the servicing of it. The essential point in today's debate is that the SNP has said that it will not put private investment into bringing about a step change in Scotland's housing stock. The SNP is prepared to say to householders in Scotland that if they are council tenants, they will continue to be denied private investment for a step change in their house. That goes to the heart of today's debate.

I had written a speech that was based on the SNP's policy for public finance as it was articulated at the previous general election. That was based on public service trusts. However, we have not heard one word about that policy this morning; instead, the SNP has chosen, chameleon-like, to advocate frittering away the Government's sound and prudent management of the economy and to find no role for private investment in housing.

I think that the SNP has at least left behind the blinkeredness of people such as Mr Tommy Sheridan—who has not even joined us today—who say that even though Scotland might have Victorian sewers, schools and hospitals, we should stick to Victorian financing: we have to save the money before we build and are not prepared to take a ha'penny from the banks.

Interestingly, the SNP has said today that it is prepared to use public investment only for Scotland's infrastructure. That is simply not the way to go. The nationalists have found an

academic in London who says that it might be possible to pretend that public spending is not public spending, and they have tried to build an economic strategy around that.

Let me make it plain to the SNP: public spending is public spending. If we borrow from the private sector and retain those assets throughout the lifetime of the Government, we will have to meet the full costs of the public sector borrowing requirement—or public sector net borrowing, as it is now known. The SNP's policy would mean that dozens of projects in Scotland would not go ahead—not the four new hospitals, the eight new transport projects, the dozens of new schools. The SNP cannot have it both ways.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Ms Alexander:** No. I want to carry on.

There is another point that the SNP has missed completely, in its suggestion that the issue is merely about the costs of borrowing. Private finance is not an evil; there is nothing evil about using partners and external expertise where appropriate. It is not the cost of inputs that really matters, but the right outputs. Value for money means incentives to deliver in line with contracts, so that the public sector does not have to bear cost overruns; payment on the basis of results; and access to private management skills.

Such measures will allow us to deliver a 40 per cent increase in the amount of public spending on housing planned by the Tories over this five-year period. Uniquely under the SNP, council tenants will not be allowed to benefit from the new private investment that has gone into other socially rented housing. Housing associations have been able to provide 70,000 houses over the past 10 years; if private investment had not been available, 25,000 families would not have a home today. That principle is behind community ownership and the new housing partnerships; the issue is not just about lifting the debt burden, but about the step change in investment.

Such an opportunity is available in Glasgow, where private investment will mean an estimated £15,000 for improvements on every rented home. Other public-private partnerships will provide 11 brand new secondary schools and the refurbishment of a further 18.

We will not be dogmatic: where private investment is not appropriate, we will not use it. For example, in Glasgow, the extension to the royal infirmary is being built with public money because it is better value for money. If the SNP follows the route that it has outlined today, it will take 20 years to get the condition of housing stock up to the standards that tenants deserve.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The SNP's position is absolutely clear: there is a role for private finance in housing. Lenders who have discussed the Glasgow situation with us have told us that the loans might be so large that they would have to issue bonds. Can the Government not inject private capital and still make sure that the ownership of assets remains in the public sector? People want public assets that are owned by the public sector. I admit that housing needs private finance, but the Government has to think differently and creatively about generating such investment.

**Ms Alexander:** That is the essential dishonesty. Any local authority can borrow money from the private sector, but it counts as public borrowing. To imply that public borrowing is not public spending is dishonest. My question to Fiona Hyslop—perhaps she will answer this in her winding-up speech—is: why is it all right to bring private investment into hospitals or education, but not into housing? If we go down the SNP route, we will miss the opportunity to recruit all 1,000 of the craft apprenticeships that are to be recruited in Glasgow this year; the opportunity of construction on a scale larger than we have ever seen before. As soon as there is effective management of the economy, the SNP says that it no longer sees a role for public and private to work together in partnership and that it wants to revert to the old ways instead.

After 20 years of Victorian values, Scotland no longer needs to live with the Victorian squalor of dilapidated homes. Those days can be behind us. We need to do things differently.

Let me make that real. On the transport PPPs, is Fiona Hyslop really saying to her constituents that she does not want the PPP transport link through west Edinburgh? Does Andrew Welsh really want to say to his constituents no thanks to the upgrading of the A92 in Angus? Does Alex Neil really want to say that the project in Kilmarnock should not go ahead? Does Dorothy-Grace Elder really think that we should say no to a new secondary school in the east end of Glasgow? Would Fergus Ewing say no to a new terminal at Inverness airport?

**Fergus Ewing:** Is not the central point of the debate that financing under PFI is much more expensive than Government borrowing? As the minister wants to hear from London experts, does not she agree with John Hawksworth, head of economics at PricewaterhouseCoopers, who said that there is no reason why public investment could not be financed by public Government borrowing?

**Ms Alexander:** Let me deal with exactly that point. The rate at which local authorities in Scotland pay interest on their loans—it is called the pool rate—is about 8 per cent. If I were a

housing association and wanted a 20-year loan from the private sector to build houses in Scotland, it would cost me about 6.5 per cent. The reason for that difference is that when local authorities borrowed money in the 1970s and 1980s, interest rates were higher. We do not subscribe to the principle that, because interest rates are a bit higher, we should say that we will not build anything for the next 20 years. The differential in the cost of money is less than 1 per cent. As I have tried to say, less than 1 per cent implies that the only benefit of PPPs is the cost of financing. That is a deeply dishonest—I am sorry, Presiding Officer; I should not use the word dishonest—and reactionary position, because it fails to acknowledge that there are management improvements, whole-life costing and so on.

I am interested to hear from the SNP, because—I think this is the position of the academic it quoted—it fails to acknowledge all the other benefits that can be realised through a partnership approach. When members consider the future of our Parliament, I hope that they will consider the advantages of using contractors with expertise and will not try to imply that the only issue is the cost of financing.

The politics of posture, which is what we are seeing today, will not build a better Scotland. Money trees are the politics of protest. We are about delivery—new schools, new hospitals and new homes. After the years of neglect, it is our responsibility to ensure that every pound of public money works as hard as possible to achieve as much as we can for our communities. To do that, we must be prepared to lever in expertise and investment from elsewhere. We must be innovative and open minded about the delivery of public services, because that is the only way in which we can meet the real needs of our communities and deliver for a new Scotland.

I move amendment S1M-676.1, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“and welcomes the action taken by the Scottish Executive to provide the policy framework and secure the resources necessary to achieve the targets set out in the Programme for Government and make a real difference in our communities.”

10:05

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** There would be little disagreement that the stated objectives for Scotland as described in Miss Hyslop’s motion are manifestly worthy. A “dynamic, prosperous” Scotland with

“quality affordable homes, a high standard learning environment for children,”—

why stop at children; I would have said everybody—

“and modern high quality communication links”

is a vision that we all embrace. As has already been said, the challenge is not the vision; it is the funding. The somewhat luxuriant language of the latter part of the SNP motion seems to be steering towards a very familiar Scottish nationalist path that is becoming well worn with the tramp of spend, tax and the familiar signpost of independence, proclaiming economic nirvana. It was at that point, Presiding Officer, that the motion gave me the jitters. Desirable is not the same as affordable, hence the amendment to the motion in my name.

The rub in all this is the money. When it comes to infrastructure, there are three options. Option 1 is to do nothing. That seems to be pretty well the Executive’s preferred option in relation to transport. Option 2 is to do something: add to public sector borrowing and tax to pay for it. Option 3 is private finance initiative: let public-private partnerships work for mutual benefit.

Looking at the motion, I shall credit the SNP with ruling out option 1—I assume that its agenda is to do something. I become much more alarmed when I anticipate—and I have now heard it—that the SNP will rule out option 3, given its notorious opposition to PFI. That means it can go only to option 2. Miss Hyslop has tried to explain, very eloquently, why she considers option 2 not to be the Stalinist, socialist formula of former years, but an enlightened, imaginative use of finance.

The minister and I have often disagreed about a great deal of things in this chamber, but I firmly agree with her in her analysis of Miss Hyslop’s suggested solution. I, too, had prepared a speech dealing with the SNP’s Scottish public service trust. I had understood from Mr Salmond’s comments last year that it was the flagship for dealing with public finance. It seems to have sunk somewhere along the line, as there has not been too much reference to it today.

When he unveiled that vehicle, Mr Salmond was talking about the Skye bridge. He said that the pledge that the SNP would make before the last election, to buy out Bank of America as operator of the Skye bridge and to scrap the tolls, would be achieved under the device of a public service trust. According to the SNP, Holyrood would then have had to put up an extra £4 million a year to pay for so-called shadow tolls. It alleges that that income would enable the trust to pay off the interest on its debt.

Given the rosy vision of this morning’s motion, the £4 million would be just a start. Reference has already been made to spending pledges given by the Scottish National party in this chamber. I shall not re-articulate them, but they are numerous. Miss Hyslop argued that the election pledges are

costed.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I referred to the SNP's spending commitment of £175 million from before the election. It was to be seed money for a homes and communities public service trust that would inject the private finance the minister mentioned, but in such a way that housing and the responsibility for access to housing remained a public responsibility and was not hived off as a private arrangement. That is a practical example of how public service trusts can deliver the affordable homes mentioned in the motion. Perhaps the member could comment on that.

**Miss Goldie:** I acknowledge that Miss Hyslop told the chamber that that proposal had been costed as one of her party's election pledges. As was clear from her proposition, however, her whole argument assumes an independence—

**Fiona Hyslop:** It could be done with devolution.

**Miss Goldie:** Well, so she says. I get even more alarmed about the tax implications. What, I think, is not being addressed by the Scottish National party is the fundamental difference between using private money in a private finance initiative and using private money to fund what I think is called a nationalised administration of borrowing. I have to agree with the minister on that point. The two approaches are different: the comparison is not between apples and apples but apples and pears. Fiona Hyslop might believe that her apples are rosier than my pears. We will simply have to disagree.

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** Will the member accept an intervention?

**Miss Goldie:** I feel apprehensive, but I will.

**Ms MacDonald:** I am sorry to upset the apple cart. Does Annabel Goldie realise that the choice is not between two different ways of choosing money but between a first-rate health service—which we had in the old Edinburgh royal infirmary—and a substandard one?

At present, a grade G nurse has responsibility for 32 or 33 beds. I have just learned that in the new Edinburgh royal infirmary—which was started under the Tories and will be finished under Labour—a grade G nurse will have responsibility for 50 beds. The difference in quality of care that can be delivered by a PFI should be considered, not just how much it will cost to borrow the money.

**Miss Goldie:** With diffidence, I disagree with the formidable Mrs MacDonald. I do not agree that the choice is not simply between ways of borrowing the money. That is precisely what it is. The new royal infirmary is being constructed and I am sure that the people of Edinburgh welcome that. I must point out that, if the only way to secure funds for the hospital had been by old-fashioned public

sector borrowing, that infirmary would not be being built.

If I seem cynical about the SNP's proposals on funding public infrastructure, it is because of my suspicions about the party's attitude to taxation. We know from the SNP's pre-election pledge that if the SNP had formed the Executive Scotland would have been the most highly taxed part of the UK. The SNP's "penny for Scotland" policy was penny wise and pound foolish: the burden proposed by the SNP on the public sector debt and the taxpayer would severely restrict the spending power of this Parliament. The Scottish public service vehicle that has been outlined today is nothing more than a mega-quango. The SNP finds it hard to argue that it can deliver its vision for Scotland by the method that has been described today. I am not satisfied that it would be able to.

That private finance initiatives are the best and most imaginative way forward is not an opinion that is held only by me. Were that so, I doubt whether the Executive would have had anything to do with them. The Executive realised soon after coming to power that PFIs provide an efficient and manageable means of accessing capital to provide essential investment. They allow the Government to provide better public services at a lower cost to the taxpayer. The services remain publicly owned, but the use of private sector capital and skill means a better deal for the taxpayer.

Mr Ewing referred to an independent report; I will refer to another. Arthur Andersen and the London School of Economics concluded, on 10 February 2000, that the private finance initiative appears to offer excellent value for money. The study, commissioned by the Treasury's PFI task force, examined 29 projects and concluded that, compared with the public sector estimates of the cost of buying the same projects conventionally, average savings run at 17 per cent.

The current structure of our water authorities bears examination. They have difficulty accessing capital because of their structure. In my opinion, accessing external capital is vital if they are to continue with the essential infrastructure investment in which they will have to engage.

The position is made a little more complicated by the Labour-legislated Competition Act 1998, which was introduced on 1 March 2000 and will ensure that dominant forces in a monopoly have a difficult time establishing the legitimacy of continuing to operate unchallenged. If we think that our water authorities will be immune from the consequences of the Competition Act 1998, we are misguided.

What we want in this chamber is a mature debate on the water industry and the supply of

water in Scotland, without any of the ideological baggage that has dogged the subject in the past. All issues and possibilities must be considered if the quality of service is to be improved, if Scotland's environment is to be protected and if the households of Scotland are to receive real value for money.

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Will Miss Goldie give way?

**Miss Goldie:** If Mr Adam is brief.

**Brian Adam:** Will Miss Goldie concede that PFI or PPP—whatever the latest version is called—does not allow public authorities the flexibility to adjust and make the changes that the public sector borrowing requirement, or whatever its new name is, allows in terms of publicly owned and managed assets?

**Miss Goldie:** No, I do not agree with that. Where they have been used, PFIs have been used for specific projects, which is why they have been popular in the health service and in education. They have also been used, to a limited extent and for specific projects, by water authorities. That has shown the merit and value of PFI.

The task with which our water authorities are saddled is having virtually to renovate and replace centuries-old infrastructure. At the moment, they are trying to do that through huge capital expenditure out of revenue, which means very high charges for the customer—as members will know, having recently received their bills. This is an area in which there must be mature and intelligent debate, as the current structures are restrictive. We must be prepared to consider how we can enable water authorities to access external capital to give the people of Scotland a more manageable and affordable deal than they currently receive.

I move amendment S1M-676.2, to leave out from “to increase” to end and insert:

“other than using its powers to propose rises in taxation, to stimulate investment in Scotland's essential public services and infrastructure.”

10:17

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Without upsetting Miss Goldie too much, I would like to say that I agree with much of what she said at the tail end of her speech. That may be worrying for her.

How water authorities access capital is important, especially considering their massive burden of renewing infrastructure, which was estimated by the Minister for Finance at around £5 billion. That is a priority, as they are dealing with infrastructure that has not been adequately

maintained and is way out of date. We must consider openly how the necessary money can be accessed more readily than through the unacceptably high charges with which customers are currently faced.

I hoped that this debate would not be a re-run of the somewhat bad-tempered debate in late June on PFI, PPP and the public service trusts. I hoped that it would be a constructive debate, so I drafted my speech in my usual constructive and positive manner. *[Laughter.]* I shall try to get the debate back on track and follow the positive course that Miss Goldie set in the last few minutes of her speech, if not in the earlier part of it.

We all agree that there is a huge backlog of maintenance and capital projects that are urgently required. All members can think of major projects in their constituencies that are urgently needed and for which local people are campaigning.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Will Mr Raffan give way?

**Mr Raffan:** I would like to get a little further into my speech.

Mr Crawford is an example of what the SNP does on the ground, rather than what it says in the chamber. As the eminently intelligent leader of Perth and Kinross Council, before he was translated to become the somewhat less intelligent SNP chief whip in the chamber, he instituted a PFI for council offices.

**Bruce Crawford rose—**

**Mr Raffan:** Just wait. I will let Mr Crawford in but I am not finished with him yet. I want him to be able to reply to everything I am saying. He instituted a PFI and I know what he is going to say: “It was the only game in town. There was nothing else I could do. It was cuts in Government expenditure. It was so urgent for me to have a brand new big office in my new council headquarters. Think of my desperate need as council leader to have adequate facilities. I was driven to the necessity of a PFI.”

**Bruce Crawford:** Very interesting and very clever, Keith. I will talk about the PFI in a minute—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. You cannot talk about a lot of things; this is an intervention.

**Bruce Crawford:** Trying to get an answer into a question is not easy. Will Keith tell us why, during the local government debate, when it was clear beforehand that he was against what was happening in local government expenditure—I have often heard him talk about the difficulties of Perth and Kinross Council—he chose, on the day, to sit on his hands? He voted with the Government to put through the local government expenditure plans that are destroying local democracy, which

he has said time after time is so important. It is time for him to talk with his hands—by pressing the right button.

**Mr Raffan:** It is easy to answer that. I did not vote with the Executive; I abstained. Mr Crawford got that plain wrong, as he so often does. I will come to local government spending in a minute.

I arranged a meeting between the Minister for Finance and Perth and Kinross Council. There was an all-party council delegation, including an SNP councillor. I attended, as did Nick Johnston. Dr Simpson could not, unfortunately, attend, but sent his apologies. No SNP MP or MSP turned up.

**Bruce Crawford:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Raffan:** No. SNP MPs and MSPs were informed but did not turn up. So much for the SNP's—synthetic—indignation about the local government finance settlement. I have not made that point in public before, despite Miss Cunningham's attacks in *The Courier* on Perth and Kinross Council, because I think it is more important to resolve such issues and to have constructive meetings, but it was a disgrace that no SNP member for either Perth or North Tayside turned up.

Let me get back to the constructive part of my speech—I have used half my time on the SNP. What a waste.

I said that each of us could think of projects off the top of our heads. I will give three examples for Mid Scotland and Fife. A new hospital for Angus is needed—whether based at Stracathro or elsewhere—costing £20 million. Spending is urgently needed on school buildings to deal with the backlog in maintenance and to upgrade all the schools that have portacabins or huts in their grounds. I visited Bell-Baxter High School in Cupar last week. It is a split-site school, which in itself is inadequate. Behind the old buildings there are 50 huts and portacabins, some dating back to the 1940s. That is not acceptable and dealing with it should be a top priority—and the problem is replicated in schools across Scotland. Bell-Baxter has a very good education record despite inadequate facilities.

**Mr Tosh:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Raffan:** No—I must get on. The Kincardine bridge is a priority because of the congestion and pollution in Kincardine. Scott Barrie, the member for Dunfermline West, and I recently attended a meeting of the west Fife villages forum where we heard about a higher than average level of asthma among children in Kincardine. The bridge is also crucial to the economic development of west Fife and Clackmannanshire, as Dr Simpson knows.

Those are only three projects in my area that should have high priority.

**Mr Tosh rose—**

**Mr Raffan:** I will give way in a minute if I can just try to make some progress—I am still on the first page of my notes.

The Liberal Democrat position—our federal policy—is that we seek alterations to the current unnecessarily restrictive Treasury rules on investment. Why does the Treasury stick so rigidly to a definition of public sector borrowing requirement that is the exception, and not the rule, in Europe? Of course that is a reserved matter, but it need not stop the Finance Committee considering it and its impact on Scotland. That definition has bred public-private partnerships, of which PFI is the principal example.

**Mr Tosh:** If we can agree that the Finance Committee should examine that issue, will Mr Raffan commit the Liberal Democrats to support for PFI and PPP, to which they have been hostile in the past? Will he commit the Liberal Democrats to support the PPP for the air traffic control centre at Prestwick?

**Mr Raffan:** We have always said that we will judge each project on its merits—that position is not very different from that of the Labour party. We have certainly criticised PPP and PFI, and I hope that we will continue to try to improve and develop the policy. Unlike the SNP policy of public service trusts, PPP and PFI are evolving and improving. The trouble with the SNP policy is that it has not evolved at all. It did not develop between last February, when it was announced, and last June, when we debated this issue. The SNP was thoroughly mauled in that debate when it was exposed that the three councils that the SNP had controlled—Angus, Moray, and Perth and Kinross—had all indulged, some more heavily than others, in PFI projects. SNP members have not answered the fundamental concerns about flaws in their policy.

To give credit to the Labour party—in partnership with the Liberal Democrats in the Executive—there have been notable developments in PPP and PFI. That policy should be a process, as should devolution. It should not be finite—we should always be examining ways in which to refine and improve it. That is why I hope the Finance Committee will eventually examine this matter—the convener and other members of the committee are here.

I hope that we will also examine public service trusts. In fact, we should take evidence on them, not from a few selected accountants or from individual academics, but from a cross-section, so that we get an objective view on public service trusts and can expose many of the flaws over which SNP members glide so rapidly.

Let me return to the constructive part of my speech.

**Andrew Wilson:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Raffan:** No. I would like to give way, but I am only on page 3 of my speech and I have a minute to go.

It is crucial that our policy on PPPs should be open to innovation and flexibility. In the debate in June, the Minister for Finance responded positively on the issues of surplus land, employee protection—particularly in relation to pensions—assets reverting to public ownership and the provision of more information. I support what he said on those issues as moves in the right direction. We may have to go considerably further. It is now up to the committees—the Finance Committee on policy and the Audit Committee on particular PFI projects—to drive changes forward in a positive manner.

I am sorry that there has been so much petty point scoring today by SNP members. We have to respond to their silly attacks—we cannot let them pass into print without being challenged. I wish that SNP members would present positive suggestions. Miss Goldie and Ms Alexander were right about that. And, of course, I am right.

I agree with what Ms Hyslop said about the chancellor getting off the top of his treasure chest and about giving local authorities more freedom of action—I am on record as agreeing with her on those issues. However, the shadow minister provided no development of the policy of public service trusts, no detail, and no response to criticisms that have been made.

The Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland have been in a tug-of-war recently, but one thing on which they agree is mutual condemnation of the public service trust policy as unworkable and not feasible. The Opposition owes it to this Parliament not just to attack, but to propose. If the SNP is to be regarded as a credible potential party of government, it must propose policy in far more detail than it has done so far and it must respond to the valid criticisms of its policy that have been made.

10:30

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I rise to express my grateful thanks to the constituents of Ayr for having returned me as its member of the Scottish Parliament. It is both an honour and privilege to have been elected to represent that famous constituency, and I will work as hard as I know how to represent the views of my constituents.

Although the election was keenly contested, now that it is behind us I will endeavour to represent the views of all my constituents, whether or not

they voted for me. I also look forward to working with South Ayrshire Council, Westminster MPs and members of the European Parliament for the betterment of the constituency. While on the subject of thanks, I would like to thank members of this Parliament for their kind and warm welcome yesterday, both inside and outside the chamber.

Ayr is a particularly favoured constituency. It was Burns who described Ayr as a town of

“Honest men and bonnie lasses”.

Having called on what feels like every house in the constituency over the past two months, I can confirm that what was true more than 200 years ago is still true today.

I wish to raise many issues on behalf of the people of Ayr, Prestwick, Troon and surrounding areas, but I have been advised that a maiden speech should be non-controversial. For that reason, I will confine myself to raising one issue—the upgrading of the A77. That is of paramount importance to the future of the Ayr constituency and, indeed, south-west Scotland. I know that I speak for all parties and all my constituents when I say that.

The importance of the immediate upgrading of the A77 cannot be overstated. I was particularly disappointed that the budget for that job was not announced at the same time as the funding was put in place for the upgrading of the A1 and the A78 bypass. I know that the funding will not now be in place until 2002 at the earliest, and I seek an assurance from the Minister for Communities that in the next three-year programme the money will be available.

Because of the delay in the project, three years have been lost. More important, lives have been lost on the road, which has an accident rate 65 per cent higher than the national average. Business development opportunities have also been lost. In simple terms, that means jobs, and it is essential that we cherish existing businesses in the constituency and nourish new business start-ups.

The success of Prestwick airport over the past 10 years needs to be encouraged by adequate infrastructure, as does the aerospace campus at Prestwick. The current state of the A77 is a threat to those businesses. Indeed, Ayrshire is the only major industrial area in the UK not to be served by adequate motorway links. Tourism is another industry with huge growth potential in the area. It, too, needs to be encouraged by better road links. I seek an assurance from the minister that the Executive will commit sufficient funds from its next three-year budget round to fund the public-private partnership that it has promised my constituents.

I wish to express once again my gratitude to my constituents, who have sent me here. I will do

everything in my power to be of service to them.  
[Applause.]

10:33

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I begin by congratulating Mr Scott on a very gracious and considered maiden speech and wishing him a happy, if busy, three years in his position as member for an excellent constituency. Every member in this chamber will wish him well in the work that he has to do over that period.

Today we are seeking to point up a serious constraint on the funding of Scottish devolution and the Parliament's entire programme. When we consider what is going to happen over the coming years, it can only be concluded that this process is unsustainable unless we do something. The Barnett squeeze, which we seek, where possible, to raise in every debate, is leading to artificial and sharp convergence of spending per head, without any reference to need or public choice.

The point of devolution is that we do things differently in Scotland. However, the financial constraints on this Parliament are making us do the same as the rest of the UK, which entirely misses the point. We do not want uniformity in how we deliver public services—it cuts against democracy and against public choice. It does not have to happen, as Scotland is a lucky country with a large landmass, a wealth of national resources and a small population. Obviously, that makes the delivery of certain services that are distributed geographically more expensive, but it also makes some of the administrative public services much cheaper to deliver.

At the modernising government conference on Monday, Chris Yapp, the research fellow at International Computers Ltd, said that much of the holistic programme that the Government seeks to promote across the UK would more usefully be delivered at a Scottish level, because the efficient and normal size of a normal country is around 5 million.

I suppose if public service, and this debate, are about anything, they are about the allocation of our scarce resources. My concern, which the SNP motion expresses, is that, within the constraints of devolution, we do not have the opportunity to deliver services in an efficient way that suits Scotland.

One only has to look round our public services to see those constraints. Every person would admit that there are problems in public services. For example, Kilsyth Academy, which the Prime Minister visited only a fortnight ago, is North Lanarkshire Council's second best school in terms of academic performance. I visited the school before the Prime Minister's visit. The school has

giant mould growing in the main corridor, windows that are permanently leaking and doors that do not hold back the wind and the rain. Greenfaulds High School in Cumbernauld has a permanently flooded fire exit. The school can hold fire drills only when it has not rained in Cumbernauld for three consecutive days. Anyone who knows that area knows that that is an unlikely event. According to the Local Government Committee, North Lanarkshire Council needs £80 million to bring its schools up to standard. This issue cuts to the heart of everything that the Scottish Parliament is about, but how do we address it?

I say to Ms Alexander that, according to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget report, the current level of net public sector investment is still well below the levels of the early 1990s. I do not remember the Labour party, or anyone else, congratulating John Major's Government on his high levels of net public sector investment. Even with the backing of many PFI projects, Ms Alexander is failing. The level that she announced for local authority housing support this year is less than it was when Mrs Thatcher came to power in 1979.

That is the reality of the situation. We should recognise that Scotland is a rich country and that it does not have to be like this. We were told of the chancellor's approach, and that that was all that could be done because we cannot afford more, on a nod and a wink—indeed, the Labour party was sold PFI on that basis.

Leaving out the question of borrowing, even within the surplus that was available to the chancellor, by his own admission £60 billion is available over the next five years. On the Maastricht deficit criteria of 3 per cent, and without breaching the Maastricht constraints, the sum is much larger—£136 billion over the next five years. It is not prudence with public finances that stops the chancellor accessing those moneys; only a fear of inflationary tendencies in the south of England prevents him from doing so.

The chancellor tied himself into a sterling straitjacket in his first budget and in his approach to the Bank of England. Workers in the west midlands are now suffering from the sterling straitjacket, despite the quite disgraceful diversionary tactics of the Prime Minister, backed by the tabloid press in that part of the UK. Labour back benchers must believe that the sterling straitjacket has led to 22,000 manufacturing workers losing their jobs since Labour came into power, according to the Government's statistics.

**Ms Alexander** rose—

**Andrew Wilson:** I am happy to take an intervention from the minister.

**Ms Alexander:** It seems to me that there is a



change in employment mix in all global economies.

Will Mr Wilson comment on the fact that unemployment is at its lowest level for a quarter of a century and that employment in Scotland is at its highest level since 1966?

**Andrew Wilson:** I am grateful to the minister for that question. She should be honest and admit that the figures that she has just quoted have been criticised as a fiddled Tory statistic throughout my time in politics and, when I worked as a civil servant, by the Labour party and by Labour ministers—Brian Wilson and others. [MEMBERS: "ILO."] No, the figures quoted by the minister are based on the claimant count; they are not based on International Labour Organisation figures, which do not show that unemployment is at its lowest level for a quarter of a century.

**Ms Alexander:** What about employment?

**Andrew Wilson:** I am happy to comment on the employment mix. Manufacturing is an important sector, according to the minister's colleague Henry McLeish, yet 22,000 manufacturing workers have lost their jobs since Labour came into power. I ask the minister whether she accepts any responsibility for that fact.

The reality is that our current structure provides needless constraints. PFI need not happen. It is an option that we can use if we so wish, but there is no need for it within the financial strictures that the chancellor has set, the golden rule for borrowing and the fiscal constraints for national debt.

That is why the report from the Institute for Public Policy Research—not known as a hotbed of nationalism—concluded that this Parliament can do better and can do more for Scottish public services. Two thirds of Scots believe that this Parliament should have more powers and that we should be growing the process of devolution. If we are able to respond to that and lift our sights on what we can do, we may be able to deliver and achieve the consensus that Keith Raffan so needs.

10:40

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** It is unfortunate that we have to have this type of debate in the Parliament. In a sense, it is a recognition of the fact that, in their 18 years in office, Conservative Governments destroyed the social infrastructure that had been built up by successive Governments in the post-war period. They managed to undermine our health service, our public sector housing, our education system and every important part of the social fabric that the people of this country took for granted.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will Mr Henry accept an intervention?

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con) rose—**

**Hugh Henry:** Give me a minute; I have just started. It is also unfortunate that this debate is a wasted opportunity. Instead of talking about what we are doing to improve the legacy that was inherited by the Labour Government three years ago or about new investment in health and education and the radical improvements suggested for housing, the SNP's contribution could be described in a number of ways. Some people have said that it is a whinge and a whine; others have said that it is fundamentally dishonest.

Andrew Wilson has admitted that he thinks that devolution cannot deliver. That admission comes from the same people who say that they want this Parliament to work. Fiona Hyslop started off by saying that devolution was about home rule, but she went on to say that investment could be delivered only if the Scottish Parliament was a real Parliament. That is an admission that, for SNP members, this Parliament and Scotland's devolved settlement are not something to be taken for granted; they are something to be dismissed. That is the reality of today's debate; the SNP is dismissing this Parliament and the devolved settlement.

Despite persistent questioning, today and on other occasions, we have had no admission from the SNP that its promises cannot be delivered within the Scottish block by the Scottish Parliament. The SNP's arguments are pie in the sky and fundamentally dishonest, and they mislead the people of this country.

The SNP motion

"calls upon the Scottish Executive to consider ways to increase the scope and powers of the Scottish Executive and the Parliament to provide necessary funding."

That is exactly what the Executive is doing, but instead of giving the Executive credit for doing that, Fiona Hyslop and Andrew Wilson have talked about everything but their motion. They still have to address the basic tenets of the motion. They are ignoring it and dodging it.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Does Mr Henry recall that, in my concluding remarks, I gave five suggestions for practical things that could be done, the majority of which could be delivered under a devolved settlement? We are challenging the Executive to take on board those five constructive ideas. Mr Henry is right to say that this devolved Parliament is not enough for Scotland. We have to be independent. Which of our five ideas does he support and which does he reject?

**Hugh Henry:** Fiona Hyslop has admitted that

she only glanced over those suggestions in her concluding remarks. She threw away some basic and brief suggestions, but she did not flesh out Alex Salmond's flagship proposals on the trusts or how the SNP intends to deliver its promises. We were supposed to be focusing today on how we would improve our housing and build new schools. The SNP motion calls for

"quality affordable homes, a high standard learning environment for children".

We should have been talking about finding ways of financing homes with better heating, double glazing and a more secure environment for our families—the things that the Executive is doing.

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)**  
rose—

**Hugh Henry:** None of those things is being addressed by the SNP. This motion is fundamentally dishonest. The SNP has not offered a way out, within the constraints of our powers, for this Parliament to consider. SNP members are saying that this Parliament cannot work for them, and only independence is on offer as far as they are concerned. The Scottish people have rejected independence. They have made it clear time and time again that the SNP has nothing to offer. We should be looking for some honesty from the SNP with regard to what it would deliver in a Scottish budget in a Scottish Parliament.

10:45

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** First, I wish to make it clear that I am for independence, but I say to Mr Henry that I want this Parliament to work, although I want it to be honest about itself. I want it to underline its financial inadequacies, which will become apparent to the Scottish people three years down the road. They have high expectations that the social infrastructure of Scotland will be improved three years down the line, but with the money that we have available it is being dishonest to say that the social infrastructure can in any meaningful way be improved.

I am going to apply a test to that. Scottish pensioners post-war saw, from their tax payments and their national insurance contributions, the beginning of the welfare state. That was a wonderful innovation, which I and many other working-class people benefited from. The hope was that, as the decades went on, the welfare state would be enhanced, but it has not been enhanced. Not only did we have a Conservative Government dismantling the best of the welfare state, but we have watched new Labour continuing that process. For Miss Goldie to be congratulating Ms Alexander on the policies and the financing that the Government is undertaking must send a

shiver down the spine of many old Labour supporters.

**Mr Kerr** rose—

**Christine Grahame:** Let me get on a little bit first.

Let us look at the reality on the ground, because I sit through many speeches in here and I wonder what Scotland we are talking about when it is compared with the Scotland for pensioners that is outside. My mother waited two years for a hip replacement operation. She ended up being given an oxygen mask and being transferred to Edinburgh royal infirmary, where she was put in Dickensian conditions in a congested corridor, which was an insult to all the patients who were there and to the staff.

I know that the minister will come back with a comment about the need for more hospitals, but the Executive is financing that in the wrong way. It is common sense that we need more hospitals—everybody knows that—but the problem is the way in which the Executive is going about it. My mother called that hospital a dump. It was. Good for her: 78 years old and still fighting.

The most important concern of old people is that they stay in their own homes.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Christine Grahame may be only a few minutes into her speech, but she and her party glory in failure, and they underline it. They do not want new homes and new hospitals for the people of Scotland. They want this Parliament to fail.

**Christine Grahame:** Mr McNeil would admit that I contribute to this Parliament and its committees in a constructive manner. I am simply speaking up for the people outside and about the reality out there. I want things to change for them as much as anyone else does, including those in other parties, but I am being honest about the inadequacies that exist.

**Mr McNeil:** Girning, girning, girning.

**Christine Grahame:** Why should I not say what the truth is outside?

I shall proceed. The fear of many older people is that they cannot stay in their own homes. There are simple measures to allow them to stay in their own homes. They are called aids and adaptations in the Sutherland report on long-term care for the elderly. However, they would require capital from local authorities. If older people apply to have a downstairs shower or a downstairs toilet or a ramp, there is no money for it.

That small amount of money would allow people to stay in their homes before the predictable fall that leads them into hospital and physical and psychological decline. That is the truth. It is not

girling; it is holding this Parliament, and more important, the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, to account. The Executive is sitting on the Sutherland report. It has done nothing with it. I keep asking questions, as does Sir Stewart Sutherland. The report is from the royal commission that was set up by the Labour Government at Westminster.

There are homeless elderly people. They are a hidden statistic, and it is convenient that that statistic remains hidden.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Christine Grahame:** There are so many areas on which older people could put the Executive right, such as the reality on Scotland's streets and pavements—pavements that are a danger to walk on if you are older and streets that have potholes. How to avoid the potholes in the city streets should be part of the driving test.

And what of Ayr? The town is not famous only for

"Honest men and bonnie lasses",

but for grey power—the Labour-Liberal Democrat defeat is writ large on the walls of Carrick Street halls. If, in three years' time, the Government has not started to deliver, it will suffer another defeat.

10:50

**Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** I will start by pointing out that the SNP also lost in Ayr. It is a point that should be repeated. Christine Grahame is, like many others in Scotland, too good at trumpeting gallant defeats. I am not interested in gallant defeats—one either wins or one does not.

**Christine Grahame:** Labour did not win.

**Mike Watson:** I am not trying to suggest that Labour won. Christine Grahame has, however, tried to suggest that the SNP somehow did, which is, at best, a bizarre claim.

It is important to concentrate the debate on the infrastructure of Scotland. I welcome the debate. It is interesting to examine the wording of the motion to which Fiona Hyslop spoke. She did not address the motion to a great extent, but there is not a lot in it that one could disagree with. I will, obviously, vote for the Labour amendment because it improves the motion, but if they were asked, most people would agree that they wanted what is asked for in the motion.

Christine Grahame began her speech by asking whether the Government would examine what is projected for Scotland in the next three years in terms of public services. She then asked whether

there would be improvements and answered by saying that there would not. That is simply not the case; it is nonsense. That can be seen by examining the announcements that have been made. Wendy Alexander has outlined many of the improvements that will happen. What of the additional money that was announced this week as Scotland's share by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? There will be £300 million spent this year on public services, and a further £2.4 billion will be available in the next four years. Is Christine Grahame saying that that will make no difference to public services in Scotland?

**Fiona Hyslop:** On the budget, will Mike Watson agree that the moneys that have been announced are, in the main, revenue moneys? That is the nub of the problem. The SNP wants to address capital investment and the problems of infrastructure—bricks and mortar—which are the keys to rebuilding Scotland, although revenue is important.

**Mike Watson:** I do not accept that. I am not interested in inputs or outputs, but in outcomes. I challenge anybody to suggest that the £2.4 billion that will be available in Scotland for public services in the next four years will not make a considerable difference. To do so would be nonsense.

If I understand correctly, one of Fiona Hyslop's five points was that there should be a feasibility study on public service trusts. Keith Raffan also referred to that. I would be happy to see those trusts put under the spotlight. They have already been dismissed by the Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland. We can mention individual academics, but if two such august institutions say that the trusts are not workable, I am more than willing to go along with them. Let us, however, put the trusts in the spotlight. Let the Parliament's committee's examine them and hold them up to the light.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding. In an ideal world it would be possible for the public sector to fund everything that we in this country need. We do not live in an ideal world, and although I have not previously advocated public-private partnerships, to ridicule them—as the SNP has—is to ignore their benefits. Those benefits include less borrowing, better value for money, savings on design, maintenance and construction and the public sector not having to bear the burden of overspend. Fiona Hyslop misunderstands those benefits.

Look at the Holyrood project. The overspend on that project must be picked up by the public sector and there will shortly be discussions about how that will be done. In a public-private partnership part of the agreement is that such costs are borne by the private sector. I do not advocate a public-private partnership for Holyrood—I want that to be

clear—but there are situations in which PPP would be an appropriate and effective use of resources that would result in better public services.

We can examine the list of new and improved schools and new hospitals in Scotland that result from PPP, but that is not necessarily the only way of providing new schools or hospitals. Hospitals are built being built through the public sector as well as through PPP. I am primarily interested in the provision of better public services, including better health services and better housing, especially in Glasgow.

People in Glasgow want warm and secure homes at affordable rents, and I am not prepared to say that that will not happen just because public sector borrowing cannot be increased. I want to find the best way of providing good housing. Poor housing leads to poor health, which leads to poor educational achievement. We must understand that if we are to put money into the public sector, we must aim for that best way.

When the SNP argues that it has a monopoly on wisdom in relation to how public services should be delivered, its members should consider what is being offered through this Parliament and this Executive and should not run down what is being done. There will be significant improvements through the investments that have been announced this week and through the Government's programme. The SNP ought to accept that and not continually run it down, using fantasy economics.

10:55

**Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Earlier this month, this Parliament examined the local government financial settlement. Members considered the revenue budgets, the council tax cuts and which services would need to go, to ensure that our councils did not spend beyond the limits set by the Executive. What is overlooked by the press, and what was missed in the debate, was the year-on-year erosion of the Scottish infrastructure as a result of declining capital budgets.

Yesterday, I witnessed Susan Deacon's refusal to acknowledge the crisis faced by the NHS. Every time that this Parliament raised the issue of cuts or closures, rather than address the problem, the minister simply renamed it. Calling a closure a transformation may make a better soundbite, but it will not solve the problem. There will be no such hiding place for the Executive in this debate, because I will get the facts in first.

In the three years before Labour came to power, our councils were allowed to spend just over £2 billion in capital projects. In the first three years that the Labour party has control of this

Parliament, it proposes to allow councils to spend £1 billion on capital projects. Labour, aided and abetted by the Liberals, has halved investment in the nation's infrastructure. That fact is taken straight from the Executive's publications.

The well-being of the nation's infrastructure is dependent on investment made in it. What does this dramatic cut mean for Scotland? Perhaps we should consider our nation's history. We have a proud civic background dating back to Carnegie and before. Initially, communities invested to build town halls, libraries, schools, hospitals, swimming pools, parks, gardens and even the infrastructure that is used today to bring fresh water to our towns.

Many of us, particularly those who, like me, are from a council background, resented the dark Tory years, when Treasury cuts meant that we could not afford to renew public infrastructure for our communities. As councillors—as many Labour members were—it was all we could do to keep our public buildings wind and watertight. Little did we imagine that the situation would be twice as bad under Labour.

The outstanding school repairs budget has been quoted as approaching £1 billion. I have seen the consequences, which are crumbling schools with inadequate heating and classrooms that might house the latest soundbite computer, but have roofs that leak and broken windows that need to be replaced.

Not 500 yd from this Parliament, the Infirmary Street baths, which were opened in Victorian times, now lie empty—abandoned through lack of finance. A mile away in Leith, the showpiece Leith Waterworld, which is barely a decade old, is boarded up pending finance for repairs. Under such savage budget cuts from Labour, councils can do little to stem the tide of decay, to stop the rot or to prevent nature from taking its course and reducing our public buildings to rubble.

Not satisfied with starving public assets into dereliction, Labour has found a new tactic—the great sell-off. It wants to pick up where Thatcher stopped and privatise what even she did not dare to touch. Labour has sold what was not even its to sell. It started with Falkirk's schools and moved swiftly on to Glasgow's. Those were not built by Blair or his Government, or even Thatcher's. They were gifted to communities by businessmen and other men of means in days gone by and were certainly not Labour's to sell. As a consequence, Scotland's largest city can now no longer boast of owning even a single secondary school.

The facts are before us today and the consequences will follow. Labour has halved spending on the nation's infrastructure and is selling off what is left before dereliction sets in.

The money that remains is insufficient to cover what Labour has not yet sold. I say "yet sold". I wonder what they will sell next. Our councils, most of which are Labour-run, can do nothing but wring their hands as their repair bills rise and buildings fall. Labour—trustworthy custodians of the nation's inheritance? Nae chance.

11:00

**Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**  
The Rev I M Jolly lives. [*Laughter.*]

As someone who, over 27 years, has invested in premises, sites and people, I welcome the Scottish National party motion for raising this issue in the Parliament. I even welcome the tone of the motion—at least, the first part of it. Improved as it is by our amendment, there should be no reason for divisions at all in the chamber today.

However, there will be divisions, because we are faced with a motion from a party that wishes to reach back into the mists of time, when the public school boards erected our schools, when the hospital authorities built our hospitals and where everything has to be built, owned, controlled, bought and run by local civil servants and funded by tax increases.

In the nine months of the Parliament, I have learned a number of things, one of which is that the ethos of public service is totally different from that of private industry. In private industry, I was charged with making the most of shareholder funds and of fixed assets such as buildings and land or machinery and equipment. Every penny had to show a return—a return that equalled or bettered that available in the marketplace. Otherwise, funds were not available and they had to be replaced by borrowed money.

Similarly, it was the policy in our company to plough back profits to improve our sites and machinery, and to improve productivity so that profit was our motive. I carried that over into the Parliament; however, I have quickly realised that the ethos of public service is very different. The impression I have gathered from public sector managers—good managers in their own right—is that, in many cases, they are charged with delivering the finest service from a finite allocation of resources, within the constraints of the guidelines imposed on them at any time by the Executive in power.

So diverse are those projected outcomes that they may seem irreconcilable, but they are not. What is needed is the realisation that services are what the public sector is there to deliver. It is irrelevant to talk about who owns the premises that services are delivered from. It does no service whatsoever to tie the hands of public agencies by insisting that they operate from ancient, inefficient,

ill-maintained, expensive-to-heat premises, when, with the imagination and innovation of the private sector, modern, efficient, bright buildings would improve not just the services provided but the morale and output of staff.

In this debate, we should be talking about the maximum benefit from investment, whether private or public. We should not be talking about dogma. We should be talking about true partnership between public service and private investment, to improve services, increase employment and provide opportunity.

That is why the Conservatives welcome the private finance initiative investment in our schools and why we will congratulate the Executive on the Labour-dominated Glasgow City Council, which has accepted the principle of PFI. Every secondary school in Glasgow will be rebuilt or completely upgraded. A private consortium will spend more than £400 million rebuilding and refurbishing the city's 29 secondary schools.

Scottish negative party plans would condemn schools to years of underfunding. Nicola Sturgeon, commenting on the proposals, claimed that PFI, in bringing much-needed investment to our schools, was wrong in principle and in practice. She said that it represents

"privatisation of public services. Privatisation of the education system, the national health service and transport services."

The only thing that she missed out was undertaking—maybe the SNP will privatise that next.

Is it really the SNP's stance that our children should be denied decent schools because of dogma? Is it really the SNP's approach that our health service should suffer because of the lack of innovation? Is it really the SNP's argument that private capital has no place in the rebuilding of Scotland and that the divisions between public and private finance have to be maintained?

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** Would the member like to comment on PFI in education? We are building schools for our communities, for community use, using private finance, which means that the community cannot get access to the plans for those schools. If someone is an elected member of a school board, they have to sign secrecy waivers before they can see the plans. Is that a good use of public money to provide public facilities?

**Nick Johnston:** The point here—and it is a point that many members will not understand if they have not been involved in business—is that there is such a thing as commercial confidentiality. Would Mr Crawford, who invested heavily in Perth and Kinross under a private finance initiative, tell me the details of the car parking that he says will

pay for the whole initiative?

**Bruce Crawford** rose—

**Nick Johnston:** I will let Mr Crawford do just that in a moment. The divisions between public and private finance have to be maintained. Under the SNP's plans, our public sector is condemned to fall short of the private sector. If that were the case, shame on the SNP. Scotland would be ill served by that party and no one will thank it for such a doctrinaire approach.

I support the amendment.

11:05

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** The policies that the Liberal-Labour Executive has described are among the most short-sighted, misconceived and erroneous that I have ever heard. The attitude of the Executive is based on a false premise, which is that PFI-PPP is less expensive than Government borrowing. That is simply not true.

I question whether the Executive is aware of the anger about the lack of public investment. In the Highlands, the state of the roads and schools is of grave concern to almost everyone I meet. The A95, for example—the road along which most of Scotland's whisky travels from Moray to be exported to the rest of the world—barely merits the description "goat track". However, thousands of billions of pounds in tax have emanated from that part of the world.

David Green of Highland Council has called for a capital works project in the Highlands and Islands. I hope that the Executive will adopt that plan, bearing in mind the fact that thousands of workers at BARMAC are about to be made redundant. David Green has suggested the capital works project in the context of extremely alarming statistics that show that the capital funding received by Highland Council has fallen from £17.74 million in 1994 to £5 million in 1999. Highland Council has said that, at the current rate of revenue spending on road maintenance, road surfacing would take place every 108 years. According to Mr Shimmin, the director of roads and transport at Highland Council, road surfacing needs to be undertaken every 35 years. If we do not accept the advice of the director of roads and transport, the bill that other administrations will have to meet in years to come will far outweigh the money that should have been spent at this time.

A serious barrier to the creation of jobs and investment in infrastructure is the failure of the Department of Trade and Industry to agree the assisted area status map with the European Commission. As the DTI has not agreed that map—despite having had 18 months to do so—no

public sector agency can give more than €100,000 over three years to any inward investor, business or infrastructure project. That is total incompetence. The letters DTI stand for the department of total inertia. The DTI is bungling on a monumental scale. There have been excellent investments in the Highlands, bringing many jobs, such as Inverness Medical, White Electronics and the Cairngorm funicular railway. None of that would have happened if the €100,000 limit had applied. Unless the Labour party sorts that out, tens of thousands of jobs will be lost, not only in the Highlands, but throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK.

There is much that should be done in relation to investment in our water supply and sewerage system. However, I must question whether every project submitted by North of Scotland Water Authority should be conducted over the next three years. I am surprised that that has not been questioned. I am astonished that the Labour party supports the increase in NOSWA's charges this year of 42 per cent. That is unsustainable and it is creating an anger in the Highlands in which ministers do not seem to be interested. They would be well advised to take the advice of Ian Davidson MP to get out a little more.

11:10

**Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** I place on record my congratulations to John Scott on his maiden speech. We spent some time in hand-to-hand political combat in Ayr and I am sure that he will do his best for the constituency that he now represents.

I now turn to the grim reapers and girders on the SNP benches—I have never heard such a desperate performance of talking Scotland down. Fiona Hyslop asked us to look at the reality in our constituencies. When I look at mine, I see the working families tax credit, the largest ever increase in child benefit, the winter heating allowance, nursery places, women returners—all of which would be placed in great danger by the economic madness of the policies that the SNP has presented today.

The debate this morning has contrasted the way in which we will manage the economy in a stable and prudent manner that allows us to rebuild the infrastructure as we need to, with the SNP way, which is not even boom and bust, but fantasy politics that I find pretty rich.

When I go to Hairmyres in East Kilbride and see a brand new hospital being built, people do not come up to me and say in a political or dogmatic way, "I don't like the way you've done this; I don't like the way you've done that." They want a modern hospital where people are not carted

between wards on trolleys through wind and rain to get to other parts of the hospital for X-rays and so on. They want a proper hospital. Yes, we have had underfunding in services; and yes, Labour is delivering changes—nationally and, through the partnership, in Scotland.

**Brian Adam:** The new hospital at Hairmyres is being built under a 25-year or 30-year deal. We are continually being told by Susan Deacon that we are in a period of change in the health service. How will that non-publicly owned hospital be able to accommodate the considerable changes that will take place during the time of the contract if it is not under public control?

**Mr Kerr:** Brian Adam fails to understand the nature of the contract and specifications. We are in control of the process—that is what the contract and specifications for the public-private partnerships are all about. I would add that Hairmyres is used as a model for trade union and worker involvement in such projects.

Mr Adam should come to East Kilbride and argue on the doorsteps. I am happy to take him on over the delivery of real services to real people in real communities. This debate is all about comparing the fantasy land of non-delivery with the actual delivery by the Scottish Executive.

People in East Kilbride look enviously at the Glasgow school project. They see the renewal of the whole secondary school estate that will allow young people in Glasgow to learn and to develop in the modern economy. That is what this is all about—not the political posturing and pathetic responses that we have heard all morning from the SNP. The SNP talks down public servants—the same public servants whom I meet every day in my constituency when I visit hospitals and schools. Those people want us to develop. They are not bothered about the intricacies of the debate that we have had this morning; they want real delivery.

Let us remember that every project is individually assessed. That is why—in the largest ever hospital-building programme in the history of the NHS—four projects are publicly funded and four projects are coming through the public-private partnership. We assess the projects; we go on what is the best fit, and on what is best for the economy of Scotland. That is the way in which we deliver for the economy of Scotland and that is the way in which we will continue to deliver.

Public sector trusts and the independence tag are rarely mentioned. I am glad that those issues are at last being talked about—both have been hidden in the SNP shadows. They are the real issues that we want to get over so that the people of Scotland know about the SNP's inability to deliver and about the damage that falling into the

independence black hole will do to the Scottish economy.

11.14

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I will concentrate on the effect of the Government's financial policy on vulnerable members of our community—especially the elderly and the disabled. As I am sure members will recognise, many of our elderly and disabled are dependent on public services.

In particular, I will talk about housing and the provision of community care for our elderly and disabled in local communities. There are major difficulties in providing suitable housing services, especially for the disabled. That situation has arisen principally because of the capital finance restraints on local authorities, which affect their ability to invest in local housing stock to provide housing for the disabled. That vacuum has now been filled, largely by local housing associations.

Christine Grahame mentioned aids and adaptations for elderly and disabled people in our communities. I am sure that there is no MSP who has not received a complaint from a constituent about the waiting lists for those aids. There is a waiting list for assessment by the social work department to determine whether the adaptation or equipment is required in the first place. After that, the person finds themselves on a second waiting list for the adaptation to be undertaken or the equipment to be provided.

Before the election, I was one of the public servants who were responsible for providing services to our elderly and disabled. Prior to that, I worked in a service that had to sustain a cut of £400,000 across three community care teams. That resulted in cuts not only to staff numbers, but to resources, and affected the allocation of nursing and residential home beds and the provision of basic services such as aids and adaptations. When I was in that job, the average waiting time for someone to see me had been around two to four months. When I left that job, as a result of the cuts, the average waiting time for assessment by the team was more than nine months. People then had to wait on secondary waiting lists for the adaptation and the equipment to be provided.

**Mr Davidson:** Mr Matheson describes a council that lacked any sense of priority in how it delivered services. That has nothing to do with money; it is about the design of services.

**Michael Matheson:** I thank Mr Davidson for that, because the council used to be under Conservative control. In fact, Stirling Council started under the Conservatives, but—as I am sure Mr Davidson is aware—it is now under Labour control.

To substantiate the fact that the problem is not isolated to one local authority, I refer to a written answer that I received from Iain Gray on services and funding for disabled people and services provided by local authorities. His answer showed that, during Labour's first two years in government, the amount spent by local authorities on services for the physically disabled fell from £620,000 to £450,000. By my reckoning, that is in the region of a 28 per cent drop in funding for local authority services for that vulnerable group.

The real effect of the Government's financial policy is to hurt those who need such services. Andy Kerr may say that when he goes round his constituency people tell him that everything is okay—

**Mr Kerr:** I did not say that.

**Michael Matheson:**—but I have been on the receiving end of the Government's policies and I see people who suffer day in and day out because of the cuts that result from his Government's financial policies on, and attitude towards, local government.

**Mr Kerr:** I asked Mr Adam to come to East Kilbride, to the Hairmyres site, and to argue the SNP's policy for public service trusts and against the hospital that is rising from the ground and that patients will move into in the next 12 months.

**Michael Matheson:** I touched on that. It is interesting that Mr Kerr chose not to take me up on funding for adaptations for disabled people in his area. If he chooses to do so, I will be more than happy to meet him in a public forum in his area to debate that matter. I could present the figures that show how Labour is hurting disabled people and the elderly in his community.

Local authorities are also struggling, because of limitations in capital expenditure, to meet the criteria of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Many local authority public buildings will have to comply with that act by 2004. However, because of the constraints under capital budgets, local authorities cannot adapt those buildings or build new ones.

I want to hear the minister talk today about the real politics of change. I want to hear what she will do to address the waiting lists and to ensure that local authority public buildings will comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by 2004. Will she give local authorities the money either to provide facilities by adaptation or to build new facilities?

11:19

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** I enter this debate with some trepidation; it is so often clouded in technical financial terms that it is

difficult for many people to focus on the issues under discussion.

Quality housing, good school buildings and strong infrastructure should be matched by the rigour of a real social inclusion strategy to allow us to build a healthy environment in which people can participate fully. As Christine Grahame and Michael Matheson should know from the work of the Equal Opportunities Committee and the cross-party group on older people and aging, the SNP has no monopoly of concern for older people. We are all engaged in a hard debate about how to deliver quality services to the older members of our community.

We should set this debate on infrastructure in the context of years of Tory neglect. We are often accused of using the Tories as scapegoats; however, we should remember that scapegoats were often innocent, and the Tories were not. We should acknowledge that this society is picking up the pieces and living with the consequences of a policy of neglect, which was driven by profit and based on attacking the public sector.

It is disappointing that the SNP sees this debate only as an opportunity to prove that the Scottish people were wrong when they voted for our current constitutional settlement—as the SNP encouraged them to do—and as an opportunity to point out what the Parliament cannot do. I hope to highlight the Parliament's powers to get the best value for money from our infrastructure and to build an infrastructure that will deliver for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I am aware that there is a huge on-going debate about housing. As a result, we should seriously examine the work of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee and its findings. Furthermore, we must be more confident about other ways of providing housing. Although private sector moneys have always been available, the challenge is to find out how those moneys can be directed.

My area contains some good examples of how bringing together private and public moneys through the housing association movement and housing co-ops has developed good-quality housing and created a volunteer dividend for the community. Housing in its broader context has been recognised in social inclusion partnership initiatives. Crucially, the housing association movement has led the way in putting tenants at the heart of decision making on the design and running of houses. People in such areas shed no great tears over the old public sector model, which allowed very little or no tenant control. Any stock transfer must have at its heart a matching commitment to real tenant empowerment. We must take into account the points that have been raised about the transparency of the process, and



the Executive needs to address some issues about consultation with the community.

We should be stricter in drawing up contracts. If the central principle is that the private sector is more dynamic, such dynamism should be demonstrated in ways other than low pay or reduced pension rights. That challenge is particularly important in the construction industry, which will benefit from much of the work on our infrastructure. It is still a sad fact that, in the UK, there are three deaths a week in that industry. Despite the millions of pounds that have been invested in construction work in my area, anyone who has visited a building site in the past 10 years will have found not one apprentice. The only apprenticeships and real training are being provided by Glasgow City Council and—dare I say it—its direct labour organisation. We must acknowledge the key social role of DLOs in developing apprenticeships for girls and boys, proper safe training and genuine local employment. The challenge to the private sector is to match such quality training and local jobs; the people in our communities must receive a work dividend from these developments.

This debate is not about blind faith in one area or another. Our committees must examine the options and find the best possible solution for our people. Across parties, in local communities and in local government, people are taking hard decisions because they want good schools, which they will have in Glasgow; good housing, which Glasgow will have once the housing debt is cleared; and services that our young people and older people deserve. As a result, although we scrutinise the available options, our test is not whether we will benefit electorally from our decision; it is whether we deliver the service locally, whether we improve people's lives and whether we use private moneys in ways that our communities, not the private companies, want. I urge members to see this debate not as an opportunity to undermine the Parliament's work, but as an opportunity for the committees of the Parliament to take a constructive role.

11:25

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I begin by saying to Johann Lamont that that is exactly the line that the SNP takes—we are talking about a constructive and creative approach to building a modern Scotland that is fit for our future.

I take issue, however, with what Johann said at the beginning of her speech about the need to consider this issue in the context of 18 years of Tory neglect. I remind her that we have had three years of Labour Government. I will give her some facts and figures about what the Labour Government has done for the education

infrastructure of this country during those three years.

Peter Peacock has said that it would take £1 billion to rebuild Scotland's schools to the standard that they should be at for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, in the comprehensive spending review, Labour has committed only £185 million. That in turn must be seen in the context of the £23 million of cuts in education across our local authorities just two weeks ago. In East Dunbartonshire, in my constituency, an independent consultant's report said that it would take 20 years to bring our schools up to standard, at a cost of £3.3 million a year.

**Johann Lamont:** I agree that we have a serious problem. The largest part of our infrastructure was created by the previous Labour Government, but there were then 18 years when nothing was done except to destroy our economy. I hope that Fiona McLeod agrees that the challenge is to recognise the difficult situation that we are in and to come together to find a solution. However, we cannot deny that those 18 years happened and caused huge damage to our economy.

**Fiona McLeod:** Nor can Johann deny that three years of Labour Government have not brought the investment for which Scotland is looking. Labour's dogma in refusing to consider public service trusts and innovative ways of financing the infrastructure of this country offers nothing to the people of Scotland.

As I said, East Dunbartonshire Council needs to invest £3.3 million a year in schools. Two weeks ago, its education department suffered a cut of almost £1 million in expenditure. How will we solve the problems in Scotland's schools in those conditions?

In Lenzie Academy, a school with more than 1,000 pupils, there are only three toilets. That is shocking. In an article in *The Herald* today, the secretary of the parent-teacher association at Larbert Village Primary School writes about the fact that children have to sit on the floor to eat their packed lunches. Those are the facts and figures that reflect what three years of Labour Government have given us.

We must be more imaginative and we must look to the future. Under devolution, the SNP put forward the imaginative idea of children's centres. The idea was to examine the present financial settlement and investment and to use buildings more creatively, so releasing funding for alternative uses. In the future, under independence—which is not a dirty word, nor a word from which the SNP shies away—the Government of Scotland will set borrowing requirements to reflect the needs of our country and will therefore be able to invest in the future of

our country.

11:28

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** The SNP motion seems to pose more questions than it gives answers. Once again, the threat has been trotted out of a return to failed, Soviet-style centrally controlled policies that would frighten any potential investor to death.

The Labour Government came into power with the mantra “education, education, education”. In the chamber today, we are getting debt, debt and more debt. We all agree about affordable homes, but we have had years of council neglect, which have run down the public sector housing stock in Scotland. I say to Michael Matheson that, in the four years when the Conservatives ran Stirling Council, many programmes for renovation, central heating and the warm homes initiative were turned round. The council was up to speed and well ahead. Unfortunately, since then—I served in opposition after that—Labour has lost control, supported in almost everything it has done by the SNP. The SNP is keeping Labour in power now, and its members should be careful about how they go around labelling people. Fiona Hyslop says that private finance is necessary. I congratulate her for what is at least a piece of honesty.

Housing associations all over the country get attacked, but the perception of what a housing association can do is something that we need to accept and investigate further. That perception can provide something that Johann Lamont—who I see has left the chamber—talked about: tenant control and influence. That is a form of democracy, which will roll on in the various associations without the strangulation of central control and without deviation from budget. Firm packages can be and are being designed to install disability aids, either on a percentage basis or by negotiation. We support such initiatives.

How does the SNP intend to pay? I ask that the shadow ministers also start to be honest and give us some direct answers. Are bonds a tax? Are they a levy? Who pays? Is it the taxpayer? Is it business? How will the SNP persuade people to put money into bonds? The SNP has said nothing about that. Who would be the contractor? How would the SNP establish tendering mechanisms? Will bonds be run by a central mega-quango, despite the SNP's claim not to like quangos, or will they be run by local politburos, such as we have seen in SNP policy statements over the past few years?

Alternatively, will the SNP's bonds be under democratic control? Which rules will it use? Will the commercial rules of business be used, with contract setting and accountability? The one thing

that the PFI system provides—and I do not dispute that there will be an occasional need to tweak it a bit to suit the needs of specific projects—is a contractor who is tied into delivering the construction, fabric, performance and maintenance of the building; we know to the penny what that will cost.

The projects are accountable under PFI, but that is not the case under local authorities. What about the overruns from the days of direct labour organisations? That was not the fault of the people in the DLOs; it was the people who were elected to run them who lost control. The private contract system provides the clarity of purpose and clarity of function that allows us to roll on.

Miss Hyslop raised five points; I will concentrate on the first three. First, she talked about opening up the war chest. Does that mean that the SNP does not believe in the prudence of having a reserve when in government? That is the first time that we have had any honesty about that. Her second point was about loosening the ties on public borrowing. She is saying, “It is open season: borrow what you want.” Who controls that? The SNP has not told us. That is dishonest. Her third point was to relax the 75 per cent clawback rule. Does that mean that the SNP is into postponing debt for future generations yet again? That is not a very clever way in which to go forward. Who sets the public sector borrowing requirement in an independent Scotland? Can SNP members give us some numbers or some ideas that would allow us to break even in their debt system? What are the rules of engagement?

Who designs the project? Who manages the project? What do SNP members want: just bricks, and no services? Is it more important to have bricks than to use the money to employ doctors, nurses and professionals in the health service?

Stirling Council does a good job with education. When I was a councillor, I was pleased about the Balfour High School project. It has worked. The local community was involved and there is public access. A school, in an area of high demand, that had antiquated buildings and that was neglected by the former Central Regional Council—which was, I might say, always run by Labour—has been assisted in an imaginative way.

I noticed that the Deputy Minister for Children and Education, Peter Peacock, was in the chamber and I thought to myself, “Oh, what are we going to talk about?” Were we going to talk about something other than the usual bricks and mortar? Were we going to talk about something that the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not quite make clear? The chancellor is indeed allowing some tax relief for people in business to buy a computer—we all need to be engaged in that—but not a word was spoken about the infrastructure that is

required to do that.

I require some answers from the minister, but it would be nice if the SNP, whose members look to build a future for Scotland, would address my points. In conclusion, I would not recommend any new forestry schemes—money does not grow on trees.

11:34

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** I agree with members who have said that today's debate is apposite because of the four consecutive Tory Governments' years of neglect of public sector infrastructure. That neglect was driven by the ideological right, with its philosophy that the market would provide, irrespective of the social and economic consequences for our traditional manufacturing base. The frontiers of the state were driven back for ideological as opposed to economic reasons. The principal casualty of that philosophy was capital investment in our public infrastructure. However, the crumbling public infrastructure not only created a society of haves and have nots and widened the gap between those who were dependent on public services and those who could afford private schooling and health care, but impaired economic performance, with periods of boom inevitably being interspersed with periods of bust.

The Tory response to that was PFI, which was simply an adjunct to the party's ideological predisposition to privatisation. It was not new thinking: the levering-in of private sector finance to rebuild a crumbling public sector infrastructure was first suggested by John Prescott when he was the shadow transport minister. He argued, in anticipation of the privatisation and break-up of the rail network, that public control and accountability could be retained and private sector investment secured in a partnership between what was then British Rail and the private sector.

John Prescott's proposal would have kept the national rail network within the public sector; it would have delivered—without affecting the PSBR—the necessary large-scale capital investment that everyone agreed was necessary to make the rail infrastructure competitive with road and air alternatives; and it would have given a return to private sector companies that had invested in the rail network. His proposal would have precluded the need for privatisation, which the self-styled radical right argued was necessary not simply for ideological reasons, but for economic reasons.

PPP was an alternative to privatisation and would lever in otherwise unavailable capital to buttress the wider social inclusion agenda, the agenda of the left: new hospitals, new schools and

warm housing.

**Fergus Ewing:** As Allan Wilson is an extremely clever chap, does he agree that the main objection that we have to PFI is that, as a way of financing projects, it is more expensive by 5 per cent than Government borrowing? It costs more and Labour is wasting public money.

**Allan Wilson:** PFI can be more expensive. That is why we take a pragmatic approach to PFI, based on the merits of individual projects. I will explain later how PFI can also be more efficient and more cost-effective.

When Labour defeated the ideological right, we were able to supplement our traditional ideological commitment to the NHS, comprehensive state education and social housing with private sector investment in public sector infrastructure. We got that investment not as a means of privatising the services but as a way of improving the services. As a consequence, Labour is delivering better schools, new hospitals and better housing. Unlike the Tories, Labour is not privatising key areas—areas such as clinical services and the state education service are excluded from the PFI process. The private sector can sometimes operate more efficiently than the public sector—Crosshouse hospital is an interesting example of that.

**Bruce Crawford:** Unison, a trade union with which Allan Wilson was closely associated, recently said that it

"notes with concern the Scottish Executive's continued reliance on Private Finance Initiative which is economically flawed and poor value for money for Scotland's taxpayers, since it will cost more in the long run than to fund capital projects."

Does Allan Wilson agree with that?

**Allan Wilson:** If Bruce Crawford knew anything about what he is talking about, he would understand that, within Unison, I argued against that policy. I did so because—if Mr Crawford is interested at all—Unison positioned itself incorrectly in that debate. Unison's principal objective is to defend the rights of the workers who are involved in the public sector and to ensure that they are protected and enhanced. It is not a self-styled guardian of the public sector ethos—that much is clear.

As ever, the nationalists want to have their cake and eat it. That is why, as Mike Watson and the banks have said, its proposals have been correctly described as unworkable—superficially interesting, perhaps, but unworkable nevertheless. Perhaps that describes nationalism in general: superficially interesting, but unworkable.

11:41

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I was greatly entertained by Allan Wilson. SNP members have been accused this morning of being reluctant to mention independence and public sector trusts, but I have not heard any good socialist principles voiced here today by our colleagues in the Labour party; in fact, they almost gallop away from that. We heard earlier, from Wendy Alexander, about new Labour and the right way in which to spend money. New Labour is definitely on the right—there is no doubt about that—and I have grave doubts about whether that is the correct way in which to spend money.

Undoubtedly, PFI and PPP cost more, and we are encouraged to consider them objectively. The National Audit Office examined in detail the M74 project, and its report stated that there was, at best, only a marginal benefit to PFI.

**Mr Tosh:** Will Brian Adam give way?

**Brian Adam:** I will give way if Mr Tosh will allow me to develop my argument a little.

There are considerable doubts about the public sector comparators that are being used. Those have been not just academic doubts, but doubts that have been expressed by officials who are willing to put their heads a little above the parapet—not all the way, and I am not going to name any names. Those people suggest that the public sector comparators are often designed to make the PFIs and PPPs seem to offer some marginal benefits.

**Mr Tosh:** Will Brian Adam give way?

**Brian Adam:** I should be delighted to give way to Mr Tosh.

**Mr Tosh:** I have read the transcript of Mr Adam's interview with the National Audit Office. Does he acknowledge that marginally cheaper means cheaper? Does he acknowledge the fact that he could not show that that project was more expensive? Does he acknowledge that the audit through the national audit process found many ways in which subsequent projects could be delivered more effectively and economically, and that his argument is fundamentally flawed?

**Brian Adam:** I do not accept any of the premises that Mr Tosh has just enunciated. The National Audit Office report suggests that, at best, PFI might have been better—it does not suggest that it would have been better. It also points out that we have not properly examined the issue of affordability, and insists that any further projects be examined on the basis of affordability. This process locks us in, regarding what we can or cannot do in the future; it reduces the options in the future. It locks us in, so that those choices are not there any more. Those who have had

experience of successive compulsory competitive tendering, followed by PFI and PPP, will know that there is no great experience in the public sector of drawing up specifications. We have rushed into that process and, as a consequence, we have been taken to the cleaners by private sector folk who are much more experienced in dealing with contracts.

**Mr Davidson:** Will Brian Adam give way?

**Brian Adam:** No. I would like to develop my argument. I might allow Mr Davidson to intervene in a moment.

There is no great experience in the public sector in dealing with contracts. We have great difficulty in allowing the flexibility for the changes that will come during the time of the contract, to allow what is wanted in the public sector to be delivered by the private sector, when it comes to design, build and operate—especially when it comes to operate.

I do not accept the point that we are now looking after the interests of staff. Why is it all right for ancillary staff to be employed by a private company while doctors and nurses are kept in the public sector? At Edinburgh royal infirmary, the major current PFI, we will have fewer beds and staff and no control during the period of the contract. There will be variations in what is wanted and negotiating those variations will cost more. Public service trusts would give us control.

**Mr Davidson:** Brian Adam slurs a lot of people who are working at a high level in local authorities. As he knows as a former councillor, all councils deal on a contractual basis with all sorts of suppliers, mostly in the private sector. His council leased vehicles, equipment and so on. Did he always vote against that, saying, "We are not competent as councillors to deal with it"?

**Brian Adam:** It is not a question of competence, but the member is right that it is about how finance is dealt with. PFI is leasing on a much grander scale and it constrains the choices that can be made, by locking us into contracts with private sector providers that we cannot vary without significant penalties.

11:46

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** When I saw the Opposition motion I wondered what tactical genius, what McBismarck, had managed to tee up a debate on investment in public services in the immediate aftermath of the budget. The budget has been acclaimed by serious, knowledgeable commentators as delivering the largest ever package of new investment in core public services since 1945—investment in health, education, transport and the war against crime. The debate should be placed in

that context.

There are two key lessons from the Conservatives' years in government. The first is their record of under-investment in public services, which gives us a contrast against which we can project our policies. The second is their demonstration of the bankruptcy of boom-and-bust policies. Remember black Wednesday and its consequences for UK public services.

As a Government, we are trying to put together a serious package of investment in public services. Fiona Hyslop said that the £2.4 billion that is coming to Scotland is largely revenue based and asked: what about capital? That money is not entirely revenue based; some of it is going into capital and some to revenue. The use of other options such as public-private partnerships and private finance initiatives adds to the amount that can be spent from taxation revenue. They are flexible ways of leveraging more resources into the public infrastructure. We need to look at how that can best be done on a case-by-case basis and not go into the black hole the SNP wants us to go into—the politics of denial, where PFI is out of the question under any circumstances.

Mr Hawksworth's report for the Institute of Public Policy Research has been quoted by the SNP. That report stated:

"The new public sector financial control framework introduced by the Labour Government over the past few years has removed some of the most serious constraints on public sector investment imposed by the old PSBR-based regime."

Clear evidence from expert authorities shows that the way in which we are doing things is more flexible and more organised, and a more effective way of raising revenue. Is Fiona Hyslop serious in arguing, as she appeared to, that there should be no controls on local authority public expenditure? Are we talking about Monopoly money? Does Fiona Hyslop think that whatever figure she names can be delivered? Two weeks ago, the SNP spokesperson on the water industry pledged £1.8 billion of public money for the water industry. Where will that money come from? If the SNP wants to participate in an informed debate about public investment, it must engage with the parameters within which public investment operates.

As a former Glasgow councillor, I know what tenants in Glasgow want. They do not want to look at every brick to see whether it is a PFI or a public sector brick; they want money to be spent on their houses and schools. When investment in schools in Glasgow was debated, the SNP representatives on the council did not oppose taking the PFI route as a way of getting more money into schools.

Let us be realistic and imaginative. Let us talk

about how we get investment. Labour has delivered substantially more public investment than anyone has delivered before, but we should consider other ways of getting money in. If the SNP wants to debate whether it is appropriate to follow the PFI route in the water industry, the housing sector or education, we should debate the issues properly. We should not have an ideological debate that is based on slogans and not on economic reality. I am disappointed that that continues to be all that we hear from the SNP.

11:51

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I will start by dealing with Des McNulty's point about serious politicians and debate and his selective quoting. He chose to give us only a small part of Mr Hawksworth's deliberations. Immediately after the sentence that Des McNulty chose to read out, Mr Hawksworth said:

"At the macroeconomic level, this paper confirms the conclusion in Robinson's paper that there is no good reason why PPP spending could not just as well be financed through additional borrowing without breaching the chancellor's two fiscal rules."

Let us have the whole truth.

I suppose that Allan Wilson voted against this Unison motion:

"Congress notes with concern that Scotland's public services remain grossly under-funded and that the increases fail to remedy, in real terms, the cuts implemented in both the early years of the Labour Government and by the former Conservative Government."

**Allan Wilson rose—**

**Bruce Crawford:** I will let Allan Wilson intervene in a moment, but first I will read another Unison motion, which he perhaps voted against as well.

**Allan Wilson:** Probably.

**Bruce Crawford:** The motion said:

"Congress should call for a review of the PSBR rules and the abandonment of PFI/PPP in favour of alternative routes of funding capital projects."

**Allan Wilson:** What did Unison, which Bruce Crawford is so keen to promote and quote, say about the SNP's proposed public service trusts?

**Bruce Crawford:** Unison also said:

"Congress reaffirms its opposition to the Private Finance Initiative on the grounds that it is fundamentally economically flawed and endangers the democratic foundation of Scottish local government."

There was a cracker of an example of selective evidence from Annabel Goldie; she quoted Andersen Consulting in support of PFI. Andersen Consulting has made more money out of PFI than any other organisation, so it is no wonder that it favours PFI.

I find it bizarre to hear people such as Hugh Henry—I wish that he was in the chamber—the former leader of Renfrewshire Council, defending Government expenditure plans on capital. Only a few months ago, people such as Hugh Henry, and Peter Peacock and Kate MacLean, who are in the chamber, and Frank McAveety, who is goodness knows where, complained long and hard through COSLA about the difficulties that local authorities faced on capital expenditure—on schools, libraries, roads, housing, community centres or adult resource centres. Those are the structures that build the fabric of our society; they are crumbling and are taking our society with them. If the Executive does not believe that that is the reality of Government expenditure, it should look at its figures, which were produced in September 1999.

**Ms Alexander:** Leaving aside the four out of five demands by Fiona Hyslop that are not for this Parliament but for another place, will the member confirm one factual point? Would spending on the public service trusts be on balance sheet or off balance sheet? Three hours into the debate, will Bruce Crawford clarify that tiny detail?

**Bruce Crawford:** The same problem exists with PFI. In 1994-95, the Tories put in £708 billion in local authority capital expenditure. Next year, the Government will put in £392 billion. The reality is there in the Executive's own figures.

Quite rightly, Kate MacLean, Peter Peacock, Hugh Henry and Frank McAveety complained long and hard. However, today we hear that complaining is girning and carping. We will girn and carp all the way through the life of the Parliament, until the Executive changes course. We will girn and carp until Labour is chased out of this place by the Scottish people because it is not meeting their priorities. We will girn and carp until Labour is out of here.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** That brings the open part of the debate to a close. I call John Munro to close for the Liberal Democrats.

11:56

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** Today we have heard many issues debated that contribute to the economic prosperity of Scotland. We have heard various suggestions—for high-quality, affordable houses, modern and better communications, better public services, and an infrastructure that would allow all those things to happen.

We cannot have a buoyant, prosperous, inclusive economy without an effective and interactive physical infrastructure that serves all our people and communities. We have made

significant advances in information technology, electronics and communications—nobody in the chamber would dispute that those are very welcome. However, I fear that support for them has been at the expense of our indigenous industries. I need not tell members about the problems that are being experienced daily in agriculture, about the problems in our fishing industries, or about the downturn in our tourism industry. We seem to forget that tourism is one of the main planks of the Scottish economy—statistics show that it produces £2 billion for the Scottish economy each year.

The Scottish economy will survive and flourish only with an effective and affordable transport system. Without that essential link in our infrastructure, our industries cannot compete on a level playing field with those of our colleagues in Europe. On several occasions, members have heard me mention the expansion and development that has taken place in and around Inverness during the past two decades. That expansion would not have been possible without the massive improvements that have been made to the A9 road.

**Mr Tosh:** Hear, hear.

**Mr Munro:** Much more needs to be done. We still have endless miles of tortuous, winding single-track roads and many substandard bridges that restrict development and exclude much of rural Scotland from the economic revival that we are all striving for.

**Fergus Ewing:** Do John Farquhar Munro and the Liberal Democrat party support David Green, convener of Highland Council, in his call for a capital works project that would allow the council to upgrade the roads to which the member has just referred? Do they agree that about £20 million should be devoted to that?

**Mr Munro:** I am sure that the convener of Highland Council will hear many suggestions for projects to encourage the economic well-being of the Highlands. For my part, I suggest that roads and bridges should be priorities, but other people in Highland Council might have a contrary view. I am sure that the efforts promoted by the convener and the council will be to the advantage of both Highland Council and the people it serves.

I want to mention one statistic. Over the past five years, spending on the strategic roads network in Scotland has diminished by £115 million. In 1995, spending was £208 million, while current spending is £93 million, which is a tremendous drop. The trunk road network lost £84 million over the same period, which is quite a significant reduction.

We have heard about the suggested integrated transport system. My view is that the transport system is the economic link to the economy's well-

being. I fully support the laudable concept of an integrated transport system, but without effective and affordable road, rail, air and ferry services, we will never secure such a system, which is, I suggest, the essential element of Scotland's future wealth and prosperity.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Murray Tosh to wind up for the Conservative party. Mr Tosh, you have up to eight minutes.

12:01

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** I agree with Hugh Henry's comment that it is a pity we had to have this debate. However, on the heels of that comment, he proceeded to make perhaps the most negative and unconstructive speech of the day.

This morning, we have lost an opportunity. One or two constructive points, which we might have developed usefully, were buried in the morass of abuse, girning and moaning from the SNP. Fiona Hyslop set herself up in a rather unfortunate way at the beginning of the debate. She set the tone. Her first litany was to go through all the desperate circumstances that face housing. She said that we do not build council houses any more, but she did not mention housing association houses. She drew in the 75 per cent clawback rule, but did not bother to mention that when that rule was introduced, borrowing consents were extended to councils to compensate for that rule, to a large degree.

Fiona Hyslop was correct to point out that, in the past few years, the resources available to local authorities for housing have diminished substantially. That is a great disappointment and a great pity and it must be addressed, but she made it clear that stock transfer is not one of the ways in which she would address that problem. I know that, when pressed, the SNP is willing to accept some stock transfers in principle and to say that the party approves of stock transfer in different ways, but when the rhetoric is high and the juices are flowing, the SNP simply opposes stock transfer. Stock transfer is a "boo" expression and the SNP use the phrase "discredited PFI" in the same way, as if that were its official title. Andrew Wilson may say, "We would use PFI in certain circumstances," but we have yet to discover any circumstances in which he would consider using it.

Some good points have been made. Fiona Hyslop talked about using arm's-length companies to allow local authorities to invest more. Such an approach is allowed under existing Treasury rules, so although it was not all that much of a move forward in terms of SNP strategy, in terms of intellectual commitment from the SNP it was welcome.

Fiona Hyslop also suggested, as did Mr Raffan, that the Parliament should consider how we might allow local authorities to borrow more without breaching Treasury rules. I agree that we should consider that, although it would be better to do so through a committee approach rather than through a confrontational and rhetorical debate.

Mike Watson was correct to say that the Parliament, through our committees, should examine the proposals for public sector trusts. It may be that all the financial advice on and assessment of public sector trusts is absolutely right and that they are a total non-starter. I am happy to accept that we should consider them, however, because on the Conservative benches there is an ideological commitment to getting things done. We are quite happy to consider a variety of approaches.

We have seen a lot of fantasy politics and posturing this morning. One member—Johann Lamont, I think—said that absolutely nothing had been done under the Tories during the past 18 years. We know that no Labour MSPs went to Ayr for the by-election; if Johann Lamont had gone, she could have driven down the new motorway, which the Tories built, and passed the new sewage works, which was built when the Tories were in power, or the new primary schools in Troon. She might even have taken a slight detour into Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, to visit the new Ayr hospital, which was built in the late 1980s.

The posturing has not come only from SNP members; there has been posturing and self-congratulation from Labour members as well. The simple fact of the matter is that we need to invest more and find more efficient and effective ways of procuring improvements in all public services.

**Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** Mr Tosh said that all financial advice is against the concept of public service trusts. I take it that he has heard of Bill McCall and would concede that Bill McCall, by general repute, is among the top half dozen investment bankers in the city of Edinburgh. Has he read Bill McCall's ringing endorsement of the concept of public service trusts?

**Mr Tosh:** I made it clear that those issues are worth considering. If I took the view that absolutely everybody who had ever looked at the idea was totally damning, I would probably not be prepared to spend any time discussing it. Let us look at the arguments. Although, as was recently said by Labour members, many of these matters are not devolved, one of the roles of this Parliament is to examine reserved issues and fight Scotland's corner.

I started by saying that we welcome some of the

constructive things SNP members said during the hour and a half on aggregate for which we heard them ranting against the present and previous Governments and promising all sorts of benefits without any pain, cost or intellectual input. I am happy to debate their proposals. It is just a pity that Fiona Hyslop waited until the final minute of her speech to introduce the SNP's proposals.

Why should we reject PFI? Andrew Wilson said that he would accept it in some circumstances, but Fiona Hyslop referred to it as the discredited PFI and Fergus Ewing is utterly hostile to it. The National Audit Office found that the M74, which Brian Adam mentioned, was procured at a saving of £17 million. It might have been only £13 million, or there might not have been any net financial benefit, but the National Audit Office found that £17 million was saved.

The Audit Committee—bringing to bear its greater incisiveness, expertise, authority and all the string pulling of Bruce Crawford behind the scenes—attempted to pull the National Audit Office report apart, but could not do so. The civil servants saw Brian Adam off the field in the exchanges that took place. The report found that the M74 was procured at good value for money and economically. It is an old PFI. PFI has been subject to refinement, redevelopment and improvement by the work of the National Audit Office, and it has been carried forward by the current Government.

**Brian Adam:** Notwithstanding Mr Tosh's rhetoric, the National Audit Office suggested that the figure of £17 million was not substantiated at all. It was produced by the Scottish Office. The National Audit Office suggested that it was inaccurate and that, at best, there may have been a marginal saving.

**Mr Tosh:** "At best" and "marginal" are good enough for me. If that project had been done in the traditional way, we would have had to account for the whole cost in the years when it was built, and it would not have been built. The same is true of every hospital, every road and every sewage treatment works that has been built, is being built or will be built under PFI.

Until the SNP has validated and established the creativity of its alternative, its formula is a recipe for cancelling the investment programme altogether. Well, "altogether" may be an exaggeration, but about 50 per cent of the investment programme would be cancelled—a very large slice indeed. The SNP's approach is driven by ideology.

**Fergus Ewing:** So it should be.

**Mr Tosh:** Now it all comes out. In her introductory speech, Wendy Alexander made a good analysis of the benefits of PFI. Yes, it is

marginally more expensive, Fergus, to finance a project by PFI, but the savings on the construction and management, and on maintenance in the subsequent years, overwhelmingly cancel out the higher financial costs, which are themselves diminishing year by year as we develop expertise—bluntly, as we get better at PFI and PPP.

**Fergus Ewing** rose—

**Mr Tosh:** If the SNP adopted an approach that talked about what we can do for Scotland and looked at input and output and what we can deliver for people, it could look flexibly at what is happening and would be able to find some merit in it. The trouble is, as we have just heard, an ideological approach is being taken.

What is my ideological approach? I have an ideological approach as well—if I could find my notes. [*Laughter.*] We should improve our housing stock. Stock transfer to create tenant control and to democratise management is an excellent way to do that. My ideology says that we should build roads. Our approach is to accept PPP and to argue within the debate about the allocation of resources that money should be given for that. Our approach is to build hospitals and schools, to support councils that build schools and roads, and to use the PFI and PPP instruments that make that possible. That should be the ideological commitment: to see what is necessary and to deliver it, and not to care whether we have ideological bricks and politically correct mortar, and not to validate the ranting and girning and utterly unconstructive approach that Mr Crawford took, except when he wanted to deliver the output of his own council headquarters.

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

**Mr Tosh:** Presiding Officer, I cannot remember how many minutes you said I had.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are considerably over them. Please close.

**Mr Tosh:** I accept the rebuke.

I will conclude on this point. If we are serious about this Parliament, best value, service delivery and new politics, let us look at all the options to develop facilities, investment and progress. Rather than kid ourselves that 30 or 40 people sitting here for one and a half days each week insulting each other, ignoring each other's arguments, skimming over the inconsistencies in past speeches and trotting out what was said by people two or three years ago—by the way, I welcome Allan Wilson's Damascene conversion, and so should the SNP—let us get on with the real work of improving Scotland by whatever means we can. I second Miss Goldie's amendment.



12:13

**The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock):** My volume control is better tuned than is Murray Tosh's and I will try to keep the temperature down, although I may not fully achieve that.

The SNP's motion is curious and warrants the closest examination. As is usual, it starts from a negative disposition:

"to enable Scotland to become a dynamic . . . country".

Once again we see the SNP talking down Scotland and making clear that it does not believe Scotland is a dynamic nation. What does that say to our entrepreneurs who are leading the world with so many high-tech developments? What does that say to our doctors and engineers who still lead the world in so many ways? What does that say to our younger generation who are achieving more and more through academic qualifications and academic standards and are competing with the best in Europe? The motion says nothing about them, and it typifies the SNP's approach. To see some political success, the SNP needs to invent a crisis and then portray Scotland as being in it. It talks down the people of Scotland and their entrepreneurial achievements.

The motion then talks about Scotland becoming a prosperous country, as if it were not already a prosperous country in many respects. Of course there is much more for us to do on that front, but that part of the motion goes to the heart of a previous SNP claim—and contradicts it. For many years, the SNP has been telling the Scottish people that Scotland is so prosperous that it is being held back by subsidising the rest of the United Kingdom. At last, today, we see the SNP revealing the truth. It does not even believe its own rhetoric on that point. That may be why we do not hear the arguments for independence that we once did from Alex Salmond, John Swinney and many others in the SNP.

The motion reveals even more. The SNP believes that all we need to do to make Scotland a dynamic society is to increase spending on housing, communications and learning environments. Those are important issues—I do not want to diminish their importance—and it is why the Government is investing more in them. We are using public finance to lever out private finance to make the investments that are necessary if we are to move forward.

Astonishingly, in trying to create its dynamic and prosperous Scottish society, the SNP does not mention what happens in our schools. It does not mention the information and communications technology skills that we need for the future. It does not mention that the health of the people of Scotland is a precondition for success. It does not

mention the health of the environment—one of the building blocks of Scotland's success. It does not mention the arts or creativity. It does not mention enterprise and how we will instil that in the people of Scotland. It does not mention social inclusion. None of those issues is mentioned in the motion, but they are part of the further development of an already dynamic society.

**Fiona McLeod** *rose*—

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)** *rose*—

**Peter Peacock:** Instead, we hear the usual litany of grumbles and moans. The SNP is constantly negative—it never looks to what we can do with the powers of the Scottish Parliament and to how we might do things better. It is constantly whining, whingeing, moaning and talking Scotland down. It constantly seeks and accentuates what is negative. It holds on to the past and opposes all change.

**Fiona McLeod:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Peter Peacock:** The SNP does everything that will oppose the creation of a dynamic and prosperous society in Scotland.

A successful, sustainable, dynamic and prosperous society will not scrap the national grid for learning. It will enthusiastically embrace change and talk confidently about its achievements and prospects. It will believe in and trust its own people and their enterprises.

**Fergus Ewing:** On a point of order.

**Peter Peacock:** Such a society will have a total view of the needs of its citizens and it will be outward looking in disposition. All—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Peacock, I must interrupt you—there is a point of order.

Mr Ewing, I hope that this is a genuine point of order.

**Fergus Ewing:** Is it in accordance with the standing orders for a member not to respond in any way to members who are seeking to intervene? Is not it a contravention of the standing orders simply to ignore those who would intervene?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, Mr Ewing. I think you know that that is not in contravention of the standing orders. Please continue, Mr Peacock. I am sorry about the interruption.

**Peter Peacock:** I was about to give way once I had finished that little passage. I had planned to say that what the SNP—

**Mrs Ewing** *rose*—

**Peter Peacock:** Will Mrs Ewing wait for a

moment?

I was about to say that what the SNP proposes is the antithesis of what is needed to create a dynamic and prosperous Scotland. Its approach to politics is to cast things in a negative light, not in a positive light. That is why the SNP stands for the opposite of what its motion seeks to create.

**Mrs Ewing:** Now that the minister has stopped mumbling down Scotland's prospects, let me say that he clearly does not trust the people of Scotland to run their own economy. When he attends the Highlands and Islands Convention on Monday—from which elected members in the chamber are excluded—what will he take with him from the Executive? Will he take the outlines of capital programmes for the local economy? Will he offer money or will he offer only platitudes?

**Peter Peacock:** I will attend that convention in a positive frame of mind, as will other members of the Executive and—I am sure—other participants from local authorities and enterprise companies. We will examine the ways in which we can take forward positively the interests of the Highlands and Islands; the participants will join together to do that. It will be done in a spirit of partnership and co-operation. We will look for innovation and for the sort of things that we want to encourage. I will not go there moaning. I will not go there whining. I will not go there whingeing. I will not go there with a negative disposition, looking for things to carp about and to criticise.

The Highlands and Islands of today are comparatively successful because people there have an outward-looking perspective and they talk confidently about their prospects. They recognise progress and they recognise where progress must still be made. They will challenge us about what new things must be done.

If we examine the motion more closely, it is even more revealing. It reveals the true depth of the crisis of financial incompetence in the ranks of the SNP. The SNP is looking to the Executive to increase the scope and powers of Parliament to meet its spending aspirations. It now admits that the penny for Scotland—the SNP's flexible friend—which has been stretched to accommodate every spending commitment known to mankind, is not enough. Not only is that penny not enough, the motion reveals that the Parliament's power to vary tax by 3p would not be enough. The SNP wants more—more of the people's money and more power to fleece Scotland's taxpayers.

**Fiona Hyslop:** In my introductory speech, I set out five proposals. Some of them could be done using devolved powers and some require co-operation with Westminster. Which of those five positive and constructive ideas will the minister

accept?

I understand from Murray Tosh that the Conservatives are interested in at least two and a half of them. Among the Labour back benchers there are members who recognise that the ideas are positive and constructive.

**Peter Peacock:** What characterised Fiona Hyslop's speech was the 15 minutes leading up to the last minute. They were all about moaning, girning, carping, griping and groaning. The last minute of her speech was put in only to ensure that the SNP could issue a press release that tried to give the impression that it is taking a positive approach to Scotland's affairs—but anybody who attended the Parliament during the speech saw what the SNP is about.

The SNP wants this Parliament to gain more powers so that it can take more Scottish taxpayers' money to pay for its political correctness; more powers so that it can fund its financial plans that—as other members have said—are in a fantasy world. The SNP's plans are in the old world of economics.

**Mr Salmond:** On a point of order. Is it the convention in the standing orders for a member who is summing up a debate—and therefore meant to be summing up what has been said in a debate—to read out a speech that was obviously written before the debate started?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Nothing in the standing orders covers that point, Mr Salmond.

**Peter Peacock:** My speech was not entirely pre-written, but I had a fair idea of what was going to be said, because we have heard it all before.

The SNP seeks undefined new powers from this Parliament for an uncoded programme.

**Brian Adam:** Given Peter Peacock's long response to Fiona Hyslop's question, will he tell us which of the five positive proposals from the SNP he is prepared to accept?

**Peter Peacock:** I have already dealt with that. The only reason we heard those five ideas was so that the SNP could construct a press release. They had nothing to do with today's debate.

Today's debate is about considering an uncoded SNP programme that is unrealistic, unachievable, unsustainable and unprincipled. It is the unacceptable face of Opposition politics. Contrast that with the events of Tuesday of this week. In the context of a well-managed UK economy, more money is coming to Scotland than the SNP's penny for Scotland would have raised in tax yield. That has been delivered at the same time as cuts in income tax and additions to our spending on transport, education, health and the environment.

We are starting the long road back from the disastrous Conservative days of cuts in capital spending. We are continuing, unencumbered by dogma, to improve our infrastructure. We are prepared to use public funding to lever out the PFI investment that is required. I invite Fergus Ewing and his SNP colleagues to go to Ardnamurchan and tell the people there, who are getting a new secondary school, that the SNP wants that school to be stopped because it is ideologically not acceptable. Go to the people in Tomatin who are also getting a school—and to the people in Glenurquhart—and tell them the same thing. Tell them that they cannot have new schools, new roads and new hospitals because the SNP believes that PFI is not ideologically or politically correct. Tell them that the only way in which they will get those things is to drag them out of the UK and increase their taxes—although the truth is that they can stay in the UK and get them today while their taxes are reduced and there is still public investment because the economy is being well managed.

I look forward to hearing Lloyd Quinan's summing up. I challenge him to explain the contradictions in the motion. How does scrapping the national grid for learning square with creating a dynamic society? I challenge him to speak for 10 or 15 minutes without belittling Scotland once and without talking Scotland down, moaning, whingeing or whining.

The Executive's amendment finds the right balance. I commend it to members.

12:24

**Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The extraordinary Mr Peacock will be a hard act to follow. He is the perfect example of the newest of new Labour. How long has he had his membership card?

I will start with Wendy Alexander, as this speech is about summing up what has been—in some ways—an interesting debate. I was interested to hear that there are some members in other parties who understand that debate is about the exchange and examination of ideas rather than taking entrenched positions. Hence the SNP's giving the chamber five positive ideas. I must have left the room, as I did not recognise what Peter Peacock said in his summation—I did not hear the level of carping and whining to which he referred.

**Mr Tosh:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Quinan:** Not at the moment, Murray, but later, gladly.

I begin with the Minister for Communities. For months now, we have heard the proselytising of what are effectively Tory concepts and ideology.

The Government has at the same time attacked 18 years of Tory government and failed to take responsibility for having had more than 900 days to address the problems of the United Kingdom and Scotland. That is a reality.

No longer can the Government hide behind blaming a previous Administration—unless it would like to consider the record of the Labour Government prior to this one, which managed successfully to halve manufacturing in Scotland between 1974 and 1979 and to double unemployment in the same period. If the Government wants to talk history, let us talk about the history of the Labour party in government.

Moving to Annabel Goldie: at last we have the honesty of the meeting of minds. Annabel accepts nearly every concept—as the Labour party does—for the funding of the public sector. I re-emphasise what we all know and what the people of Ayr clearly understood: they could vote for the real Tory or they could vote for the fake Tory. They voted for the real Tory.

Mr Raffan, yet again—

**Johann Lamont:** I am interested to know where, in the 18 years of Tory government, there is evidence of a Tory commitment to community empowerment and social inclusion, which are at the very heart of our education and housing policy. As I said earlier, any transfer of housing has at its heart a commitment to community empowerment. I do not see that in the Tories' policies during those 18 years.

**Mr Quinan:** I thank Johann Lamont for that. It is not my job to support Tory ideology—I leave that to her front bench.

Mr Raffan, with his negative, single transferable speech, gave us the 13 SNP pledges on spending—

**Mr Raffan:** It is more than that now. *[Laughter.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Mr Quinan:** I point out to Mr Raffan that it was not 13 to begin with; he should get a decent researcher because he is clearly not getting value for money.

Hugh Henry is guaranteed to leap to his feet and suggest that the SNP supports independence. That is a complete surprise to the many people who vote for the Scottish National party and those of us who carry a card that says that we believe in an independent Scotland. He cannot understand that a political party can have an ideology and stick to it, unlike the Labour party over the past 10 to 15 years, which abandoned the miners, the steelworkers and clause 4.

We still have a core belief that the best way forward for the people of this country is an

independent Scotland.

**The Deputy Minister for Local Government (Mr Frank McAveety):** Will the member give way?

**Mr Quinan:** No thank you, Mr McAveety.

**Mr Raffan:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Quinan:** No thank you, Mr Raffan.

**Mr Raffan:** I get a mention but he does not give way.

**Mr Quinan:** So Mr Raffan was listening, for a change.

The noble Lord Watson started extremely well. Unfortunately, in a desperate need to show loyalty in the control freakery of new Labour, he fell badly at the last. Nick Johnston: another single transferable speech. We get to find out what Nick did on his holidays and what Nick did in business in previous years.

**Ms Alexander:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Quinan:** No thank you.

**Ms Alexander:** Give us one positive example, on or off the balance sheet.

**Mr Quinan:** We have already explained that. Labour has PFI. We would be in exactly the same position on the balance sheet.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Mr Quinan must decide whether he is giving way. We cannot have a shouting match.

**Mr Quinan:** I know—thank you.

Our suggestions for borrowing, as we have stated very clearly, were all within the Maastricht criteria of 40 per cent. That answers the minister's question.

**Ms Alexander** *indicated disagreement.*

**Mr Quinan:** If she does not accept the answer, that is fine.

**Nick Johnston:** Does Mr Quinan understand what a balance sheet is?

**Mr Quinan:** I can reassure the member that, having worked in industry, I do.

Let us reconsider the five very reasonable suggestions made by Fiona Hyslop. The Tories accepted two and half of them and the back-bench members of the Executive supported three. First, we must open up the £60 billion to which Gordon Brown has access. The budget gave us something, but not enough. The infrastructure of the country requires investment. Why not invest instead of letting the money simply pile up? The Executive would have to talk to Westminster, making the best use of devolved government. The devolved Government must go to central

Government to negotiate. There should not be a problem, as the Executive would be talking to members of the same party.

Secondly, we should increase local authorities' freedom to borrow the money they need. As we have said, that could happen within the Maastricht criteria. It could be done partly from Holyrood, but it would require negotiation with Westminster. Is there a huge problem in the devolution settlement about negotiation with Westminster? I think not.

Thirdly, the Executive should relax the 75 per cent clawback rule, therefore freeing up a further £165 million for public housing. We can do that and I ask the Executive to consider it.

Fourthly, the Executive should abolish the consent for local authority borrowing required under section 94 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, because it makes no sense. That would free up resources and is an action that can be undertaken by the Scottish Parliament.

Most important, in light of today's debate—and in reference to what Johann Lamont, Murray Tosh and even Keith Raffan said—would it not be sensible to initiate a feasibility study into the concept of public service trusts to replace the PFI schemes that have been discredited in most people's eyes?

**Mr Raffan:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Tosh:** I put that back to the SNP. If the Conservatives are willing to consider the SNP's proposals, why will the SNP not respond to the audit investigation of PFI-PPP schemes? Why will the SNP not accept that that is an appropriate vehicle and is the core of the considerable amount of investment that has taken place over the past few years?

**Mr Quinan:** Mr Tosh said that "at best" and "marginal" is good enough for the Conservatives. I accept that that is the Conservative position, but it is not good enough for the SNP. That is why we want a proper examination. If Mr Tosh can convince me that marginal is worth while, I will consider it.

**Mr Tosh:** I put it to Mr Quinan that both the National Audit Office and the Parliament's inquiry of an early PFI project identified several ways in which the scheme could have been delivered more economically. They found that improvements had been built into subsequent PFI and PPP schemes and that there is scope for delivering substantial economies in every investment project currently supported by PPP.

**Mr Quinan:** That is Murray Tosh's belief, but it is not the belief of the SNP or the Institute for Public Policy Research. I accept that position, although I hope that it will change eventually. The Tory concept of PFI and the Labour concept of PPP are

different things. Every contract is different. We must examine all those things. Surely that is the sensible way in which to proceed.

I give way to Mr Raffan.

**Mr Raffan:** Oh. I was going to raise a point concerning the fact that SNP economic policy is so heavily based on the price of a barrel of oil. A year ago, oil fetched \$11 a barrel, but is now worth \$30 a barrel. Mr Wilson is always quoting Chantrey Vellacott DFK. Does Mr Quinan agree with Mr Wilson and Chantrey Vellacott DFK that if the price of oil fell below \$11 dollars per barrel, income tax would have to go through the roof? The SNP is basing its economic policy on the price of oil, which is highly volatile. That is an extremely irresponsible policy.

**Mr Quinan:** I will clear something up for Mr Raffan. The debate today takes place in the context of devolution, and our suggestions are made in the context of devolution. It is obvious to anyone that the Scottish National party stands for independence. That does not mean that every debate that we have in this chamber is predicated on independence—as has been proved by the five pledges that we have today asked the Executive to make. That is very straightforward; there is no need for us to discuss the varying price of oil.

**Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)** *rose—*

**Mr Davidson** *rose—*

**Mr Quinan:** I am sorry, I have to sum up.

**The Presiding Officer:** He is in his last minute, and we are running over time.

**Mr Quinan:** Some extremely interesting ideas have been thrown up today. There are clearly tensions within all parties about the manner in which we finance the public sector and the infrastructure of this country. I suggest that we require an immediate and proper investigation into PFI, PPP and the public service trusts. We should then revisit this debate so that we can deliver for the people of Scotland high quality at a prudent cost. I support the motion.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate; the votes will take place during decision time at 5 o'clock.

## Business Motion

### **The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):**

Before everyone rushes out of the chamber, I call Iain Smith to move motion S1M-677, which is the business motion set out on page 3 of the business bulletin.

**The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Iain Smith):** I wish to move the motion as set out in the bulletin with the small amendment that the members' business on Wednesday 29 March be swapped with the members' business on Thursday 30 March. That change has the agreement of the two members concerned. I hope that the Parliament will also agree.

I draw members' attention to the likelihood that on Wednesday 29 March, the stage 3 consideration of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill will require that the meeting be extended.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 29 March 2000

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection - Reverend Dr Kevin Franz, Action of Churches Together in Scotland
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<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion to include timetabling of proceedings of Stage 3 of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill
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<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill
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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-650 George Lyon: National Park Status for Argyll Forest Park
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Thursday 30 March 2000

9.30 am	Scottish Socialist Party Debate on a Scottish Service Tax
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11.00 am	Scottish Green Party Debate on Housing Energy Efficiency
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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 Public Appointments
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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-488 Cathy Jamieson: Standing Commission on Health and Safety at Work in Scotland
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Wednesday 5 April 2000

2.30 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement  
*followed by* SPCB Debate on the Holyrood Project  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 6 April 2000

9.30 am Non-Executive Business - Scottish National Party  
*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

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S1M-677, as amended verbally by Mr Smith, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

12:37

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Before we begin question time, I want to explain that we had a little difficulty last week because some members who had requested to ask supplementaries then attempted to cancel their request by pressing their button at the end of the question. I remind members that requests to speak are cancelled centrally. If members try to do it, their name will come up at the top of the list of speakers for the next question. That is why members were called wrongly last week. Once you have requested a supplementary, please leave the console alone if you are not called. The request will be cancelled by the clerks.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

**The Presiding Officer:** We begin question time. Question 1 has been withdrawn.

#### Casino Opening Hours

**2. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** Before I ask the question, I declare an interest in the matter, as I am a member of the union that represents the staff concerned.

To ask the Scottish Executive what consultation was undertaken in relation to the extension of casino opening hours in Scotland and whether that consultation included the attitudes of staff to the change. (S1O-1441)

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Mr Jim Wallace.

I am sorry, but Mr Wallace appears not to be here. [*Laughter.*] Order. We will move to question 3 and come back to question 2 if Mr Wallace turns up.

#### Scottish Bus Group (Pension Fund)

**3. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions have taken place with Her Majesty's Treasury regarding the pension fund of former employees of the Scottish Bus Group. (S1O-1403)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** Discussions with HM Treasury have focused on procedural matters relating to the wind-up of the Scottish Transport Group.

**Dennis Canavan:** Is the minister aware that I wrote to her about the matter on 15 September last year, again on 22 October and again on 7

December? More than six months later, I still have not received an acknowledgement or a reply. When I phoned her office on 29 February, I was told that the matter was under consideration by the UK Treasury. I therefore wrote to Gordon Brown, only to be told that the matter is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. Will the Executive and the UK Government stop passing the buck?

Bearing in mind that, in a similar case, the High Court in England found in favour of the former employees of the National Bus Group, will the minister take urgent action to ensure that the surplus of more than £100 million in the Scottish Bus Group Ltd pension fund is handed over to the former employees of Scottish Bus Group, instead of being used to fill the Treasury coffers?

**Sarah Boyack:** On each occasion, Mr Canavan should have had a letter from my office saying that the matter was being dealt with. A number of members have asked me the same question. Until the issue is resolved, I cannot give him a letter setting out the formal resolution.

The matter is on my desk and we are attempting to deal with it. It has been a long, complex and extremely frustrating process for all the members who have local people who have written to them about the issue. In the region of 8,000 pensioners and 4,000 deferred pensioners are involved in the two schemes. I am extremely concerned to ensure that we can resolve the situation, and we are dealing with the matter with the utmost urgency.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will come back to question 2 for the late Mr Wallace. [MEMBERS: "Oh."] Will the member please repeat the question?

### Casino Opening Hours

**2. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what consultation was undertaken in relation to the extension of casino opening hours in Scotland and whether that consultation included the attitudes of staff to the change. (S10-1441)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** First, I apologise, Sir David, to you and to the Parliament. I am afraid that the opening hours caught me out. [Laughter.]

Widespread consultation was undertaken in regard to the proposal to extend casino hours, and representations were received as to the attitudes of staff to change.

**Pauline McNeill:** Is the minister aware that the extension of opening hours may have a detrimental impact on staff working in casinos, who already work long hours? One major employer has already written into the contract of employment that shifts will be dictated by business

requirements. There is a fear among workers in the industry that the extension will lead to 24-hour opening.

**Mr Wallace:** I am aware that a number of parties made representations, including the GMB. Ministers have not yet received the outcome of the consultation. I assure Ms McNeill that staff concerns will be given particular attention when I get a report from officials on the outcome of the consultation exercise.

### Rural Housing

**4. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it intends to take to improve the number and quality of community houses for rent in rural areas. (S10-1433)

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander):** Next year, the Scottish Homes development programme for rural Scotland will increase for the third successive year, to £45 million. That is an increase of more than 10 per cent on this year's figure, and will allow Scottish Homes to approve more than 1,200 homes for social rent.

A further £36 million will be made available through new housing partnership funding. Over the next three years, that will provide a further 1,500 new and improved homes, most of which will be for social rent.

Finally, we have launched a rural partnership for change in Highland, which will pilot a new approach to tackling the difficulties faced by pressured rural areas.

**Dr Murray:** As far as the pilot project in the Highlands is concerned, what advice would the minister give to the housing agencies in Dumfries and Galloway—an area which, like the Highlands, contains a number of pressured rural communities and a shortage of community-rented housing—so that Dumfries and Galloway may also access the extra available funding to address housing problems in its rural areas?

**Ms Alexander:** Because of Dumfries and Galloway's particular needs, it will receive £4 million next year, an increase of 33 per cent on last year, when it received £3 million. That should allow the approval of 86 new homes, and the pilot in Highland will be rolled out to other rural areas from next year.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** Can the minister confirm that, on 13 January, in the housing debate, she said that, if rural Scotland were to get the lion's share of the 6,000 new homes funded by the Scottish Homes development, there would be no difficulty in extending the right to buy to housing associations in rural areas? As the 1,200 homes that she has

announced is not the lion's share of 6,000, and given that she has already climbed down on the issue of right to buy in rural areas, will she consider now abandoning that whole policy?

**Ms Alexander:** No. I am happy to confirm that the number of units to be built in rural Scotland will increase by 89 per cent from the number built two years ago. We are increasing considerably the number of houses in rural areas while also building in urban Scotland.

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Will the minister accept that the Executive's current proposals to extend the right to buy could severely curtail the availability of much-needed social housing for rent in rural areas such as Deeside, in my constituency? Will she agree to examine the prospect of allowing communities with less than a certain level—whatever that level would be—of such housing to be excluded from the proposed extension of the right to buy?

**Ms Alexander:** As we have often discussed in this chamber, the key problem in rural Scotland is the absolute shortage of houses, either for rent or for purchase. The right to buy, therefore, is not really a particularly significant aspect of that problem. However, we have recognised that the existing exemption for some pressured rural areas is not effective, and we have asked Highland Council to examine what form a replacement exemption power would take.

#### **Chancellor of the Exchequer (Budget)**

**5. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what impact it expects the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget to have on the economy of the Highlands and Islands. (S10-1409)

**The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison):** The chancellor made a number of budget announcements that will benefit greatly the economy of the Highlands and Islands.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Well summarised.

**Fergus Ewing:** The minister, I notice, did not mention the chancellor's rise in fuel duty, his fourth. Can the minister name any one country in the world that has a higher level of fuel duty on petrol and diesel than Scotland?

**Mr Morrison:** Once again, the tone and content of Mr Ewing's supplementary could be adequately summed up using a Gaelic expression, but I am a bit loth to use it because I suspect that, on hearing the translation, Mr Ewing would ask me to leave the chamber. *[Laughter.]*

**Members:** Go on.

**Fergus Ewing:** Try me.

**Mr Morrison:** Considerable sums of money are being invested right across the Highlands and Islands for transport. I can cite the increase of up to £15 million in the Caledonian MacBrayne subsidy and the increase in the subsidy to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd, which has now been raised to £13 million. Millions of pounds are being spent on transport initiatives right across the Highlands and Islands.

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** Name a country.

**Mr Morrison:** That is the reality, and I wish that my friend Fergus Ewing would appreciate what is being done, step by step, right across the Highlands and Islands.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we go any further, can we please have less shouting from the SNP side of the chamber during answers.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Will the minister join me in welcoming the increased scope for public spending in the Highlands and Islands? Will he also agree that that is good news for the Scottish land fund and for land reform? Will he further agree that it is an absolute disgrace that John MacLeod has put the Cuillins up for sale at a price of £10 million? Does he agree with the statement issued by Calum MacDonald earlier today?

**Mr Morrison:** I agree that the Scottish land fund has been excellent and is empowering communities across the Highlands and Islands. I agree with Calum MacDonald, who said that MacLeod should hang his head in shame for trying to exploit what God gave to the people of Skye.

The episode raises a number of issues. John MacLeod of MacLeod did not buy the estate; he got it because he is the clan chief. I hope, for the sake of the people of Skye and Scotland, that MacLeod of MacLeod will come to a solution that will be sympathetic to his kinsmen in Skye.

Incidentally, the matter raises the wider issue of how some clan chiefs became private landowners. I hope that this episode can shed light on that great mystery.

**The Presiding Officer:** All very interesting, but I could not see what it had to do with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget.

#### **Air Routes (Islay, Campbeltown and Tiree)**

**6. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive when an announcement will be made on a new operator for the Islay, Campbeltown and Tiree air routes. (S10-1413)



**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** An announcement was made on 21 March 2000 that the Scottish Executive's contracts for the provision of air services between Glasgow, Campbeltown and Tiree and from Glasgow to Barra have been awarded to Loganair for three years from April 2000 until March 2003. The Glasgow-Islay air service is operated on a commercial basis and does not form part of these contracts.

**George Lyon:** I inform the minister of the widespread concern in the Tiree community about the use of the Twin Otter aircraft for the service. There is real concern about the ability of that aircraft to serve the needs of the community. I ask that the minister monitor closely the service provision for Barra, Campbeltown and Tiree and take action if Loganair fails to deliver what the local community expects: a reliable and efficient air service to Glasgow airport.

**Sarah Boyack:** Two pieces of news will give great comfort to George Lyon's constituents in Tiree. There will be an additional Twin Otter aircraft on the Barra, Campbeltown and Tiree service, which will lead to much greater reliability and effectiveness. Also, the Barra flight will no longer be linked to the Tiree flight, which will mean that passengers to Tiree will no longer be held up by the vagaries of the tidal system at Barra.

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Will the minister comment on the steps taken to consult communities on this matter? Does she believe that aspects of that consultation might be relevant to the provision of public transport services elsewhere in Scotland?

**Sarah Boyack:** On this occasion, we consulted the relevant local authorities: Argyll and Bute Council and the Western Isles Council. We also consulted the relevant enterprise companies: Argyll and the Islands Enterprise and Western Isles Enterprise.

In the consultation, we were looking for ways in which the service could be improved. Our consultation process is a model one and I hope that we can consider the responses when we discuss the possibility of a Highlands and Islands transport authority.

### **Enterprise (Public Funding)**

**7. Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are taken by the enterprise agencies and local enterprise councils to ensure that public funding is not given to companies whose financial position is unsustainable. (S10-1422)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** In considering proposals for providing financial assistance to

companies, local enterprise companies are required to satisfy themselves that such assistance is justified in terms of financial, economic and environmental benefits. Appraisals should include, where appropriate, an assessment of the commercial viability of the company concerned and quantification of the risks and uncertainties associated with providing financial assistance.

**Alex Fergusson:** I draw the minister's attention to the case of Galscott Foods, a seafood processing company in Stranraer. Despite receiving start-up funding of £300,000 only 18 months ago and a loan of £50,000 last December, it has now gone into liquidation. Despite a specific requirement in Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise's loan funding conditions that all contractors must be timeously paid, several small local firms are owed significant sums of money as a direct result of public funding.

Will the minister agree—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order, Mr Fergusson. There is a limit to the length of questions.

**Alex Fergusson:** I had to give the background, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** I want the foreground, not the background.

**Alex Fergusson:** I have reached the foreground, Presiding Officer.

Will the minister agree to review the procedures that local enterprise companies undertake when assessing the financial viability of companies that are applying for funding, as part of his review of Scottish Enterprise, to ensure that they are considerably more robust than they were in this case?

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr McLeish, please try to give an answer that is shorter than that question.

**Henry McLeish:** I will try to give a shorter answer, but this is a case that it is worth while to consider in the chamber, as important issues are raised in relation to this particular set of circumstances. I would not like Alex Fergusson to generalise from a specific case that involves a difficult set of circumstances.

When the situation arose and we found out that the creditors were not being properly dealt with, in early January, on 8 February, on 29 February and on 10 March, letters were sent from Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise to the company—without a great deal of response. Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise is working closely with the liquidator to try to salvage something from the situation. The Scottish Executive offered regional selective assistance, and fisheries guidance cash was

offered, but that assistance was not taken up.

We are not talking only about a relatively small amount of money, but about the principle that, when we are dealing with companies, we expect them to give us every piece of information that is available. If we discuss with the liquidator the problems of that case and solve it, I will be quite happy to consider the general issues that the case raises, to ensure that every pound of public finance that is given is given against the best and most secure background to ensure that the money is protected and that the interests of creditors and others who are involved are secured as well.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I share Mr Fergusson's concern that companies that are not financially viable should not be given public support. However, following the announcement today of the potential loss of 628 jobs at Daks-Simpson's factories at Larkhall and Polbeth, and following the withdrawal of contracts by Marks and Spencer—given the high level of skill and dedication of those work forces, and given that the company is financially viable—will the minister indicate what steps the Executive has taken, and will take, to assist the company in winning new contracts and providing support to the work force that is affected? Furthermore, will he undertake to meet me and my colleague Bristow Muldoon—the constituency MSPs—and to visit the factories in the near future?

**Henry McLeish:** I am happy to accept the suggestion of meetings and visits. However, this situation was created by the withdrawal of the order from Marks and Spencer. We visited Marks and Spencer last year, and we visited Daks-Simpson. Since then, the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive have been working closely with that company.

It is interesting—and the Parliament should take note—that, as a result of the efforts of Daks-Simpson, the company has been able to secure work without which an additional 200 people would have been made redundant. The company has given statutory notice to the department. We hope to work continuously with it so that this provisional figure for redundancies will not be realised.

The company is trying its best, as are we, and I sincerely hope that, by working with all those who are concerned, we can achieve a more positive outcome than was envisaged in October when Marks and Spencer withdrew contracts. It is a sad situation, and we are doing our best to improve it.

#### **European Union Intergovernmental Conference**

**8. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it made at the recent European Union

intergovernmental conference, at both ministerial and advisory levels. (S1O-1404)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Executive has and will continue to be fully involved in the UK preparations for the forthcoming intergovernmental conference.

**Alex Neil:** I do not know what that means, as, this weekend, no minister from the Scottish Executive will be attending the e-commerce summit in Lisbon. Has the Scottish Executive had any input to the discussion document "The E-Commerce Initiative", which was published by the European Commission? Does the minister agree with the European Parliament's rapporteur, who reckons that the e-commerce document that was produced by the Commission does not focus sufficiently on the issues of social cohesion and employment?

**Mr McConnell:** I discussed some of those issues in Brussels yesterday with commissioners and officials. That is an indication of how regularly discussions take place between ministers, officials and representatives of the Commission.

We must recognise that Scotland is represented at the intergovernmental conference, and in other ways, by much bigger players on the European scene. To dismiss the fact that the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who represents the UK at such events, is a Scot who represents a Scottish constituency, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a Scot who represents a Scottish constituency and that the minister with responsibility for European competitiveness is a Scot who represents a Scottish constituency is to dismiss the fact that we are there. We get the best of both worlds, as we have direct representation and we have the clout of being part of one of the big players in Europe.

#### **Day Care Facilities**

**9. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to ensure the viability of day care facilities such as crèches and playgroups. (S1O-1435)

**The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock):** Over the three years to 2002 more than £33 million is available to local authorities for the child care strategy, including support for child care projects to secure viability. A further £42 million is available to authorities for Sure Start Scotland, to support vulnerable families with very young children. Over 1,100 child care centres, including more than 450 playgroups, are also benefiting from pre-school education grants.

**Mr McNeil:** Does the minister agree that the maximisation of the local authority rent and rate-free space that the Executive encourages for after-

school clubs would assist the wider delivery of affordable day care for many more Scottish children?

**Peter Peacock:** I am happy to agree. Local authorities have a clear role in encouraging the provision of child care and playgroups in their areas as well as making their own provision. If they can help voluntary sector groups, particularly with rent and rate-free space, that would be a major contribution that we would encourage wherever possible.

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** How much funding, last year and this, has the Government given to the Scottish Pre-school Playgroup Association, which ensures that children have free play?

**Peter Peacock:** I do not have the figure to hand but I will write to Mrs McLeod with it. Colleagues and I recently met the SPPA to discuss the role it can play to make sure we have a strong and vibrant playgroup movement, which has a very important part to play in the life of our communities.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the Scottish Executive show a similar level of interest in day care for the elderly? Is the minister aware that Scottish local authorities are—

**The Presiding Officer:** No. We will move on to the next question.

#### **Caledonian MacBrayne**

**10. Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with the current service provided by Caledonian MacBrayne. (S1O-1428)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** The Executive attaches a high priority to maintaining lifeline ferry services. We are satisfied that Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd has made good progress against efficiency and performance targets set by the Executive each year.

**Mr Hamilton:** On a previous occasion I asked the minister whether she would guarantee that, despite the efforts on competition of the European Commission, Caledonian MacBrayne will not be privatised. I ask today if she will give a guarantee that no individual route operated by Caledonian MacBrayne will be privatised, as there is widespread concern that that may happen. Will she tell us today that no CalMac route will be privatised?

**Sarah Boyack:** The answer I can give is that we are currently discussing the issue with the European Commission. As I said to Parliament previously and reiterate, we have no intention of privatising Caledonian MacBrayne.

#### **Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)**

**(Con):** I would like to ask the minister if, in relation to the individual operating routes of Caledonian MacBrayne, she can demonstrate how effectiveness and efficiency are measured and how value for money is provided.

**Sarah Boyack:** I am happy to explain how we identify efficiency across CalMac services. Given that we are allocating the highest ever subsidy to it of £14.8 million, it is vital that we receive an efficient service. In 1998-99 the target for financial efficiency was achieved and the efficiency target was exceeded. The performance target was not met; it was 98 per cent of sailings on time and the rate was 97.4 per cent of sailings on time. On staff costs the target was met.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the minister whether the Scottish Executive has made any attempt to have returned to CalMac the ferry sold at rock-bottom price to Sea Containers Ltd on the order of Michael Forsyth, then Secretary of State for Scotland.

**Sarah Boyack:** No; we have not attempted to buy that ferry back. The £20 million investment in new ferries this year has been our priority.

#### **Nuclear Installations (Decommissioning)**

**11. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Health and Safety Executive over the environmental implications of the decommissioning of nuclear installations in Scotland. (S1O-1443)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** The Scottish Executive was consulted on the draft regulations that were proposed by the Health and Safety Executive and the accompanying guidance document relating to the decommissioning of nuclear installations.

**Mr MacAskill:** In view of the appalling track record at Dounreay, and at Sellafield or Windscale, why is it that accountability on decommissioning is to Westminster rather than here? What will the minister do to return accountability to this Parliament and to the people of Scotland?

**Sarah Boyack:** I am disappointed but not surprised by the tone of that question. The critical point is that, through the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, we oversee the protection of the environment. We are fully consulted on, and involved with, any of the decommissioning works that are being carried out at Dounreay. One of the first things that I did on becoming a minister was to ensure that I could meet the management at Dounreay and receive regular reports on progress towards the achievement of the recommendations

of the HSE/SEPA audit report.

We are being more transparent and are ensuring that we stick to the highest standards of environmental protection. The Executive has a strong interest in ensuring that the decommissioning of Dounreay proceeds to those standards.

**Mr MacAskill:** What powers does the minister have over the HSE?

**Sarah Boyack:** We are kept informed by HSE through SEPA. Through SEPA, we have the opportunity to ensure that each HSE report is subject to the transparency to which I referred. That is our mechanism for accountability in the implementation of the HSE/SEPA audit report. It is significant that that is a joint report. Reports are made regularly to a local liaison committee. There are now more reports about progress at Dounreay than there have ever been. Some of us have campaigned for years for such transparency. The Executive is ensuring that we have it.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Will the minister join me in congratulating the management and staff of Dounreay, who have worked very hard to produce a marked improvement in safety practices there? Will she congratulate them on their new policy of openness after so many years of secrecy? That openness has done much to reassure those of us who have been concerned about safety at Dounreay.

**Sarah Boyack:** There is evidence that much more emphasis is being placed on transparency and accountability. One example of that is the fortnightly information for stakeholders that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority produces. People who wish to raise concerns can see what progress is being made in practice.

The HSE/SEPA audit report made a number of recommendations. There is a rigorous process to go through before it is accepted that recommendations have been implemented, and only six recommendations have been fully closed off. That is a recognition of the higher standards that apply and the more transparent process that is under way. Follow-up action has been completed on 40 recommendations, but the regulator's approval of that action has still to be gained. The process is now more rigorous and transparent. That is critical for people's confidence in decommissioning at Dounreay. It is important that that confidence be sustained and the management there is aware that transparency must be maintained.

#### **Scottish Executive (Newspaper Advertisements)**

**12. Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what criteria

it applies in deciding on the appropriate placing of its newspaper advertisements. (S1O-1419)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Scottish Executive's newspaper advertisements, which range from public information campaigns to recruitment advertisements, are placed on our behalf by our advertising agencies. The criteria that determine the placement of advertisements vary according to individual circumstances and commonly include the requirement to reach the target group at an affordable cost.

**Michael Russell:** As the minister was deeply involved in the election campaign last year, he will be aware that a book that was published this week provides incontrovertible evidence that the Labour party used £100,000 to try to blackmail a Scottish newspaper to take the Labour line. [MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I would like an assurance from the minister that the criteria that he has announced today will be the inflexible—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Questions must be about the Government, not about a political party.

**Michael Russell:** Will the minister give me an incontrovertible and cast-iron assurance that the criteria to which he refers will be published and observed on all occasions, and that Alastair Campbell's remarks last week about the press will not influence decisions?

**Mr McConnell:** The chamber has my absolute assurance that the criteria that determine the placement of our advertisements will be as I have stated. However, it is a bit rich for me to have to deal with comments on advertising during election campaigns or at any other time from someone who was responsible for the advertising campaigns of a political party that thought that it would win the election, but lost that election and the one before it.

#### **Business Start-ups**

**13. Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to assist traditionally under-represented groups, such as young people, women and the long-term unemployed, to start their own businesses. (S1O-1426)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** We are keen to encourage people from all sectors of society to consider self-employment and starting their own business as a viable option. A significant number of initiatives are in place to assist particular groups who are not traditionally seen as entrepreneurs.

**Mike Watson:** I thank the minister for that response and for the announcement that he made

on International Women's Day of an extra £1.5 million.

Can I draw to the minister's attention the record of the Castlemilk Economic Development Agency in providing support for women, youth and existing businesses? Each year the agency assists on average 25 previously unemployed Castlemilk residents to start up in business, through grant aid and loan funding. It actively encourages women to start up and develop businesses by accessing specialist women's finance and resources and micro-credit schemes.

Does the minister agree that the agency's success illustrates what can be achieved when local organisations are provided with the resources and those resources are targeted effectively?

**Henry McLeish:** Very much so. The project to which Mike Watson refers is excellent and reflects some of the excellent work that has been done in Glasgow generally to tackle unemployment and the key economic issues that the city faces. We are attempting to put in place a wide range of measures that encourage self-employment and help people become more entrepreneurial. The new deal does that with 18 to 24-year-olds. The training for work scheme does the same thing, and we are keen to pursue it in the Glasgow employment zone.

It is absolutely crucial that the same opportunities are offered to every group in our society. For far too long, people from disadvantaged areas and, in particular, women, have not had the same access to the economic opportunities that we take for granted. I want to remove barriers and obstacles, and I hope that the project in Glasgow will serve as a beacon to other parts of Scotland, so that they join in to ensure that we have equality of access and equality of opportunity.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that also affected are unemployed people who suffer from the scandal of age discrimination, which in Scotland affects tens of thousands of people over the ages of 40 and 50? Because of age apartheid, such people often do not have the chance of getting a job. Sometimes, when trying desperately to start a small business, they are turned down by public bodies. Does the minister have any plans to aid persons of both sexes who are the victims of age discrimination in employment?

**Henry McLeish:** The member's sentiments will be shared by most members of the Parliament. We do not want discrimination to affect any group or gender. That said, the budget highlighted the fact that we want to do more for older people—through the new deal for the long-term

unemployed, for example. I can assure Dorothy-Grace Elder that all the policies that the Executive is pursuing are based on equality of opportunity. When it comes to employment and training, people should not be discriminated against on account of their age. I would like to think that the budget proposals and the work that we are doing will allay some of the member's concerns.

### School Football Tournaments

**14. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to ensure that children under 12 years of age will continue to play competitive school football tournaments in Scotland. (S1O-1440)

**The Presiding Officer:** I welcome back Rhona Brankin. [*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport (Rhona Brankin):** Thank you, Sir David. With your forbearance, I would like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues from across the political parties for their support and encouragement during my recent illness. However, I must tell Brian Monteith that peace has not quite broken out.

Soccer sevens are the preferred approach to introducing under-12s to football and encouraging young people to maintain their involvement. That approach does not exclude an appropriate element of competition. The Scottish Football Association agrees with the approach; soccer sevens were introduced in the 1980s with the support of the Scottish Schools Football Association and local authorities.

**Mr Monteith:** I thank the minister for her answer and I am pleased to be sparring with her again.

Jim Baxter, a Scottish legend—[*Laughter.*] He was not a favourite of mine, but he was a Scottish legend. He called that approach "very stupid" and Tommy Docherty called it "lunacy". Whatever one may think of their views, would the minister be willing to ask the SFA at least to consult the children who will be affected by that approach, before competition in 11-a-side football for the under-12s is phased out completely?

**Rhona Brankin:** I, too, am old enough to remember keepie-uppie. The interests of the child are paramount in our approach. We are talking about appropriate competition—I stress the word "appropriate", as we must remember that when we take decisions.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Would it be possible to use new money to assist the development of coaching in primary schools? As well as ensuring that some degree of competition continues, that is an important aspect of enabling children to play well.

**Rhona Brankin:** We recognise that the link between sport and health in primary schools is important. We have pilot programmes to develop active primary schools. We take sport in primary schools seriously and we are examining closely various different ways of improving sport in primary schools.

### **Education (Computers)**

**15. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what provision is being made to advise teachers and pupils on the sensible use of computers within schools. (S10-1406)

**The Deputy Minister for Children and Education (Peter Peacock):** There is a £23 million programme for training teachers on the classroom use of information and communications technology.

**Mrs Mulligan:** I thank the minister for his answer. On 29 February, I visited a group of repetitive strain injury sufferers, who stressed the need to encourage good practice when using computers. Does the minister agree that school is a good place to start that good practice, not just in computer classes, where good practice is often encouraged, but in any classes where computers are used? For example, during that visit we saw children using rigid chairs, which can cause children a great deal of strain and so is a practice that should not be followed.

**Peter Peacock:** I presume that those matters are covered by the training programmes that local authorities are developing and by health and safety guidelines, with which local authorities, as employers, would have to ensure that they comply, in relation to not only their employees but those who pass through their care as students or pupils. I will double-check that that matter is being given the attention that it deserves.

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that it is extremely important that we ensure that teachers are properly trained in the use of computers? Will he comment on the fact that the computers for teachers scheme in Scotland provides teachers with a subsidy of up to £200 for the purchase of a personal computer, but that the same scheme in England provides teachers with up to £500 for the same purpose? Does he agree that that is hardly fair to teachers in Scotland? Does he have any plans to change the scheme in order to bring Scottish teachers into line with their English counterparts?

**Peter Peacock:** In the commentary in the educational press, the Scottish system is being praised over the one in England and Wales. Our scheme guarantees £200—we pay the tax centrally, whereas teachers in England pay their

own tax. The scheme in England offers up to £500—it does not guarantee £500—and restricts the technology that can be used, whereas the Scottish system is much more flexible. That is why we have received credit for our scheme, not only for what we have done, but for ensuring that more teachers as a proportion of the total teaching work force will get access to computers than is the case in England and Wales.

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister inform the chamber what safeguards are in place to protect schoolchildren from exposure to pornographic material on the world wide web when they are using school computers?

**Peter Peacock:** We take seriously the important issue of access to the internet. We have issued specific guidance to schools, through the ClickThinking guidance notes, to protect children from such influences. There are technical ways in which one can filter out inappropriate material, and we have ensured that those are in use. A variety of other technical devices exist to ensure that children do not access inappropriate material on the internet. The professionalism of our teachers in the classroom adds considerably to our ability to ensure that children are not exposed to inappropriate influences. We will keep the matter under close review, but we have taken a great many measures to ensure that nobody has access to inappropriate material.

## First Minister's Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### UK Parliament (Visits)

**1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister when he next plans to visit the United Kingdom Parliament. (S1F-225)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** Shortly. I regularly visit the Westminster Parliament and I particularly enjoyed my visit there on Tuesday this week.

**Mr Salmond:** When the First Minister next goes to the Westminster Parliament, will he take time to reflect on the claims of the Scottish Executive that the freedom of information legislation going through this Parliament will be better than the freedom of information legislation at Westminster? If that is the case, can he explain why our parliamentary information centre has been unable to obtain key documents relating to the Holyrood project? This is what the head of research and information services has to say about the Scottish Parliament information centre's attempts to contact officials in the Scottish Executive:

"My staff have contacted the relevant official at the Scottish Executive, who informed us that he had passed this request 'upwards' as he wasn't sure of the exact position with regard to public access to these documents. When we chased the official . . . to find out when we might expect a decision, he apologised and said he didn't know whether we would be able to see the reports or not, and if so, when we would be able to get access to them."

Will the First Minister deprecate that climate of secrecy and undertake to have those key cost consultant reports in the parliamentary information centre by the end of this week?

**The First Minister:** A good deal of the information that Alex Salmond requires has been in the public domain for some time. I can assure him that there is no intention of withholding documentation that is properly in the public domain. I will look into the matter, but I think that he is getting into something of a paddy about it.

**Mr Salmond:** If the parliamentary information centre cannot obtain the original cost consultant reports on Holyrood and St Andrew's House, this Parliament is entitled to be concerned when the information centre is obstructed by officials in the Scottish Executive. Will the First Minister undertake to have those documents in the information centre of this Parliament by the end of this week, or could there be some reason why he does not want those documents to be available to members of the Parliament?

**The First Minister:** I know that Alex Salmond is a master of innuendo, but the suggestion that I am personally blocking information that should properly be available to members is one that I greatly resent. I have said that I will look into the matter and I will do so.

**Mr Salmond:** If the First Minister does not want that suggestion to hang over him, why does not he undertake to make the documents available to the Parliament by the end of the week? Does he accept that the original estimate of £50 million that he gave to the people of Scotland for the Holyrood project was based on erecting a simple building on a flat site? Did no one tell him that Holyrood was not a flat site and that, whatever else Mr Miralles may be accused of, he does not build simple buildings? Are not those the facts about that original estimate? Are not the people of Scotland entitled both to see the rake's progress of escalating costs at the time when the First Minister was in charge of the project and not to have vital information withheld from members of this Parliament?

**The First Minister:** I must say that I enjoyed the dramatic way in which Mr Salmond threw his papers on to the desk. If he sees a conspiracy, I am not surprised; he is always seeing conspiracies. As I understand it, the publication of the Spencely report is planned for the very near future. There will then be a full debate in this chamber. I am confident about the way in which the choice of site was approached. It was done with the aid of inspections and visualisations of buildings on all four sites by architects and, as Mr Salmond said, exercises in costing the proposals were carried out. That will no doubt be a matter for debate, but the important thing is that we continue in a constructive way to get the right solutions to a difficult situation, rather than imagining bogeymen and conspiracies, as Mr Salmond does. Perhaps the disappointment of many years on the Opposition benches is getting to him.

#### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S1F-223)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** I meet the Prime Minister regularly, and I spoke to him on the telephone several times over the budget period. The specific matters are for me.

**David McLetchie:** I invite the First Minister to ask the Prime Minister, the next time that he speaks to him, to convey our congratulations to Rhodri Morgan on his decision to put the Welsh Assembly building on hold pending an examination of all the options, a course of action that we could have taken last June—if we had

done, we would not be in the mess that we are in now.

In view of the fact that Mr Morgan has taken his decision against the backdrop of a cost escalation of only £2 million, whereas our cost escalation is estimated by some at £200 million, will the First Minister place a cash ceiling on the Holyrood project, so as to inform our debate on the Spencely report in a couple of weeks' time?

**The First Minister:** These attempts to skirmish are futile given that we will have an authoritative report shortly—with, I have no doubt, proposals from the parliamentary body that is in charge of the project—and given that we will have a full-scale debate. I suggest to Mr McLetchie that parallels are always dangerous and are often incomplete.

The decision that was taken last June was taken by the Parliament as a whole on a free vote, at least as far as we were concerned. Mr McLetchie's criticism—[*Interruption.*] It may be that the fact that there was a certain unity of purpose in some way—[*Interruption.*] I know from conversations with many people that they voted against their conscience and opinion because the Scottish nationalists were on a three-line whip on the occasion of the vote. There would have been a more comfortable majority in this chamber had it not been for those bully-boy tactics.

**David McLetchie:** May I ask my question? May I have the First Minister's attention? As the First Minister knows, it is not sufficient simply to have the Spencely report on its own, because the Spencely report is concerned with the Holyrood project. If the Parliament is to debate the issue in its entirety, we must have information on all the options, to which Mr Salmond alluded earlier, and we must have an informed debate against the financial backcloth. In other words, how much money is the Executive prepared to make available for the project and where is that money coming from? That is a reasonable question to ask the First Minister and the Scottish Executive. Is the First Minister prepared to take responsibility for the new Parliament project, and take a leaf out of the Rhodri Morgan book of leadership?

**The First Minister:** That is a tempting prospect.

The project is in the hands of Parliament as a whole, and specifically it is delegated to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on which Mr McLetchie's party is represented. I have no doubt that the SPCB will want to give a good account of its stewardship when the opportunity arises.

I have repeatedly made clear what the situation was when the SPCB took responsibility. I make it clear that I, and most of my colleagues, want a building that is fit for a Parliament. We want it to

be completed in a way that gives a degree of cost control with which we can all feel comfortable. I have no doubt that we, at least, will be trying to achieve that, and I suspect, to be fair, that many others in the chamber will be trying to do the same. It is right that we wait until we have the Spencely report and then see how we proceed from there.

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** In view of the reports that are built on leaks and spin in today's *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and *The Scotsman* concerning the Holyrood project and the outcome of the Spencely report, will the Prime Minister join me in urging the Presiding Officer to make available to all members of this chamber Sir John's report when it is published? If that entails having an emergency meeting of the SPCB to decide that, will he join me in urging the Presiding Officer to call one?

**The First Minister:** I suppose that I ought to thank Ms MacDonald for my new title. John Spencely might be a little puzzled as well. [*Laughter.*] Mr Spencely is the head of a group of three men of experience and expertise. I understand that his report will be published and made available to Parliament. Suggestions or implications that pressure from the chamber or emergency meetings might be required to force the report into the public domain seem to me to be misplaced and rather excitable.

### Chancellor of the Exchequer (Budget)

**3. Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what representations the Scottish Executive has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the implications of the budget for Scotland. (S1F-231)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** I do not reveal the details of the Executive's representations—not even to Andrew Wilson, the great journalist. I am tempted to make some comments on his efforts in that respect, but I will not do so.

Anyone who has a little nous and common sense will see that there are many things in the budget that reflect the representations that the Executive has made. That is one of the reasons why I look upon the outcome of the budget with such satisfaction.

**Andrew Wilson:** Has the First Minister made any representations on the impact of the budget on the Scottish manufacturing sector? Does he acknowledge that, since he took office as Secretary of State for Scotland, 22,000 fewer people are employed in that sector? Does he acknowledge that the bulk of the difficulties in that sector, in the west midlands as in Scotland, are because of the over-valuation of sterling—which



has gone up by 35 per cent since Labour came to power—against the euro? Will he further tell the chamber whether he has said in his representations to the Treasury and to the Bank of England that—in his opinion and with regard to the Scottish economy—the value of sterling is too high, too low or just about right?

**The First Minister:** Very clever. [*Laughter.*] Manufacturing industry in almost all parts of the country and the world tends to decline. I have been impressed by the facts that Scottish manufacturing output is up; that manufacturing exports from Scotland are up by about 8 per cent; and that, in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available, growth in Scotland's manufacturing output has outpaced the rest of the United Kingdom's. Those are satisfying and important statistics and I commend them to Mr Wilson.

Some of the budget is of especial importance to Scotland: the airport passenger duty concession on flights from the Highlands and Islands; the third year in which there will be no increase in whisky duty; and the fact that there is no real-terms increase in the petroleum revenue tax. The 6 per cent escalator was not applied on any amount over the rate of inflation. There have also been important changes to vehicle excise duty on lorries, for example—changes that are worth about £45 million. That will create concessions that are, in some cases, as great as £1,800 a year. The £50 reduction in road tax will apply to 4 million cars. All those things are important to Scotland, as is the massive public spending increase that has been authorised. I hope that Mr Wilson will stop ginning and welcome that.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** Did the First Minister discuss with the Chancellor of the Exchequer the fact that the increases that were announced in Tuesday's budget will mean that in the next four years there will be approximately £2 billion more for the NHS in Scotland? Does he further agree that that dwarfs anything that the SNP has promised in its nationalist budgets?

**The First Minister:** That is true. Many of us remember the 1997 election in which the SNP—with tremendous magnanimity—offered £35 million a year in increases to the health service. That is a pretty miserable little tip. Can I also say with considerable satisfaction—

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** Zero—that is what you proposed.

**The Presiding Officer:** Order, please, Mr Swinney.

**The First Minister:** I say with considerable satisfaction that, after the per capita increases for the coming year have been taken into account, the

average spend per head in England will be £883, whereas in Scotland it will be £1,055. That reflects a substantial differential.

### Freight Transport

**4. Mr Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what progress is being made in moving freight from road to rail in Scotland. (S1F-229)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** We are already more than half way to meeting the commitment in our programme for government to transfer 15 million lorry miles per annum off Scotland's roads by March 2002. That should give pleasure to us all.

**Mr Kerr:** I welcome the additional announcement of grants made by Sarah Boyack yesterday and the extra money for transport announced in the chancellor's budget. Will the First Minister confirm that the chancellor's announcement on 44-tonne lorries does not run counter to the policy of moving freight to railways?

**The First Minister:** Indeed it does not. Anyone who complains about the rearrangement of vehicle excise duty would be ungracious and short-sighted, as it is an attempt to encourage people to move to lorry weights that are suitable for roads and that do not lead to unnecessary problems in road construction.

Sarah Boyack has made a series of announcements about uses of the freight facilities grant. I will take two extremes as examples. First, the important development at Ayr harbour will allow the transportation of timber by sea to Ayr and its redistribution from there. Secondly, in great contrast, the Safeway supermarket agreement means that refrigerated units will go by rail from Bellshill to the Inverness area. That will again relieve the weight on roads, which I think is important even to nationalist MSPs.

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Given that grants totalling £1.58 million have been made to Safeway to move goods by rail rather than by road, is it the intention of the Executive to offer that facility to others? Are the refrigerated units, to which the First Minister referred, for the exclusive use of Safeway? Would not the money be better spent on investing in the rail infrastructure so that all users might benefit rather than one or two private companies?

**The First Minister:** I will have to look into some of the details of Brian Adam's question. I am told—I am getting advice as I speak—that I said that refrigerated units will go by rail to the Inverness area, but the facility goes beyond that; it will be available up into the Thurso and Wick area, which is important. Some of the units concerned were manufactured in the Fraserburgh area, which

again seems to me to be a good thing on the whole—I will not hold anything against an area such as Fraserburgh, much though I might be tempted. The story is a positive one. I will look into the detailed points that Brian Adam made and I will write to him.

**Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con):** Will the First Minister confirm that the Prime Minister has promised the shadow strategic rail authority increased money for investment in rail services, funded by reallocating declining revenue subsidies, including those from franchises in Scotland? Will the Executive be allocated any part of those funds to invest further in Scotland's passenger and freight services, including enhanced allocations for the freight facilities grant?

**The First Minister:** I will certainly consider that point. I will not pretend that I can answer it off the cuff. Anyone who looks at the sweep of the remarkable announcements in the budget will know that we have got full consequentials. We have been happy with how we have been dealt with in that respect. If there is additional expenditure in an area elsewhere in the country that is comparable to a devolved area, I am sure that we will get our share.

#### Local Government Finance

**5. Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what adjustments the Scottish Executive might consider making to the way the local government financial settlement is reached next year. (S1F-220)

**The First Minister (Donald Dewar):** That is a wide canvas. I like "might consider making"; I have no doubt that we will consider many things. I notice that Keith Raffan is constantly considering things—sometimes to my entertainment and sometimes to my benefit.

Of course there is a continuing dialogue. Jack McConnell has set up a close liaison with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and conversations are taking place. I was at the COSLA annual conference yesterday and those arrangements were firmly praised as a model of good practice. It has been the case in our system for many years that distribution formulae were a matter for agreement between the Administration of the day and local government. One of the difficulties is that, when one is presented with a special case, that is prone to the revolving door problem—if we give to one, we take from another. We recognise that there is some discontent with the grant distribution formula; it is under active consideration at the moment.

**Mr Raffan:** Let us hope that that will be to the benefit of us all. Does the First Minister agree with

me and the Minister for Finance that we cannot approach next year's local government financial settlement in the way in which we approached this year's? If he has gone beyond the point of consideration, perhaps he could let us know what realistic progress he thinks can be made on the following points: a relaxation of ring-fencing; a move towards three-year funding; central funding of salary increases; and a review of the formula. Has he given those three points his consideration?

**The First Minister:** They are constantly with me. Of course, this is always a matter of balance. Ring-fencing, for example, is a tiny percentage of the more than £6 billion that we now give to local government each year. Keith Raffan may be interested to know that Government support for local government services is almost 35 per cent higher per head in Scotland than it is in England. We work closely with local authorities and we will continue to do so. That must be on the basis of agreement. The one thing that matters, at the end of the day, is that we have an efficient delivery of services. In terms of the spending guidelines, the settlement this year, as I know Keith Raffan will accept and will be familiar with, was 3.7 per cent, while grant-aided expenditure was up by 3.4 per cent. Those are both well above the rate of inflation. We hope to beat inflation again this year.

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** What plans does the Executive have to investigate an alternative local taxation that would be based on an individual's ability to pay?

**The First Minister:** That is a formidable question. At the moment, there is no major inquiry into the funding methods of local government in relation to, for example, replacements for the council tax. There is some correlation: self-evidently, wealthy people tend to live in properties with a higher banding. It is interesting to note that, at the time of the Conservative debacle over the poll tax, the Conservatives were driven back to a form of property taxation—it is hard to avoid. I cannot promise Shona Robison that in the near future there will be a change as fundamental as the one that she appears to envisage. If she would like to write to me, I would be interested to know what her favoured candidate is.

## Points of Order

15:32

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Our next item of business—

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** On a point of order. Would it be in order to have a majority vote of members of the chamber to instruct the corporate body to make available to all members, at the same time, the Spencely report, on its publication?

**The Presiding Officer:** The answer is that it would not be in order.

We come now to—

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order.

**The Presiding Officer:** Another point of order?

**Phil Gallie:** It is really a point of clarification. [*Laughter.*] Earlier, I had a question ruled out of order when I attempted to establish the Executive's priority with respect to day care for the elderly and for children. Given that I wanted a priority comparison—it was a fair point—I feel slightly aggrieved.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry if you feel aggrieved at being ruled out of order—I am sure that it is not a new experience for members. However, you were asking about day care facilities for the elderly, whereas question 9 in the business bulletin was, quite explicitly, about day care facilities such as crèches and playgroups. That is why I would not take the question.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** On a point of order.

**The Presiding Officer:** Another point of order? An embarrassment of riches today.

**Michael Russell:** I am sorry to annoy you at this time in the afternoon with another point of order. Further to the point of order that Margo MacDonald just raised, would you be prepared to entertain a motion without notice to the effect that the chamber should instruct the corporate body to publish the Spencely report when it receives it? If not, why not?

**The Presiding Officer:** I would not. Normally, I would not give reasons. The report has been commissioned by the corporate body, which will receive it on Monday afternoon. The corporate body will meet on Tuesday morning to consider the report and will, I am sure, take note of the request. However, the decision that has been made so far is to publish that report with our report. We may reconsider that, but you cannot

expect the chamber to have a mini-debate on an issue that is already under consideration. This will be considered at the earliest moment by the corporate body; we have noted the request.

**Michael Russell:** In that case, presumably it would be in order for members to raise points of order on the matter on Wednesday, if they have not received the report by then.

**The Presiding Officer:** It is always in order to raise points of order, Mr Russell.

## Genetic Modification Science

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next item of business is a debate on genetic modification science. I want to explain to members that, unusually, I have selected three amendments to motion S1M-675, and I do not want that to be taken as a precedent. Mr Harper's amendment raises a different point from the other two and was supported by other members. That is why I have selected three amendments.

In the business bulletin, amendment S1M-675.4 in the name of Robin Harper contains an error. It refers to the Enterprise, Culture and Sport Committee, which should be the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. I am sure that Mr Harper will agree with that verbal amendment to his amendment.

15:35

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Executive.

As members will be aware, genetic modification science is a complex issue. However, it is an issue that is relevant to our policies on food, agriculture, the environment and industry. I want to set out clearly to members the Scottish Executive's position on the issue.

First, let me be clear that the Executive is neither for nor against genetic modification. Our priorities are to protect human health and to safeguard the environment. We are pro-safety, pro-environment and pro-consumer choice. I am very aware of the real and understandable concerns of consumers and the wider public about genetic modification. That is why we are moving forward on a cautious, precautionary basis. We have helped to establish and are working within a rigorous and stringent regulatory regime. There is a comprehensive framework of regulatory bodies, which provide advice on the safety of GM and the broader implications of biotechnology.

As I said when we debated food safety last September, we must promote a mature and well-informed public debate on issues such as GM. We must move away from the highly emotive language that has surrounded such issues in the past. That is in the best interests of everyone, particularly the public. The recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development conference, held in Edinburgh and supported by both the UK Government and the Scottish Executive, was an important step in widening the debate. It is that sort of open, constructive dialogue that we wish to encourage, allowing

different perspectives to be aired and considered, sensibly and maturely. I hope that today's debate will be a further step towards raising public awareness and providing the factual information that is crucial to enable informed views to be reached.

As we all know, GM is an evolving subject; research is constantly extending our knowledge. There are potential benefits that have already been demonstrated through, for example, new therapeutic products for diabetics and haemophiliacs and the development of nutritionally enhanced staple crops. Those are real benefits that our people need. We cannot ignore that.

Major developments are taking place every day in this area of science and across the world. GM is not just a Scottish issue or a UK issue, but crosses international borders. We need to work in partnership with other countries if we are to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place. That is why the European regulatory framework is so important.

Although GM food and crops is a devolved matter, it would be unrealistic to take an entirely separate Scottish approach, not least because we do not have the legal scope for action outwith the European rules. We have powers to prohibit cultivation or withdraw GM products, where there is supporting evidence. However, we cannot and will not take a stance that does not have a sound legal or scientific footing. Let me assure members that if unacceptable harm is demonstrated, we can and will act. European legislation gives us that important safeguard.

The development and the possible commercial planting of GM crops have been the subject of much concerned debate. Let me be absolutely clear. There is at present no commercial growing of GM crops in Scotland or in any other part of the United Kingdom. Under an agreement reached with the industry and farmers, no commercial growing will take place until a programme of farm-scale evaluations is completed and independently assessed for risk, which will happen no earlier than 2003, and no GM crops will be grown or marketed commercially until they pass one of the most rigorous regulatory systems in the world. We will always act cautiously, but—equally—we will not turn our backs on progress.

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Does the minister accept that there are limitations to our scientific knowledge in this matter, and that the damage that is feared by many people in the green movement could be done before the tests are even concluded?

**Susan Deacon:** It is precisely because scientific knowledge is—as I have already said—growing and evolving that it is important that we take a

precautionary approach and that we are prepared to learn from the evidence and to apply what we learn to our policy making. That is precisely what we are doing in relation to crop testing.

In Scotland, a number of small-scale trial sites have consent to grow GM crops for research. I stress that, before any GM crop is allowed to reach that controlled trialling stage in the open, it needs to satisfy strict safety tests in the laboratory and under greenhouse conditions. However, testing under those conditions cannot tell us definitely what effect, if any, the crop will have on the countryside. For that, we need to consider the conditions under which the crop might be grown commercially and the agricultural practices that would be adopted. That is why we are participating in the UK programme of farm-scale evaluations, which will provide essential scientific information on any effects that the growing of GM crops might have on biodiversity or on the environment generally. That will enhance our scientific knowledge, and will enhance our ability to make policy on an informed basis. It is essential that informed decisions on the potential effect of those crops are taken on the basis of sound scientific evidence.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Will the minister give way?

**Susan Deacon:** I would like to move on.

Without such scientific knowledge, we can only speculate, and that is in no one's interest.

The first trial site in Scotland was announced last week. It is important for carefully assessed trials to take place in Scotland to reflect our particular climate and ecology. Farm-scale evaluations are the precautionary principle in practice. Without them, GM crops would already be grown commercially in this country—and they are not.

Equally important is that the public should have the right to know what is going on, where it is going on, and why. That is why we will make public the exact location of all trial sites, and why we have put a fuller explanation of the purpose of the trials on the internet.

Our overriding responsibilities are to safeguard public health and to ensure that consumers can make informed choices about whether to eat GM food. We believe that effective labelling is crucial to allow real consumer choice. We already label foods containing GM soya and maize, which are the only GM foods currently on sale in this country. Legislation was laid before this Parliament on 17 March to extend the requirements on labelling to cover GM additives and flavourings.

We wish to see labelling go even further than that. We fully support the UK push to get "GM

free" labelling as well as labelling for animal feed with GM ingredients. Where possible under European law, we will take action to provide maximum information for consumers, to allow real choice. That thinking has underpinned our approach to GM and food safety throughout our time in office.

It is important that the public have access to information on this subject, and that they have access to and confidence in the regulatory process that operates on their behalf. In the UK, that process is rigorous and is based upon the precautionary principle. The regulatory system has two distinct functions: to regulate the approval of individual GM products and processes, and to provide a strategic framework for the development of the technology.

Expert committees already provide us with independent scientific assessments of the environmental and health implications of GM crops or foods that are proposed for development or marketing. We have also acted jointly with the UK Government to establish two new commissions to advise us on the wider, often ethical, issues that go beyond purely scientific considerations.

All those bodies will operate alongside the new Food Standards Agency to provide a strong, strategic advisory structure to oversee the regulatory system. From 1 April, when the new Food Standards Agency is established, we will look to it for advice on all GM food and animal feed issues. The agency's independent Scottish Food Advisory Committee will advise on specific Scottish issues. In particular, the agency will advise us on the longer-term and ethical implications that surround GM food. It will also ensure that the safety assessment regime continues to meet the pace of change in this fast-moving area of science. The agency will be independent, open, transparent and consultative, and will give clear, well-publicised advice. The Food Standards Agency and the other advisory bodies will advise Scottish ministers directly on devolved issues.

In accordance with our approach of being open on all such matters, we are taking other steps to extend information more widely. From today, a Scottish Executive website will be dedicated specifically to providing information on the issues that we are discussing today.

This is a complex issue. Public health and protection of the environment are at the core of our policies, but it is important that we do not lose sight of the significant developments that are taking place in our biotechnology industry. Biotechnology is important, for example, in the discovery, development and delivery of new medicines and vaccines. It has helped us to advance in our ability to diagnose accurately and

quickly, and is key to developing completely new treatments for a range of diseases. The industry in Scotland is well established and we are in a leading position, in particular in the medical sector, in a field with the highest potential.

The Scottish Executive examines all those aspects when it considers the most appropriate way of formulating its policy on GM. We have adopted a cautious approach to a very sensitive issue. We are neither pro nor anti-GM. We must, and we do, give priority to the need to protect public health and the environment, but we do not turn our backs on the science, which has the potential to bring us significant benefits. To assess that potential properly, we believe that it is necessary to learn more, but we will do that within rigorous constraints to ensure that the public and the environment are fully protected.

We will work with the UK Government and our European partners to improve the information that is available to consumers and to ensure that consumer safety is protected. We are acting in a responsible, measured and precautionary manner. That is in the best interests of Scotland and the Scottish people, and for that reason, I commend the motion to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the public concerns which exist in relation to the development of genetically modified foods and crops; commends the precautionary approach of the Scottish Executive and the rigorous regulatory systems which are in place to control the development of genetically modified foods and crops, and recognises the excellence of the Scottish biotechnology industry.

15:48

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** It is one thing to be neither pro nor anti, but actions speak louder than words and if trial testing is given the go-ahead, that will take matters a quantum leap ahead.

At the outset, I want to indicate our support for my colleague Robin Harper's amendment. The facets that are addressed by that amendment are separate and distinct, but he has our full support.

This debate is long overdue; it is also far too short, and it must continue. The Parliament has been in existence for nigh on nine months; the GM debate has progressed at pace, and serious and important events have taken place without the Parliament having the power of veto, or even a by your leave. That is a scandal.

As we begin the debate, we should examine our current situation and the factors that are before us today. In Scotland, we are fortunate enough to have a pioneering biotechnology industry. We have scientists whose work is recognised beyond

these shores and whose reputation is justly world renowned. It is a matter for considerable national pride that the Roslin Institute and the Rowett Research Institute are household names. Scottish science is once again a pioneer in progress and is pushing out the parameters of knowledge.

Although we want such technology to be progressed in Scotland, boundaries must exist, as in any other field. We welcome the advancement of knowledge, but do not worship at the altar of applying untried technology for its own sake. We are not prepared to sacrifice the rural economy of Scotland, the proud reputation of our quality farming industry or the health of our people. Boundaries must be placed and regulations followed. That is not meant to impede scientific progress, but it is meant to ensure that science is not applied beyond our control in unforeseen circumstances and with possible catastrophic consequences.

What is the current situation? First, we should scotch some of the myths. Myth No 1: GM crops will feed the world. With genetically modified loaves and fishes, Monsanto will end world hunger in an act of altruism unknown for nigh on 2,000 years; a company founded on sheer capital for profit's sake will be moved to the provision of seed corn for humanity's sake. Aye—that'll be right. The tragic images of starvation on our television screens should lead not only to charity but to an analysis of the cause and the solution. The cause is not food shortage, but unfair distribution and supply. There is more than enough food in the world to feed the whole human race. The United Nations World Food Programme reckons that enough food is grown to feed the world one and a half times over. If so, why should one seventh of the world's population go hungry and one in four children go to bed hungry tonight?

GM foods are not the great white hope from America's corner coming to deck the dark, rampaging scourge of hunger; they are being used to increase Monsanto's profits, boost its share capital—and hell mend the consequences. They are indeed a food steroid in the environment ring. If the Executive is determined to increase food production, it should put some of Scotland's 77,000 hectares of set-aside land back into production and create jobs and produce.

Myth No 2: GM foods pose no threat. Who says? This is not a criminal prosecution; the burden of proof is not based on the concept of beyond reasonable doubt and the onus of proof is not on us. We are told that there is no evidence to show that GM foods are unsafe. However, that is not the issue. The Executive has rightly used the terminology, "precautionary principle". This is not a matter of proving beyond reasonable doubt that GM foods are unsafe; it is about the

manufacturers satisfying all of us beyond reasonable doubt that they are safe.

Myth No 3: GM foods will improve Scotland's agricultural reputation. Although Scotland's agriculture industry needs assistance, this is a helping hand from the devil. Scotland's reputation in the food industry is, to some extent, based on high-quality foods for niche markets. Like everywhere else, we grow the basic crops, but the image that we market of "Scotland the Brand" is top of the range: fresh, clean and pristine pure. Organic farming is the only growth sector in Scottish agriculture at the moment, and we must encourage it instead of jeopardising it by planting environmental time bombs.

As for the SNP amendment, it is one thing to conduct tests in a laboratory where conditions are safe, secure and isolated; it is quite another thing to jeopardise all in an unrestricted, unrestrained, open experiment in the Scottish countryside.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** Will Mr MacAskill explain how cross-pollination of crops, for example, can be tested in laboratories and greenhouses?

**Mr MacAskill:** The bottom line has to be the precautionary principle. The simple fact of the matter is that if we cannot be satisfied that testing can be done in any other way, we must not proceed with it.

As the legacy of Chernobyl testifies, the environment knows no boundaries. That event was on a macro-scale; we cannot risk something similar happening on a micro-scale. In the same way that GM foods have not been proven safe beyond reasonable doubt, the parameters that have been set do not suffice. I do not believe that there is such a thing as a safe distance or an exclusion zone; the only safe exclusion zone is within the confines of a laboratory or in a similar restricted environment. A generation ago, army veterans in fields in Australia were told that if they turned their backs and put their fingers in their ears, all would be well as an atomic bomb was tested. There, the safe exclusion zone was shown to be flawed, as radiation penetrated the victims unfelt and undetected.

Can we be absolutely certain that, as the wind blows and the bee flies, not one grain of pollen will cross the 50 m exclusion zone set by the Executive? For those who would accuse me of scaremongering, I produce in evidence the statement of the chair of the British Medical Association's board of science of education, who said:

"Once the GM genie is out of the bottle, the impact on the environment is likely to be irreversible."

Plant in haste, repent at leisure.

At the moment, there is one test site, but up to 24 more are possible, located throughout our land, whichever direction the wind blows. They would be environmental time bombs and we cannot take the risk.

We acknowledge the progress made by the biotechnology industry and the benefits that it can provide to our society. However, exactly as in day-to-day life, no one is above or beyond the law, neither in science can anyone or any institution be beyond control or regulation. We seek to impose not unnecessary constraints, but safeguards for a yet unproven technology.

Just as we have learnt the lessons of Windscale and now recognise the risks involved in moving nuclear fusion from the lab to the field, we must be conscious of the possible consequences of moving GM technology from the lab to the field. We are playing with fire. We risk, in the event of a technological meltdown, a disaster for our agriculture industry, our natural environment and our people. If we play with fire and are not careful, we are likely to get burned. We cannot take that risk. The devastation of the fire would be too great.

I move amendment S1M-675.2, to leave out from "commends" and insert:

"recognises the Scottish biotechnology industry's excellent work and record to date; notes the concerns regarding crop testing expressed by bodies such as the British Medical Association, and calls for a moratorium on field crop testing until all legitimate causes for concern have been satisfactorily addressed."

15:57

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** Some weeks ago, two petitions came before the Rural Affairs Committee. The first asked the Parliament to debate the issue of GM foods. The second asked us to support the call to have GM foods banned in Scotland. It is with great pleasure that I welcome today's debate, which satisfies the demand of the first petition, which the Rural Affairs Committee approved. We did not approve the second petition, but decided to wait to make a judgment, pending a debate on the issue. I am therefore delighted to be able to take part in today's debate.

Genetically modified food has, as we have heard, been a controversial issue for many years. It is widely available in Scotland and, surprisingly to some people, is in cheese products and, I believe, in some tomato products. However, the main sources are, as the minister rightly said, soya and maize. We know that GM products have been included in animal feed in Scotland for some time. It could, therefore, be argued that the genie is already out of the bottle.

We know that the varieties of genetically

modified crop that are available could conceivably have a number of benefits for people who farm and who consume farm products. There is little doubt that genetic modification can bring benefits. It might reduce the persistence in the environment of certain chemicals and the total amount of chemicals applied. It could also increase yields from existing agricultural land although, as we have heard, there are question marks as to whether that would be an appropriate objective to pursue. The concept of cheaper food is difficult for many farmers to understand, when they are selling food at prices that are cheaper than those at which food has ever been sold in living memory.

Genetically modified crops also have a number of potential pitfalls, many of which we have heard about, particularly from Kenny MacAskill. However the problems are perhaps rather too easy to highlight. As he anticipated someone might, I would suggest that Kenny slightly overstepped the mark, entering an area that some might consider as scaremongering.

In the past week, we have had announcements that there will be farm-scale trials of genetically modified crops in Scotland, particularly in the north-east. I am sure that today's debate is particularly pertinent for people who live in the Inverurie and Oldmeldrum areas of Aberdeenshire and will raise concerns about the issues of the past week.

When Ross Finnie, the Minister for Rural Affairs, announced that farm-scale trials were to take place, he did so in a letter to MSPs. In that letter, he said that the GM crops being tested had already undergone years of tests, both in laboratories and in carefully controlled sites. He added that the Executive's scientific advisers, all experts in their field, had concluded that the crops themselves did not present any direct threat to the environment, and were safe for humans and animals.

Therein lies a problem. I, as a Conservative and a farmer, can remember all too easily the situation that existed in the 1980s in relation to BSE. In spite of the people who like to take advantage of this—I am not looking at anybody in particular, George Lyon—I should point out that throughout the 1980s, the Conservative Government acted on best scientific advice, and decisions were made largely based on that advice. The fact remains that the scientific advice changed. At progressive stages of that crisis, it became obvious that decisions made on what appeared at the time to be sound advice were in some way flawed. For that reason, I have serious concerns about the scientific advice relating to this matter.

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** Will Alex Johnstone give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** If it is very short—I have points to make.

**George Lyon:** May I remind Alex Johnstone of exactly what did happen, as opposed to the sanitised version that he gave a minute ago? The scientific advice was right in the 1980s; the big problem was that it was not implemented.

**Alex Johnstone:** I remind George Lyon that we are not here to debate BSE today—we have done so many times in the past. What he has suggested many times in the past is that the Conservatives failed to learn the lessons of BSE. I am suggesting today that perhaps we all need to learn some of the lessons of BSE.

If we are to make a constructive judgment on GM science, we must have all the information in the public domain. I am delighted to have heard today that more of that information and more scientific facts will be placed in the public domain in the near future. I would like to have seen those facts in the public domain, so that the public could have been involved in the decision-making process that led to the decision to go for full-scale field trials. Only if we include the public can we carry them with us.

There are more than just scientific issues involved. One of the biggest opportunities that GM crops present to farmers in Scotland is—Robin Harper will like this—the possibility that Scotland could exist as a GM-free area. It is conceivable that the biggest financial advantage that could accrue to Scotland's farmers through the introduction of GM crops to the United Kingdom could be that we could claim to be GM-free: as a result, Scottish products could command a higher premium in the marketplace. For that reason, we needed to consider more than just scientific advice before proceeding to the full-scale field trials.

In spite of my broad agreement with many of the views contained in the Executive's amendment, I cannot commend its precautionary approach, and I ask ministers to ensure that all information on GM crops be placed firmly in the public domain, so that a full public debate takes place, taking the facts into account. Once that is done, the Conservative party will be the first to support GM field trials in Scotland.

I move amendment S1M-675.1, to leave out from "commends" to end and insert:

"and, while recognising the excellence of the Scottish biotechnology industry and the benefits that GM technology has the potential to provide, calls upon the Scottish Executive to delay the recently announced farm scale trials until evidence from previous scientific tests, proving beyond any reasonable doubt that such trials pose no threat to the environment or public health, has been thoroughly evaluated by a range of independent assessors and placed in the public domain."



16:04

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** While I welcome the fact that the Executive has finally allowed some debate in the chamber on genetic modification, I am unhappy that it has granted a debate of only one and a half hours. Five minutes is not very long to make a presentation. I am also critical of the fact that, as Kenny MacAskill said, this has taken more than nine months and that it took an 18,000-signature petition from Friends of the Earth Scotland and the Green party to add enough weight to secure this debate.

No doubt the Executive has avoided a debate because GM is a difficult issue for it. It is an issue on which the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties were divided before entering into the partnership agreement and on which they are divided still—if reports from the Liberal Democrat conference in London are true. Which, of course, they must be.

The title of the Executive's motion is "Genetic Modification Science", but that title blurs the line between the potentially beneficial applications of genetic science and the particular application of the science that threatens the environment and human health—GM crops and GM food. In reply to a point made by Elaine Murray, I will say that the responsible thing to have done in the farm-scale trials that were set up in 1999 would have been to incorporate research into cross-pollination resulting from pollen flowing into the environment. That was not included in the research. The research tried to discover whether there was any significant difference between the biodiversity associated with the management of GM herbicide-tolerant oilseed rape and maize and comparable non-GM crops.

**Dr Murray:** I take Mr Harper's point about the earlier field trials, but the field trials that were announced last week are intended to consider pollen transfer and cross-pollination. I am sure that he will welcome that.

**Robin Harper:** I do not welcome that, because I strongly feel that research should be done into that without doing trials in the open. While the Scottish Green party is concerned with some other applications of GM science, such as human cloning, at least those applications are confined to the laboratory.

The urgency of this debate on GM crops is that genetically modified oilseed rape is about to be planted in Aberdeenshire on such a huge scale that the results might be irreversible and might damage the Scottish countryside. We are not asserting that it will; we are asserting that it might.

History shows that the appliance of science is not always beneficial. Ecological history is littered with examples of biological introductions that have shown man's knowledge of biology to be naive

and partial. A little knowledge has been shown to be a dangerous thing and interference with nature has been shown to bring unforeseen consequences. Ecological systems are complex and it is difficult or even impossible to predict the outcome of interfering with the balance of nature. In Scotland, ecological havoc has been wreaked by the accidental introduction of the New Zealand flatworm and Japanese knot weed.

We have reached the point where we need to stand back and take a long look at what the GM biotech corporations want to do. It is worth highlighting that we are not talking only about GM oilseed rape, GM beets and GM maize: the biotech corporations have scores more GM crops ready for release or in the pipeline. Although the few GM crops that are currently being released might be less damaging to the natural world, some GM crops that are proposed are more obviously alarming, such as the Bt corn, which has been genetically modified to express an insecticide and the pollen of which has been shown to be lethal to monarch butterflies.

We must have the wisdom to acknowledge that there are limitations to scientific knowledge, in particular to scientific knowledge of complex, living eco-systems. When the stakes are so high, we need to be much more precautionary in our approach. Remember: we are contemplating the possibility of irreversible damage to Scotland's countryside. Would it not be prudent to work with the grain of nature, as with organic farming techniques, rather than against it?

We have not had the time properly to examine the implications of GM crop technology before it is released in Scotland. I propose that we remit all relevant committees of the Parliament to report on the implications of GM crops for Scotland. The Transport and the Environment Committee should consider the long-term interest of Scottish farmers, particularly the impact of GM crops on neighbouring producers of conventional and organic crops—I will return to that in my summing up.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** You are pretty close to your summing up, Mr Harper.

**Robin Harper:** The Rural Affairs Committee could form an opinion on the benefit to Scottish farmers and producers and the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee could take up the point that was so ably made by Alex Johnstone about the benefits to the tourism industry of selling Scotland as a GM-free zone.

I move amendment S1M-675.4, to leave out from "commends" to end and insert:

"recognises the excellence of the Scottish biotechnology industry and calls on the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning,

Rural Affairs and Transport and the Environment Committees to report to the Parliament on the full implications of planting GM crops in Scotland for our economy, agriculture and environment."

16:10

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** The Scottish Liberal Democrats are fully committed to the precautionary principle. Our overall approach on all GM issues is to value caution and transparency. As the minister said in her introduction, it is right to be pro-safety, pro-environment and pro-consumer choice. In his conference speech in Plymouth last weekend, Charles Kennedy said that

"the Liberal Democrats have constantly urged caution. We see science as a servant, never a master. The government must now go the whole hog. Back our policy of a five-year moratorium on commercial GM crops."

My party has campaigned, and is campaigning, to impose tight European international regulations on all aspects of GMOs. The European Parliament's environment committee voted only on Tuesday to toughen up the European position on the 1990 directive on the deliberative release of GMOs into the environment. The European Parliament Liberal group voted to strengthen the accountability of biotech firms that are conducting GMO trials.

In particular, the environment committee of the European Parliament is calling on European member state Governments to take action, when they consent to such trials, to prevent gene transfer from GMOs to other organisms. The committee proposes that biotech firms should have strict civil liability for any damage to human health or the environment that is caused by the release of GMOs and that they should take out liability insurance prior to any release. That would be an important step forward. There is surely no more hard-headed assessment of risk than in the insurance industry. Liberal Democrats are working to strengthen the regulatory regime, and I hope that the minister will address those two points in his summing-up later this afternoon.

It is important that genetically modified crops are fully tested before there is any question of commercial growing. It is vital that we know the full facts and it is right to be cautious. Much greater scientific work is needed on the threat to the environment, which is why it is right to conduct field trials under strict controls that include the appropriate buffer zones. Taking the head-in-the-sand approach is akin to saying that, when Alexander Fleming discovered mould in a test tube, he should have poured Domestos in right away. After all, there would have been—to paraphrase—"legitimate causes for concern that have not been satisfactorily addressed".

In addition to that approach, food labelling measures are extremely important. We want consumers to make informed choices. We will push for GM-free labelling throughout Europe. It is right for consumers who want to avoid GMOs to be provided with clear labelling so that they have a choice. Anyone who goes into a supermarket anywhere in Scotland today can see that they are reacting to what consumers want: that is self-evident in any Sainsbury's, Safeway or Tesco in Scotland.

This debate comes at a time when the public need strong reassurance about food safety. The new Food Standards Agency, which is to be based in Aberdeen, will play an important role independently of the Government. The ethical role that the minister mentioned in her speech is particularly important. I agree with Winnie Ewing, who said that GMOs are scary. That is why the ethical points the minister mentioned about the role of the FSA in that area are extremely important.

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I am curious. Tavish Scott is outlining a distinctly Liberal position, although the Minister for Rural Affairs is a member of the Liberal coalition. If the Liberal Democrats are getting a bang of the bucket out of the coalition, why do they not have direct access to the Minister for Rural Affairs, who can influence policy?

**Tavish Scott:** I am completely lost by Duncan Hamilton's question. I am sure that the minister will deal with that in his summing-up; I am giving the Liberal Democrat perspective. I have talked about what Charles Kennedy said, and the Liberal Democrat minister will respond to the debate on behalf of the Executive.

A more significant development is the announcement of a large-scale trial at a farm near Inverurie, in Nora Radcliffe's constituency. It will enable scientists to assess the environmental impact of GM crops in comparison with more traditional farming practices. It is right for the public to be aware of what is happening in the locality and why. For that reason, it is right that the precise location of sites where GM crops are being grown should be published.

Members may have read in *The Press and Journal* on Saturday about the proposed designation of the Ythan estuary as a nitrate-vulnerable zone. If science can reduce fertiliser inputs, and thereby help the environment, surely it is right to undertake the research. Scientific research can be an ally of Scotland's environment, although, given public concern and the questions that surround GM technology, it is right to publish justification for each separate trial. Transparency in decision making regarding what will be found out is important.

Liberal Democrats endorse the precautionary principle. A policy on GMOs must be based on caution, safety and good science. If evidence emerged from the trials that GMOs pose a threat, Liberal Democrats would argue strongly on the basis of sound science for a legally defensible ban. A commercial moratorium in Europe remains our key aim. The right approach is not pro or anti-GMO but pro-safety, pro-environment and pro-consumer choice.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are now in general debate. If speeches are kept under four minutes, all will get in.

16:15

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** Genetically modified foods is one of the most important issues to face the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has led to heated debate and I am glad it has made it to the Scottish Parliament today. More than most topics, it has split society; I hope that our debate will be informed, balanced and free from the prejudice that has characterised many discussions of the issue.

Irrespective of whether we agree with Kenny MacAskill's claim that there is enough food to feed the world, agriculture must cater to the food and fibre needs of an increasing human population: 1.5 billion in 1900 and now 6 billion. It is estimated that by 2025 the world population will be 8.3 billion. Present food production techniques are inadequate to cater for the expanding population. United Nations research estimates that in the next two generations, twice as much food will be consumed as was consumed in all of human history. It is time for Governments throughout the world to decide how agriculture can best deal with the problem.

The possibilities of new biotechnology techniques providing more food are exciting and must be explored. I do not think anyone here disagrees with that. The big challenge for the biotechnology sector is to ensure that GM food is safe for the consumer and the environment. If that can be achieved, much can be done, not just in foreign aid but for the low paid and poverty stricken at home. Cheap, affordable, safe food could provide basic nutrition for the poorest and most deprived members of society in affluent as well as poor countries.

There is a long way to go before fears about the safety of GM crops are allayed. Terms such as Frankenstein foods used in the wider debate have cheapened the arguments; nonetheless we must take account of people's concerns. People are usually afraid of change. Fears about GM science go far beyond that. They include the concern that the introduction of antibiotic-resistant genes in

plants used for food could have serious implications for public health. Lives must not be put at risk as a result of stubbornness or ignorance. Before any progress is made on the availability of GM food, we must be certain that it poses no health risks.

We must recognise the concerns about potential environmental risks. It would be contrary to the aims of producing GM crops if they led to the destruction of healthy, natural crops. If modified plants that produce new compounds such as insecticides disrupt the balance of nature in some way, we must ensure that that is not harmful. However we cannot bury our heads in the sand, as some of the more extreme elements of the anti-GM lobby seem to suggest—

**Robin Harper:** I like what Janis Hughes is saying about ensuring that we do not compromise other crops. How does she propose to deal with the problems caused for organic farmers, who have no wish to have their crops contaminated by GM trials, but whose farms are already threatened by contamination? An example is five organic farms near Liff where potato trials are being conducted.

**Janis Hughes:** As Elaine Murray said, how can we conduct trials to help us know that GM foods are safe if we do not have field trials, which will result in some cross-pollination? We cannot decide whether it is safe if the trials are not conducted.

**Dr Murray:** Does Janis Hughes agree that it is scientifically impossible for genetically modified oilseed rape to cross-pollinate a potato?

**Janis Hughes:** The member is absolutely right.

GM foods offer exciting opportunities and could revolutionise food and nutrition throughout the world, but without proper scientific testing we will never know. I welcome the statements that Susan Deacon made last week and today, in which she said that the Executive is neither pro nor anti GM but is in favour of consumer choice and environmental protection.

I commend the Executive's position and its adoption of the precautionary approach. Public safety must be our utmost concern, but if we bury our heads in the sand we might miss out on an incredible opportunity to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

16:20

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I associate myself with remarks that have been made about how long it has taken for this issue to come to Parliament. It strikes me that an issue of this importance should have been debated long before now—nine months after the

opening of the Parliament. I know that Robin Harper has been trying to drive the issue forward and I am delighted that we are finally debating it here.

The delay perhaps reveals much about what the Executive feels for the Parliament. It has shown a disregard for the dignity of this institution that I hope will not be repeated in other respects. Today, we are trying to get away from the idea that because GM testing is happening throughout the United Kingdom, it has to happen here. The Scottish Parliament should focus solely on doing what is in the interests of Scotland. I urge members to remember that that is why we were elected.

I will touch on the point of confusion that arose between me and Tavish Scott—so confused was he that he has left the chamber. I asked him to explain why it was so difficult to transmit the strongly held, independent Liberal position, which seems to be different from that of his party in the UK and that of the Lib-Lab coalition Executive, to the Liberal Minister for Rural Affairs. Charles Kennedy accused the Government of

“flying in the face of public opinion”.

He said that

“It shows a highly irresponsible disregard for the environmental agenda of British politics.”

That is the Liberal party's position, yet Liberal members in the Executive are taking an entirely contrary approach. I look forward to Mr Finnie's efforts to explain that.

I want to challenge the concept of safety. I am no scientific or medical expert but I have talked to those who claim to be. The point that has been put to me is that when people are told that GM foods or these trials are safe, how do they know that? If we do not know what we are looking for, we cannot possibly know whether something is safe. Until the Executive understands that, it cannot come to this public forum and tell the people of Scotland that it is happy to proceed. That is true of the lab test, in which we are told that what is being tested is safe for human and animal consumption. How on earth can we possibly know that without knowing the whole spectrum of things for which we should be looking? Equally, in the full farm trials, how does the Executive know what it is looking for? If it does not know, how can it give us a guarantee?

The answers that we have received so far have been very interesting. We are told that we cannot have a guarantee or some firm assurance that it is safe to proceed because of the rough edges of the forward drive of technology and scientific thought. It is not good enough simply to throw the matter into the mists of time and say that although it is not known what will happen, no guarantees

can be given and the Executive will not be liable for anything that goes wrong, and people should trust the Executive because that is just how scientific progress goes.

The issue of consumer confidence should also be highlighted. Alex Johnstone made an interesting point that it may be to Scotland's advantage—it may be its unique selling point—to be the GM-free zone. That would build on Scotland's international reputation as a clean and environmentally friendly country. That is a huge opportunity for Scotland. We have to decide whether to cherish or threaten that reputation. This debate is an opportune moment for us to reinforce our environmental credentials. If we are going to grow consumer confidence in this area and ensure that Scottish interests are promoted, we should support the amendments lodged by Mr MacAskill and Mr Harper.

16:24

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** I have a close and personal interest in this debate, as the first Scottish farm-scale trial of genetically modified oilseed rape is taking place not only in my constituency, but just down the road from my home.

Like others, I believe that the first consideration in this enterprise must be safety, both for ourselves and for the environment. I am pleased that the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy is taking a firm line on strengthening the accountability of biotechnology firms conducting field trials and that it is being supported by the Liberal group in the European Parliament.

It is extremely important that the whole proceedings are open to public scrutiny. I will be satisfying myself that the precautionary principle is being thoroughly applied and that my constituents have access to all the information that they require. I have already spoken to the biotechnology firm that is supplying the modified seed and the scientific institution that is doing the independent monitoring of the field trial. I will be visiting the neighbouring farmers and the people who live in Daviot, the village nearest to the field that is proposed for the trial, to speak to them about their concerns and to do what I can to help them find out any information that they require.

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Nora Radcliffe's party leader, Charles Kennedy, said that Ross Finnie's recent announcement of the crop trial in the Gordon constituency flies in the face of public opinion. Does Nora Radcliffe agree with that statement, or does she think that Charles Kennedy is wrong?

**Nora Radcliffe:** If the member will allow me to

proceed with my speech, he will see where I am coming from. The question will be answered as I proceed.

The local community council has already had a preliminary discussion of the proposal and it, too, will be seeking more information to assure itself and the community that they are satisfied with the precautions that are being taken.

My first concern was to check that there will be baseline monitoring before the trial begins—if there is not, on-going monitoring will be fairly meaningless. Samples will be taken prior to sowing. There will be intense monitoring of the site and its environs this year, while the crop is growing, and follow-up monitoring of the site and its environs over the following two years. A week on Wednesday, I will receive a full and detailed briefing on what will be monitored and how.

It is important to be clear that field trials are the logical next step after laboratory testing and plot trials. Conducting farm-scale evaluation is emphatically not prejudging whether commercial growing will be the eventual outcome; this is still very much a technology under examination. Having said that, the examination should be fair and objective. If this technology can be demonstrated to be beneficial, we do not want to wake up one day and find that we are behind the game and that our agriculture industry is operating at yet another disadvantage. As science has progressed, farmers have refined their use of fertilisers and weedkillers, and the new technology may enable farmers to use even fewer chemicals on their crops, which cannot be a bad thing—for a number of reasons.

Tavish Scott referred to farmers in the Ythan catchment area—not a million miles from Daviot—who are having to look very carefully at their inputs because it has been declared a nitrate-vulnerable zone. My experience of the build-up of nitrates in the Ythan and what I know of the monitoring of the estuary and the catchment area over many years make me very conscious of the complexities of environmental monitoring, and I will pay very close attention to the work of the Scottish Crop Research Institute.

I conclude by reiterating that the right approach is one of sound scientific evaluation, with the health of the environment and the consumer firmly established as the fundamental priorities, and that everything should be done in an open and above-board way to ensure that everyone is kept fully informed.

In reply to Richard Lochhead's question, I think that this is the logical next step in scientific evaluation. It in no way implies that we will proceed with full-scale commercial growing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** I ask members to keep their speeches as short as possible to enable us to accommodate everyone who wants to speak.

16:29

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** I want to declare that before I became a member of this Parliament I was a scientist and that I recognise that science is important in moving the Scottish economy forward. Having said that, there are issues that I would like Ross Finnie to address in his winding-up speech.

It is quite obvious that there is concern, not only in Scotland but in Europe, which I have been made aware of through reading European Commission literature. We have also recently seen on television the situation in the USA. While talking about some of the concerns, I will quote first from the global assessment of the EC programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development. The document, which is called, aptly, "Europe's Environment: What directions for the future?" says:

"The control of both experimental and commercial deliberate release of GMOs is covered by legislation that provides a common approval system for the whole EU. Preparations are underway to strengthen the legislation in response to the concerns of citizens. This will provide for more substantial monitoring of potential impacts."

At the last meeting of the European Committee, two documents came members' way that relate to strengthening the legislation mentioned in that quotation. One of the documents deals with the precautionary principle, which has already been mentioned this afternoon. It says:

"The precautionary principle is not defined in the Treaty, which prescribes it only once—to protect the environment. But, *in practice*, its scope is much wider, and specifically where preliminary objective scientific evaluation indicates that there are reasonable grounds for concern that the potentially dangerous effects on the *environment, human, animal or plant health* may be inconsistent with the high level of protection chosen for the Community.

The Commission considers that the Community, like other WTO members, has the right to establish the level of protection—particularly of environment, human, animal and plant health—that it deems appropriate. Applying the precautionary principle is a key tenet of its policy, and the choices it makes to this end will continue to affect the views it defends internationally, on how this principle should be applied."

Further—this is particularly important—the document says:

"Recourse to the precautionary principle presupposes that potentially dangerous effects deriving from a phenomenon, product or process have been identified, and that scientific evaluation does not allow the risk to be determined with sufficient certainty."

I will now consider Ross Finnie's letter to all MSPs in relation to the farm-scale evaluations of GM crops and the purpose of those evaluations. His letter says:

"Our scientific advisers—all experts in their fields—have concluded that the crops themselves do not present any direct threat to the environment and are safe to humans and to animals."

Through the website that I know is to be set up and through any other methods that Ross Finnie can think of, it is imperative that the public—and MSPs—are given the information that justifies the scientific advisers' conclusion that there is no direct threat to the environment and that those crops are safe for humans and animals.

At the end of that page of his letter, Ross Finnie says:

"They will also look at potential pollen transfer and cross-pollination."

It is not clear to me that such tests will be undertaken in an enclosed area. It appears from Robin Harper's speech that they could be undertaken outwith the trial area. That must be taken into account and I ask the minister to explain how. Is that action not against the precautionary principle, given that we do not know what area will be affected?

16:34

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the fact that we have finally managed to secure time for a debate in the Scottish Parliament on this important subject.

GM is a fast-moving science and we must not allow it get ahead of us. The SNP does not want the Executive to storm ahead with GM food without giving the Parliament adequate opportunity to examine the implications of such a move. It is quite clear that the Executive is outpacing public opinion and we must have time to address the many concerns expressed by the public and by many organisations.

It has taken 10 months since the Scottish Parliament was set up to get this debate. The Food Standards Agency, which will have a remit over GM foods, is not yet up and running, but the Executive is storming ahead with crop trials. The biotechnology industry set up a group on GM technology only last month, and we have not yet had a chance to hear its side of the argument.

We are told that the Government is taking advice from such bodies as the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. How many people in Scotland know who is on those committees? How many people in Scotland have spoken to the people on those

committees or had a chance to ask them questions? No one. No one in this Parliament has had a chance to ask questions or speak to them, or even find out who is on those committees. Why are we not meeting those people? Why is Scotland's national Parliament getting to hear everything at third or fourth hand? That is completely unacceptable.

The Rural Affairs Committee, as Alex Johnstone said, recently got a note giving the background to those committees. It is quite clear from reading that note that the people who put it together—officials of this Parliament—had to call the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in London to get all the information about the committees. In spite of that, our ministers feel qualified to proceed and make important decisions. It is time that the Executive got a grip on the issue of GM foods.

We have had many empty assurances. A press release on the much-talked-about Government website says:

"The Government makes the location of trial sites public as an exercise in openness and transparency."

Yet what do we hear at Daviot, the site of the first crop trial announced by the Minister for Rural Affairs? People living adjacent to the chosen site are quoted in the press as saying:

"We were not even asked or consulted about this. I don't really know anything about genetically modified crops so I don't know if I should be concerned or not but I think someone should have explained to us what it all means."

So much for transparency and openness.

The fact that only one site has been identified in Scotland surely tells us that Scotland's farmers do not want to touch GM crop trials with a bargepole. They are busy developing the organic sector, which has a lot more to offer Scotland.

It is not only the agricultural sector that is expressing concern. Even the salmon farmers do not want to touch the issue with a bargepole. In *The Press and Journal* last week, under the headline

"GM salmon rejected by Scots farmers",

it said:

"Scottish salmon farmers have made it clear that they are totally opposed to genetically-modified salmon".

A spokesman for Scottish Quality Salmon was quoted as saying:

"None of our members want to get involved in importing GM salmon eggs."

According to the Minister for Rural Affairs, however, everything is hunky-dory and everyone is on side for the development of GM foods in Scotland.

It is the duty of this newly established Parliament

to lead the public debate on GM foods, not to be led by the debate south of the border and to do as we are told. Surely the minister realises that, now that we have our Scottish Parliament, when London says "Jump," we no longer have to jump. Ross Finnie announced the crop trials before this Parliament had even had its first opportunity to debate the issue.

GM foods is one of the biggest issues facing this Parliament, and we need time to address the many important matters associated with it. We have to maximise our influence over the decisions that are made. We cannot ride roughshod over public opinion; to do so would be letting down the people of Scotland. Even the remotest suggestion that the trials might have any adverse consequences would be highly damaging to Scotland's reputation for the best quality food produce.

We call on the Scottish Executive to scrap its plans for those crop trials and to give this Parliament its due place in investigating the issue. We must find out all we need to know and inform the people of Scotland. Let us make today the beginning of the debate on GM foods, not the end.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to closing speeches. I apologise to those members whom we were unable to call this afternoon. I call Dr Elaine Murray to close for the Labour party.

16:38

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to debate these issues. People are right to be cautious, because there could be risks to human health or to the environment from some transgenic organisms. People have the right not to touch GM foods with a bargepole if that is what they want, and that is why labelling is important, as Tavish Scott said. Nobody should be forced to consume genetically modified foodstuffs against their will.

There is, of course, a difference between those foods that contain genetically modified materials and those that are produced by genetically modified plants but are themselves chemically and biologically indistinguishable from the naturally occurring product. People should have the right to produce and to consume organic food without any fear that that food may inadvertently have been contaminated by cross-pollination from genetically modified plants. That right must not be compromised, and that is why we need to know more about the possible hazards of cross-pollination.

Of course, scientists working in the field of genetics are themselves divided on the potential benefits and hazards of this technology. On the anti side, there is concern that genes may be

transferred to other plants—not necessarily potatoes and oilseed rape, but other plants that are compatible—and thereby inadvertently alter the genetic makeup and characteristics of those plants and the ecosystems in which they survive.

There are also well-founded anxieties that genetic modification could alter plants' metabolisms, and possibly result in the production of toxins that could get into the food chain through the consumption of GMOs by farm animals. That is why it is important that no trial GM crops enter the food chain. The experience of the BSE crisis, as Alex Johnstone said, naturally makes people cautious. There is concern about the introduction of terminator genes into GMOs, which prevent the organism from replicating, and thereby tie in producers to the annual purchase of seeds from powerful monopoly suppliers.

On the other hand, there are the possible benefits of gene technology. Contrary to much public knowledge, pharmaceuticals have been produced by expression from genetically modified bacteria such as *E coli* since the early 1980s. That is possibly scarier than some of the matters that we are discussing today.

Genetically modified plants can be used to produce vaccines. Axis Genetics, which went bust last year through investment problems, was producing an oral hepatitis B vaccine in plants. Plants can also be developed that have resistance to pesticides and to herbicides, which makes them less environmentally invasive than those plants that are used at present, although I have some concerns about herbicide and pesticide resistance.

Plants that are adapted to hostile environments, such as dry, hot, wet or saline conditions, might be developed to enable food production in currently infertile environments. Plants that produce biodegradable plastics, for example, could have environmental benefits. They may produce plastics that do not pollute the environment for evermore, and such plastics would emanate from a renewable source and therefore not use up the world's finite oil reserves.

Labour's position is not pro-genetic modification, nor is mine; neither is its position necessarily anti-GMO. There needs to be more medical and scientific opinion, and there must be no general cultivation of GM crops until scientific and medical opinion is completely satisfied that there are no unacceptable effects to either public health or the environment. However, we cannot resolve those dilemmas without knowing the facts. Banning GMOs for evermore would be impractical, because they will be used in other parts of the world and could be introduced illegally into our environment.

We need to know the facts. We need to know if

there will be an environmental price for the use of GMOs, but we need to make informed choices using knowledge that is based on rigorous scientific method, and not on melodramatic pseudo-science or 19<sup>th</sup>-century horror stories—a point that was well made by Janis Hughes and something that, I am sorry to say, was illustrated by Kenny MacAskill.

The only grounds on which such choices can be made are independent, controlled and rigorously evaluated research, using organisms that are proven not to be hazardous, but which can provide information about the possibilities of, for example, genetic transfer to other plants. Controlled farm-scale experiments have to be used, because that is the only way in which we can get that information. No committee of this Parliament can report on the implications for the environment or agriculture of GMOs at this time. We must proceed cautiously, but we must let our scientists collect and analyse the data, provided that carefully controlled experimental conditions are used. We can discuss the implications, but the research needs to be done first.

I commend the Executive's motion to the Parliament.

16:44

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** First, I will turn to some of Elaine Murray's points. The only way to address them is to pass my amendment, because the committees that the amendment refers to are where her points should be debated.

Before I sum up, I will address the fact that there seems to be general acceptance of that appalling "Equinox" programme that was shown on television earlier this week, which was made by the appalling Martin Durkin. He has a judgment against him from the Broadcasting Standards Commission for his programme "Against Nature". "Equinox" gave the impression that the third-world countries of this world cannot wait to get hold of GM crops. I will read a quote from all 23 African delegates at the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations meeting in Rome in July 1998:

"We, the undersigned delegates of African Countries participating in the 5<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources, 8-12 June 1998, Rome, strongly object that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries is being used by giant multinational corporations"

such as Monsanto

"to push a technology that is neither safe, environmentally friendly, nor economically beneficial to us."

That is the third world's view. Members must not ignore it. We must not be patronising and say, "We are going to offer them the crock of gold and the

solution to all their food problems." Ask Oxfam, Christian Aid or any other organisation that works in the third world. They will say that the third world's problem is western greed, not lack of food supplies. Lack of money to buy those supplies is, perhaps, a problem, as is lack of distribution.

Of the two other amendments that are before the chamber, I lean towards the SNP's, although, as far as I can see, there is no reason why members should not pass all three. The Conservative amendment has some things to commend it.

My amendment does not necessarily rule out acceptance of GM crops in the future and it does not call for an end to GM research. It does not seek to undermine a small but important area of research that could be of benefit to us all. It does, however, call on Parliament to recognise that the argument about the safety of GMOs has not even begun as far as the public of Scotland is concerned. It calls on Parliament to recognise that the relevant committees of the Parliament are the proper, the good and the public way to conduct the debate. My motion calls on Parliament to assume its responsibilities in this matter. It calls on Parliament to do what it was elected to do—debate and decide publicly on matters of grave public and environmental importance.

I appeal to back benchers of all parties and none. If they do not, through my amendment, vote for a full investigation of GMOs by Parliament's committees, they will be handing powers over to the Executive and abandoning their responsibilities. Members will be failing to assert their right in the chamber to advise the Executive and to call it to account.

16:47

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** I am not being overdramatic when I say that the subject of debate epitomises one of the great conundrums of our time. As a people, we have ability and science, but we lack certainty. We do not want to stand in the way of progress, but we are nervous—if not sometimes terrified—of what that progress might unleash. We are right to be nervous, right to be cautious and right to be somewhat wary of what is, after all, a comparatively new science.

We have heard convincing arguments from members on the benefits that the scientists might bring us through this nature-defying technology. It does not, however, matter how convincing the arguments are—the practice of genetic modification is a non-starter unless, as Robin Harper said, the body of public opinion agrees with it. That is where the conundrum lies.

Despite all the assurances, the great British



public remains largely unconvinced about the desirability of GM foods and crops. The great Scottish public is no different. They do not want GM foods. The more that we, the politicians, tell them that they should want GM foods, the less they, as consumers, will want them. That was the overriding lesson of the BSE crisis. If the Executive has not taken that lesson on board, it is considerably more arrogant than I thought it was.

The House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities published a report on genetic modification in agriculture in December 1998. It recommended that risk assessment should include

“direct, indirect, immediate and delayed effects.”

The second and fourth of those adjectives most concern public opinion. I am sure that they are also of most concern to members.

If the Executive insists—as, no doubt, it will—that we need have no fears over the indirect and delayed effects of GM, why is any analysis virtually hidden from sight and why are the statistics virtually unobtainable? Why, in these days of supposedly open and accessible government, is proof so hard to find? I welcome what the minister said about internet accessibility, but that is not enough to satisfy public opinion. The proof of the pudding is usually in the eating, but in this case the pudding is not even on the menu so it is no wonder that the public has severe reservations.

The Conservatives firmly believe that there are potential benefits, which could be achieved by careful and controlled genetic modification of crops. We are equally firm in our belief that in order to achieve public acceptance, which is a prerequisite of the successful commercialisation of GM crops, we must take the steps that would have been outlined by my colleague Jamie McGrigor, had he been around when the Presiding Officer was looking for him.

They are good, sensible steps. I believe that the most important one is to secure what we believe is a beneficial technology against its possible misapplication. There is a very fine line to be drawn between genetic modification and genetic manipulation. It is the prospect of the abuse of the latter that is the real reason for the fear that is felt by the opponents of this technology. I admit to Kenny MacAskill that, at one extreme, the potential exists to solve world hunger but that goes hand in hand with the other extreme, in which lurks the potential to destroy our countryside.

That is why the Conservatives urge the need to be extra-cautious over the future programme of GM development. That is why we insist that the science and its results should be open and accessible to all, as Sylvia Jackson said a few

moments ago. That is why I commend the amendment, in the name of my colleague Alex Johnstone, to this chamber.

Susan Deacon was recently referred to—she may not know about this—as the Margaret Thatcher of Scottish politics. If that is a reputation of which she disapproves, and I suspect that it may be, I am happy to offer her a way out. On this issue at least, she could prove that she is a lady that is for turning. If she does that, she will do a great deal to meet the aspirations of many Scottish people.

16:52

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** This has been a good debate and, perhaps surprisingly, there has been a general acceptance that we should proceed with caution. The division seems to arise as to where we draw the line and how much caution will be enough.

I will summarise some of the arguments. One of the first arguments against field trials is that they will have a long-term and irreversible effect on other plants and crops due to cross-pollination. There is evidence that the cordon sanitaire, the exclusion zone, around field trials can never be large enough. Once that is crossed, it is liable to be crossed for all time. I know that cross-pollination is not possible between oilseed rape and potatoes, but Elaine Murray said that it is possible between oilseed rape and other species. This is not a no-risk scenario.

In her speech, Susan Deacon said that she wanted to follow the precautionary principle, but surely that would be better exemplified by a moratorium rather than by going to field trials at this time. She also referred to European legislation and the fact that, under council directive 90/220/EEC, we must take commercial crops that are approved. I hope that when Ross Finnie replies to the debate, he will confirm that we are under no obligation to permit any field trials. Some other dangers are probably relevant only to larger-scale growing, so they will not be proved or disproved by field trials.

We will be being blind if we do not accept that this project will develop a momentum of its own. Nora Radcliffe referred to the next logical step. My worry is that there will always be a next logical step after every step that we take. This may be the only time at which we will be able to pause.

The dangers to which I am referring include the effect on other crops and organisms because of the success of GM crops. A danger is that, by natural selection, insect-resistant crops will promote the development of insects—I do not want to call them super insects, but that is the

term that the press would use—that are able to destroy insect-resistant crops. Far from reducing the need for pesticides, we will end up needing pesticides that are more powerful than the ones that we now use. To the extent that those crops are successful, the effect on the ecosystem—on the birds and insects that live on these crops—is unquantifiable and will not be predictable as a result of field trials.

The other main argument, which many speakers have alluded to, is the commercial effect on Scottish agriculture and food, both of which are highly significant industries. One of the few ways in which they will survive and prosper is by concentrating on quality. In agriculture and food, there is significant scope for increasing sales and increasing margins by the proportion of sales in the quality areas. The question is whether the existence of GM crops will cause problems in the public perception of the quality of other Scottish crops and of Scottish animals.

There has already been a vast swing in the enthusiasm of the supermarkets for GM foods, a reaction that surprised many. We would be rash if we took the public's reaction to GM crops, and to other crops that are grown in the same countries as those crops, for granted. On the matter of quality, it will be the public's perception that is right. It will not matter what science says; it is what the consumer says that will be important.

I do not think, therefore, that we can afford to take any risk that undermines the quality reputation of Scottish produce. I will let Sam Galbraith, the former minister for health, take his seat. He may be interested in this. Alex Johnstone was right: it is not just about avoiding potential disadvantage. There may be some positive commercial advantage to being GM-free. *[Interruption.]* I will sum up, while the Westminster habits that some people find difficult to leave behind persist on the other side of the chamber.

The key aspect of the decision on GM trials is that it is potentially a one-way decision. There may be no return, once genetically modified organisms are out in the environment. They may well be beneficial to mankind; however, the jury is still out on that. I have heard nothing to convince me—and to convince many other people in this chamber—that irreparable damage will be caused by waiting or by delaying. However, damage might well be caused by going ahead too quickly. That is why we need a moratorium and that is why the amendment should be supported.

16:57

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** I am very glad that the Scottish Parliament has had this opportunity to debate an issue that has been,

and will continue to be, the subject of much public and media concern. That concern is understandable—it emphasises the duty that we all have to ensure that the public has access to information that will enable it to come to informed decisions and information that will reassure it that the regulatory process that we have in place to protect them and the environment is transparent.

There have been many interesting and valuable contributions to this debate. However, I have found it slightly surprising that, particularly in the case of the contributions from the Scottish nationalists and the Conservatives, we appear to have ignored the European structure that is in place. Indeed, in so far as the Scottish National party, the Conservative party, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats are signed up to the European Union, that impinges upon us and places obligations upon us in terms of the precautionary principle that has been developed over many years.

I am not suggesting that that principle has not been improved at times. Indeed, there have been many recent improvements to some of the EU directives. Let us be clear that we are governed in this field by Council directive 90/220/EEC, which deals with the precautionary principle as it affects us. It is apparent that we are bound by the directive at any stage of the development of a crop, unless the member state can show that a product represents a threat to human health or to the environment. In that case, there are provisions within existing legislation for the Scottish Executive to withdraw a consent or to ban a product.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Is the minister saying that we are under a legal obligation to license field trials?

**Ross Finnie:** I was coming to that point. That is the case, provided that the very conditions that I have read out are adhered to. If we cannot meet the condition in terms of clear scientific advice, we are obliged to allow those trials to take place. Failure to do that would leave the country open to infraction proceedings. I do not take that lightly.

**Alex Johnstone:** Does that mean that we may ultimately find ourselves under a legal obligation to allow full commercial release?

**Ross Finnie:** That is a possibility. That is one of the reasons why, at a UK level, there was great anxiety to secure an agreement that there would be an absolute moratorium on commercial release for at least three years. That gives us the opportunity to use the present trials to determine whether we can advance the necessary scientific advice.

In the case of foods, there is a similar position, although there is an even more rigorous regime. Foods must be rigorously assessed under the EC

Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients Regulation 258/97. In the UK, the Food Safety Act 1990 prohibits the sale of food that is injurious to health, fails to comply with food safety requirements or is falsely described—that includes GM foods.

**Robin Harper:** Would the minister explain how the precautionary principle has been applied to the potato trials at Liff—release number reference 00/R23/7—in relation to the five organic farms nearby?

**Ross Finnie:** That is a rather specific reference. All I can tell Mr Harper is that those applications go through the statutory procedure and they are assessed by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment—ACRE—which sets out the regulations that should be observed. If Mr Harper is saying that those regulations have not been observed, that is a matter that should be taken up. There are powers to deal with it.

I want to discuss some of the other important issues raised in the debate. We are not in a position to declare that we are going to have a GM-free Scotland. However, we are in a position to follow carefully the precautionary principle as it is set out. The Executive has no intention of departing from that principle. When I informed members about the field trials and said that we had no evidence, that meant no evidence on the basis of the previous steps that had been taken. If evidence that the trials are not in compliance comes to the attention of the Scottish Executive, it will take the necessary steps either to end the trials or to withdraw a particular licence. Members can be assured of that.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson:** I want to repeat a question that I asked previously about pollen transfer. If pollen transfer is going to be considered in the trial site, would it be useful to examine that outwith the site as well and to include that in the scientific evaluation?

**Ross Finnie:** There are two aspects to that. First, the distances that are set for the trials are based on previous evidence within the limited plot-scale trials. The observation of pollen transfer in the current trials will not extend just to the buffer zone. Secondly, Mr Harper was right in saying that the previous trials in England did not include the observation of pollen transfer, but the current evaluations will.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Ross Finnie:** In a moment.

I want to deal quickly with the apparent difference between my policy and that of other Liberal Democrat members. All members, as keen readers of political science, will have read the full

policy document that was debated at the Liberal Democrat assembly in Harrogate. They will know that many of the measures to improve EU directives on GM that were called for at that assembly have already been adopted. In addition, we called for a five-year moratorium and the document clearly stated that that would require an amendment to European legislation. I assure members that if there are changes to the EU directive, the Scottish Executive will take them on board.

I would like to move on to deal with other points that were made during the discussion of the Conservative and SNP amendments. I was disappointed, if that is the right word, in Kenny MacAskill's opening remarks. He went not only over the top but very much further. To talk of technological meltdown and a disastrous threat to Scottish farmers is going too far.

Of course there are myths surrounding this issue; but we in the Scottish Executive are affected not one jot by claims by Monsanto. We are sticking to a regulatory process that has been laid down by the European Commission and the European Parliament. We are not deviating from that, and we will certainly not be put off by the nonsense that is often put about concerning GMOs.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The minister is winding up now.

**Ross Finnie:** Points were made about the unavailability of information. The bodies to which Richard Lochhead referred have public websites. The operations of those bodies and the decisions that they take are available on those websites.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Will the minister give way?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but the minister is into his last minute and we are well over time.

**Ross Finnie:** My apologies, Mr Chisholm.

The Executive is keeping an open mind on the benefits that GM science has the potential to deliver. Science-based testing procedures are in place and we will not move from that position. We believe that we cannot turn our back on a developing science in which Scottish scientists play a prominent role. However, we must not proceed pell-mell in pursuit of some so-called golden goose. That road has been travelled enough.

The Scottish Executive's approach is sensible and responsible. It is firmly rooted in the precautionary principle, and it best serves the interests of Scotland and the Scottish people. We

will not take risks with public health. On GM foods and crops we are neither pro nor anti. We are pro-safety, pro-environment and pro-consumer choice. I commend the motion.

## Subordinate Legislation

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2000 be approved.—[*Mr McCabe.*]

## Points of Order

17:07

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

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. You heard the points of order that were raised earlier by Margo MacDonald and Michael Russell. I wonder whether you have had time to reflect on those points of order, and whether you intend to make a considered statement in response. My view, as leader of the largest Opposition party, is that Mr Spencely's report, when it is received by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, should be made immediately available to every member of the Parliament. If the corporate body then wants to add to that report, it can do so over the following few days. Even if you have to convene a meeting of the corporate body over the next few days in order to adopt that position, will you please do so? It is vital that we proceed on the basis of maximum and immediate disclosure of information, and not on the basis of leak and counter-leak.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):**

Technically, that was not a point of order, but I do not want to be difficult, as this is an important issue. Perhaps it would help if I outlined what the corporate body has decided should be the programme of events leading up to the debate.

On Monday afternoon, the corporate body will receive the Spencely report. We have not yet seen the text, so that will be our first chance to look at it. We will then meet first thing on Tuesday morning to consider the report and to start work on a draft of our report to the Parliament, of which the Spencely report will be an annexe. Everyone will see a copy of that. Our present plan is to meet on Wednesday to finalise our report. On Thursday, we plan to publish both reports and then to have a seminar, which I will chair. At that seminar, every member will have the chance to cross-examine Mr Spencely and his two colleagues who produced the report.

On Tuesday the following week, there will be two sessions—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—at which members will have the opportunity to question the design team on the whole project. We will then have the debate on Wednesday.

I think that that is a sensible and open way in which to proceed. The report has been commissioned by the corporate body. If we commission a report, we are entitled, like any committee of the Parliament, to consider it before it is published for the whole Parliament.

**Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP):** On a point of order.

**The Presiding Officer:** Just a second. If Mr Salmond or anyone else feels strongly that that is not the right procedure, they should by all means write me a note and I will put their points to the corporate body at our meeting on Tuesday morning. However, I do not feel that I can overturn a decision that the corporate body has sensibly made. I think that the procedure is very open.

**Mr Salmond:** Further to my point of order, surely the key point is that the corporate body is a servant of the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** Indeed.

**Mr Salmond:** Information that is provided to the corporate body should be made available immediately to the Parliament. If the corporate body then wants to add its own opinions, let it do so over the next few days.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am not prepared to overturn the decision that the corporate body has already made. If Mr Salmond wants to put that request, I will ask the corporate body to consider it on Tuesday morning. Personally, I do not see any reason to change what we have already decided.

**David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In addition to the points that you have made about the timetable, may I invite you to enter into discussions, on behalf of the corporate body, with the First Minister, so that the whole debate on Spencely and the project is informed by consideration of costs and alternatives, bearing in mind the fact that Mr Spencely and the corporate body have a remit that is limited solely to Holyrood. Of necessity, many other dimensions involve the Scottish Executive, because they have expenditure implications, and we cannot take an informed decision without knowing about them.

**The Presiding Officer:** I accept that, and I have discussed it in the abstract with the First Minister. I do not know who will participate but, obviously, there has to be an Executive input into the debate on the Wednesday. Whether the Executive makes a statement before then is a matter for the Executive, but I can assure you that I hope that there will be an Executive input into the debate.

All I can suggest is that, if Mr Salmond feels strongly about the matter, I will put his request to the corporate body on Tuesday morning, but there would need to be good reasons for us to change our decision. The timetable that I described is a logical and open way of enabling members to get lots of information before a decision is reached.

**Ms MacDonald:** On a point of order.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am not going to continue—

**Ms MacDonald:** With all due respect, Presiding

Officer, my point of order concerns the principle of the ruling that you gave this afternoon. You ruled out of order my colleague Michael Russell's request for a motion without notice, but that ruling was based on the premise of what you had already ruled in respect of my request that the Parliament, on a majority vote, could instruct the corporate body on the disposal of the Spencely report. You ruled that, because the corporate body had commissioned that report, my request was unreasonable, if not out of order. My contention—the reason why I question the ruling—is that the corporate body is always at the disposal of a majority vote of the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not in dispute, and I have not ruled you out of order. I am saying simply that I am not prepared to have a mini-debate on the matter, or to take a motion without notice on it. There will be plenty time to consider the matter. I have invited Mr Salmond to put a reasoned case to the corporate body on Tuesday morning, when we will consider it collectively. I am not prepared to overrule the decision that we have taken.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** On a point of order. I seek clarification on the timing of decision time. I understand that members wanted to raise points of order, but you will understand that some of us operate to tight timetables. It would be appreciated if decision time could be held as close as possible to the time at which it is supposed to be held, if points of order, of the nature of those that we have just heard, could be taken after that.

**The Presiding Officer:** The normal procedure is that I have to take a point of order whenever it is raised. This afternoon's debate overran, for a very good reason—it was an important debate—and we finished late.

## Decision Time

17:13

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** There are eight questions to be put. The first question is, that amendment S1M-676.1, in the name of Wendy Alexander, which seeks to amend motion S1M-676, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on public investment in the infrastructure of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (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)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)

(LD)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 59, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Because amendment S1M-676.1 is carried, amendment S1M-676.2, in the name of Annabel Goldie, falls.

The third question is, that motion S1M-676, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on public investment in the infrastructure of Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members: No.**

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (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)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**AGAINST**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)

Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 59, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament recognises that, to enable Scotland to become a dynamic, prosperous country prepared for the 21st Century, priority must be given to the provision of quality affordable homes, a high standard learning environment for children, and modern high quality communication links; and welcomes the action taken by the Scottish Executive to provide the policy framework and secure the resources necessary to achieve the targets set out in the Programme for Government and make a real difference in our communities.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that amendment S1M-675.2, in the name of Mr Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S1M-675, in the name of Susan Deacon, on genetic modification science, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members: No.**

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**AGAINST**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (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)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 33, Against 59, Abstentions 16.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that amendment S1M-675.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S1M-675, in the name of Susan Deacon, on genetic modification science, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Adam, Brian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)



Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### AGAINST

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (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)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 48, Against 57, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that amendment S1M-675.4, in the name of Robin Harper, which seeks to amend motion S1M-675, in the name of Susan Deacon, on genetic modification science, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)

Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 36, Against 53, Abstentions 19.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that motion S1M-675, in the name of Susan Deacon, on genetic modification science, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (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)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (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)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 57, Against 19, Abstentions 28.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament acknowledges the public concerns

which exist in relation to the development of genetically modified foods and crops; commends the precautionary approach of the Scottish Executive and the rigorous regulatory systems which are in place to control the development of genetically modified foods and crops, and recognises the excellence of the Scottish biotechnology industry.

**The Presiding Officer:** The eighth question is, that motion S1M-674, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, approving the draft Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2000, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2000 be approved.

## Bus Corridors (Glasgow)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I ask members who are not attending this debate to leave as quickly and quietly as possible.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-601, in the name of Bill Aitken, on bus corridors in Glasgow. The debate will conclude after 30 minutes without any question being put. Members who want to participate should press their request-to-speak button now.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the concerns of businesses in Glasgow about the effects of bus corridors on the main arterial routes in and out of the city on local businesses, and believes that the local authority should give the fullest possible consideration to the views of small businesses prior to the imposition of these schemes, in view of the potential adverse consequences on employment.

17:21

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** At first sight, this might appear to be a trivial matter for this august body, but when one looks into it further, it is far from that. The issue is one of employment and the possible impact of the council's proposals—as yet uncertain—on parts of the city of Glasgow, particularly on parts of the poorer areas of Glasgow.

It is easy to see the other side of the argument. The creation of bus lanes would obviously facilitate the moving of traffic. Buses contain people, like us, who are anxious to get to work or to go home from work. All of us know the frustration of being in long traffic queues. That said, however, surely the issue goes somewhat wider than temporary inconvenience; it is about the effects that the measures would have on the east end of the city, in Shettleston Road, and on the west end of the city, in Dumbarton Road.

I draw the attention of the minister, who comes from the east, to the fact that Glasgow's structure is perhaps unique among Scottish cities. The main arterial routes into Glasgow are through tenemental areas, with shops and small industrial units on the ground floor and private flats above. The structure and design of the buildings is such that there is one way in—through the front door of the shop. The only other route that there is likely to be, probably for fire escape purposes, is a door from the shop to the close or an enclosed back court. It therefore follows that if there are to be deliveries to or collections from a shop, they will have to take place through the front door. Equally obviously, it will not be possible, if bus lanes are introduced, for those to take place without

breaking the relevant regulations—and clearly we should not encourage people to break the law. The effect on businesses of not having access would be quite cataclysmic.

I cite a case with which I dealt in the days when I was a councillor in the city of Glasgow. I was consulted by a constituent who was having severe problems paying his rates. On examination, the facts of the case were quite terrifying. He ran a small grocer, newsagent and tobacconist shop, which at rush hour went, in his words, "like a fair". Between 8 am and 9.30 am, the shop was particularly busy and between 4 pm and 6 pm, it was extremely busy. Bus corridors were introduced in Maryhill Road, an area now represented by Patricia Ferguson. His shop, which provided a livelihood for him, one full-time assistant—who was a relative—and two part-time assistants, was no longer financially viable. The area, which is in dramatic need of employment, was therefore left without one full-time and two part-time jobs. If that were to apply to Dumbarton Road and Shettleston Road, the effects would be equally disastrous.

The effects go beyond businesses. If there is no access—no deliveries or collections—and no customers, with the police ensuring that passing trade is a thing of the past, a real threat will be posed to the viability of many small businesses. Shops will close; nothing will take their place. We will have row upon row and street after street of boarded-up shop fronts. That will attract vandals and there will be a danger of fire raising. It will give a depressing appearance to the area as a whole. If the proposals proceed, that will hit the areas concerned with a double whammy of job losses and the appearance of dereliction, which is unlikely to be conducive to attracting any future or further investment into already deprived areas.

I am well aware that this is a matter for the local authority, Glasgow City Council. I do not accept, however, that the Scottish Executive and the Parliament have no input. I am also aware that a consultation process is under way in Glasgow. I cannot help but feel, however, that the pencilled-in proposals were completed some time ago in biro, and that it is the council's intention to implement the proposals at the earliest possible opportunity.

I seek to highlight the difficulties that would arise and to put forward in as strong a manner as possible the representations that I and colleagues from other parties have received from people in the relevant areas, who are concerned as to the future viability of their businesses. In many cases, they are also concerned about the effects on the district in which they live and operate. If the proposals proceed, dereliction will affect many parts of Glasgow.

I will confine my remarks to that. The debate has

excited considerable local interest. I have had intimation from several members of other parties that they wish to participate, and I wish to give them the maximum opportunity to do so.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Indeed, Mr Aitken—six members have asked to speak. Everyone will be able to do so if speeches are kept to just under three minutes.

17:27

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):** I will not presume to give Sarah Boyack a lecture on the make-up of Maryhill. She is very familiar with it, given that she used to live there and that her mother and brother are still constituents of mine, I am pleased to say.

I thank Bill Aitken for raising the matter in Parliament, and it is valid that we examine the issues. As Bill mentioned, we have had a bus corridor in Maryhill for some years. Originally, it seemed to most of us who lived on or near Maryhill Road to be a fairly attractive proposition.

A great deal of traffic came into the city centre via Maryhill Road, mainly, I have to say, from Bearsden and Milngavie, but also from other areas of Glasgow, taking Maryhill Road as an alternative to other main roads. A reduction of three minutes in the average bus journey, with the concomitant reduction in the pollution from standing vehicles, seemed an excellent way forward. The scheme still has some merits, but over the years, two factors have emerged that are perhaps not so attractive to the residents or to the shopkeepers of the area.

The first factor is that a new development of modern houses at Celtic Street has become a car park for Maryhill railway station. People from outside the city come into Glasgow, park their cars there and make their way into the city centre by train. The result for the people of Celtic Street is that they cannot park anywhere near where they live.

The shops on Maryhill Road have suffered in recent years as a result of the bus lanes. I do not blame the bus lanes entirely for all the closures of small shops on Maryhill Road. People's shopping trends have changed in recent years, too, and there is more of an emphasis on people concentrating their shopping in out-of-town developments or in the city centre. However, the bus lanes have, at the very least, exacerbated the situation.

As a result, long stretches of Maryhill Road—a major route into the city—have become festooned with "To Let" and "For Sale" signs. Tenements above empty shops encounter problems with dampness penetrating from below and it is difficult

to trace owners, tenants, factors or anyone who will take responsibility for the property, which is, of course, also vulnerable to vandals.

I hope that the minister urges Glasgow City Council to limit the use of bus lanes to peak times. That would be of great benefit to traders. I hope that the city council considers alternative uses for the shops that are lying empty on Maryhill Road. It has already been suggested that they be turned into ground-floor accommodation for people with special needs, although that might not be possible with all the shops. We should think about having cheap rental packages and incentives to encourage back into the area the small shops that used to proliferate on Maryhill Road.

The local councillors and I have put our concerns to Glasgow City Council, which is prepared to consider those ideas. I ask the minister to urge the council to take on board the concerns of the communities where bus lanes are proposed and to consider assisting communities such as Maryhill which already have bus lanes and the associated problems.

17:31

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I was pleased to hear what Patricia Ferguson said about the Maryhill corridor. Having seen the example of Maryhill Road, the traders from Shettleston Road and Dumbarton Road have joined together to publicise their view that bus lanes are not always beneficial to an area.

I am concerned not only about the shops in an area but about the community as a whole. I worry that, without local shops, local people will not have any services. Also, local people are employed in the shops that are at risk. While I sympathise with the shopkeepers, I also sympathise with the people who use those shops. We must preserve that amenity. Buzzing places such as Dumbarton Road and Byres Road would die without those shops.

I have asked the minister many questions on this subject. In all her answers, she talks about consultation. I agree that we need consultation, and it is because of the importance of consultation that the traders from Shettleston Road and Dumbarton Road set up the traders association. They felt that they were not being consulted. I am pleased that Mr McPhie of the traders association, which submitted a petition with more than 17,000 signatures, was one of the first people in Scotland to address the Public Petitions Committee. The committee passed that petition to the Transport and the Environment Committee, which will, I hope, take action.

The traders have had a rough time from some Glasgow councillors regarding the meetings that

they have held, most of which I have attended.

I have a map with me that shows proposed bus lanes and bus gates and which was produced in August 1999 by Glasgow City Council with no consultation. I have minutes of a council meeting from 29 November. They mention plans for bus lanes going back to April. Again, local people were not consulted on those plans. The council agreed to

“enter into a partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council, First Glasgow and Glasgow Wide Taxi Owners Association”.

There is no mention of the traders or the people who live in the areas that would be affected.

We are told that a leaflet was sent to everyone in the areas, but it was sent only to businesses—residents did not receive it. It was sent at the end of November and the beginning of December, and the returns were to be in by 18 January. However, good consultation cannot be carried out over the Christmas and new year period.

I have attended several public meetings and I know that residents are concerned about the fact that they know nothing about the plans. I would like the minister to take their concerns on board.

17:34

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** I thank Bill Aitken for giving Glasgow MSPs the opportunity to discuss the quality bus corridor from Faifley to Baillieston.

I want to emphasise the word “quality”. We must bear in mind that the object of the exercise is to create a quality bus corridor. Having said that, and to make my position clear, I do not support 24-hour or extensive bus lanes. I support wholeheartedly what Patricia Ferguson said, which is the meat of the matter. I do not support the bus gates outwith the city centre and I do not support any development that would inhibit the quality of residents’ life or the livelihood of traders on the Glasgow route.

Like other members, I support consultation on the proposals for change involving communities, traders and all other interested parties. It is important to note that this is pre-statutory consultation. It is to the council’s credit that it has widened that consultation. Consultation on bus corridors is important for communities. We should not forget that we are essentially trying to get more people of all types to use the bus service. People are demanding changes so that they can get to work more quickly, pick up their children more quickly and attend hospital more quickly. We should not lose sight of our objective; those are things that car users take for granted.

The bill has raised the concerns of traders. I

would like to address those concerns. Part of the corridor—in Dumbarton Road—is in my constituency. Bill Aitken has already raised some of the concerns of traders. I have studied the bus corridor proposals in detail, and I think that the local traders have been misled about the extent of the proposals. I feel confident that, through the consultation, traders will be listened to. I do not believe that any of us—never mind Glasgow City Council—would put together proposals that would negatively affect traders in the city.

I am fortunate enough to have a good relationship with my local councillors. Aileen Colleran and Eamon Fitzgerald, in the Partick and Hayburn wards, which are affected, have kept me informed and have done a lot to keep their constituents involved in the consultation process. In the west end, and in Partick in particular, there will be 300 new households within a very short walking distance of the Partick shopping area. Traders would welcome that with open arms. It is important to note that local walk-in trade is as important to small traders as trade from car-stopping, which has been described this evening.

We have a responsibility, as representatives in the Scottish Parliament, to ensure that we take a balanced view when taking up the interests of the traders and the community. We all want the best quality of life for those who live near the bus corridor—those whom we want to use the bus service—and the best quality traffic management system for all. The city council should be congratulated on the wide consultation that it has undertaken.

17:37

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I, too, congratulate Bill Aitken on securing this debate. I was struck by Patricia Ferguson’s comments. We were all saddened by the situation in the Maryhill Road, which she knows well. I do not want that to be replicated elsewhere, so we have to take preventive measures in other parts of the city. We must not forget that the purposes of a transport system—notwithstanding global warming, public transport projects and all the rest—are to take people where they want to go, to facilitate commerce and to sustain communities.

Like other members, I have met local people in Shettleston Road and Dumbarton Road. I have been briefed on the scheme by council officials. I have heard the chairman of the council committee bravely and sincerely defend the scheme at a packed meeting in Shettleston Hall. I remain convinced that, as it is presently designed, it is not a very good scheme. I cannot understand how it is in the public interest, in the areas that are not congested outside rush hour, to think of banning private vehicles from stopping at the shops or to

give buses—some of them articulated, double-barrelled monsters—fast right of way in the inside lane, next to the pavement. Statistics have shown an increase in the number of accidents in Maryhill Road as a result of just such an arrangement.

It cannot be in the public interest to damage the trade of suburban shopping centres and the communities that rely on them; we are trying to sustain communities and create social inclusion. One statistic, which I heard at the meeting at Shettleston Hall, impressed me. In a survey of one day in Shettleston Road, there were 176 buses with 10 or more passengers, but 341 buses with nine or fewer. Some were running in the evening, no doubt, but the figures show that two out of three buses are not reducing congestion but adding to it.

We all have experience of consultations that are a device for implementing something that has already been decided. I hope that the consultation on this issue is not of that kind. I would be encouraged if the council indicated that the working groups will report back to local people after the consultation and involve them.

The way forward is to look at the whole transport corridor: the railways, the road system and things such as park and ride at the fringe of the city. There are considerable concerns about the proposals and they should not go ahead as presently mooted.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would like to squeeze in Mike Watson and Dorothy-Grace Elder, but their speeches will have to be in headlines or bullet points—they have two minutes each.

17:41

**Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):** I will be brief. I thank Bill Aitken for introducing a debate on an important issue.

Although my constituency does not have bus corridors, many of my constituents use them. When I was the MP for the constituency, I was heavily lobbied on the issue of Victoria Road before the bus corridor there was introduced. I have also been written to by people who live in Shettleston Road. The consultation is obviously reaching people. That is important because the survey carried out after the Victoria Road bus corridor was introduced showed that 68 per cent of people did not recall publicity about the changes before they were introduced. That included a high proportion of the shopkeepers.

We should not forget that the purpose of bus lanes is to ease congestion, make bus travel easier and reduce the number of cars going into the city. Patricia Ferguson's arguments were

important. In the greenways system in Edinburgh, the bus lanes are on at certain times of the day—sometimes only at rush hours. The Glasgow bus lanes are on permanently. That could be looked at for all bus lanes, not just the bus corridors.

I am concerned about the shopkeepers. In Victoria Road, an area I lived close to and used until two years ago, it is undoubtedly the case that since the introduction of the scheme a number of "For Sale" and "Closed" signs have gone up on shops. That is to be regretted, although part of that equation is that Asda built a big supermarket at Prospecthill and Safeway built a new supermarket at Crossmyloof.

Bus lanes are necessary, but we must consider the effect on shopkeepers. We must also think about travel in and through Glasgow, which is a problem, as anybody who does it regularly knows. Consultation and more co-operation could lead to a better outcome than occurred at Maryhill and Victoria roads. I sympathise with the people in Shettleston Road. I know Alistair Watson and his colleagues will be following the debate and will respond to it in their decisions on how to proceed.

17:43

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am sorry we have only two minutes because the issue is important, it affects many thousands of people and the principles go beyond the situation in Glasgow. I also thank Bill Aitken for raising the subject for debate.

The Shettleston shopkeepers' petition has 17,300 signatures, which is huge for this Parliament and shows the strength of feeling. I have attended most of the public meetings. There were more than 400 people at one meeting at Shettleston Hall. Only one person voted for the bus corridors and he was a bus company executive. The Shettleston traders have done some superb research, finding out that accidents have gone up alarmingly in areas where bus lanes have been introduced.

Strathclyde police figures show that the accident rate on Maryhill Road went from 30 people injured to 65 injuries, including one death, in the first year of fast bus lanes. The remaining shopkeepers told the Shettleston shopkeepers that trade was down 75 per cent in Maryhill Road and down 82 per cent in Victoria Road. That is devastating.

Shortly after the public meeting protesting about the bus lanes, we learned that Shettleston's shopkeepers were about to face a double whammy, as a gigantic new Tesco is planned for the end of the street. It was rather strange that we were not told of those plans at the public meeting. Tesco promises to offer 450 jobs, but 300 jobs in small shops are affected—there are 140 small

shopkeepers. Small shopkeepers in Britain have suffered greatly. Fifty thousand small shops have closed in a generation—that is too many. The Parliament must have a policy to protect our shopkeepers, who inject so much into the heart of a community.

17:45

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** I am grateful to Bill Aitken for initiating this debate, if only so that I can put on record that, as I was born in Glasgow, I am most interested in its economic and environmental future—I did not want to interrupt his opening remarks to correct him.

I know from the oral questions that I answered last month, from the many written questions that have been lodged and from the petition that the Parliament has received, that members have a strong interest in this matter. It is important that we have the opportunity to debate this issue, but we should recognise that this is a matter for Glasgow City Council and West Dunbartonshire Council rather than for us.

However, this debate could be helpful. Members have made many points, to which I would like to respond. I will outline the provisions of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 that apply to bus corridors; set out the process that needs to be carried out by councils; and inform members of action that has been taken—I am aware that many members are aware of some of those actions. Members made some wider points effectively. It is important that bus corridors should be considered in the context of a wider policy on transport. The work that has been done by both councils on their local transport strategies allows us to consider this debate in that wider context. For example, park-and-ride schemes, which Patricia Ferguson mentioned, are important and must be developed by councils. The future of retailing and the pressure on shops must be underpinned by a strong planning regime—the guidelines and local plans that are in place in both councils.

Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, local authorities have a general duty to ensure the free-flowing movement of traffic in their area, which they can do by introducing traffic regulation orders for a variety of purposes. It is for each traffic authority to decide on the best way in which to proceed to meet that statutory obligation. Bus lanes are one way of doing that.

To promote a traffic regulation order, local authorities have to follow the procedures laid down in the Local Authority Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1999. They are designed to ensure that local authorities cannot just impose traffic orders. They provide for consultation,

publication of proposals, a statutory period for objections to be received and, if objections are not withdrawn, a hearing procedure. Depending on the nature of a traffic order and whether objections are sustained, the matter may eventually come before the Scottish ministers for determination.

I need to be careful about what I say on any particular scheme, as I may become involved in determining whether it should go ahead. It would be inappropriate for me to say anything about proposals that could prejudice my future involvement. I am sure that members appreciate my position. However, I hope that it will be helpful if I speak on those issues.

The background to bus quality partnerships in this instance is the successful joint bid by Glasgow City Council and West Dunbartonshire to the first round of the public transport fund for the development of bus priority measures along the Baillieston to Faifley corridor. The public transport fund is aimed at assisting local authorities to add key value-for-money developments to their public transport network. The joint bid was considered very carefully by ministers in March last year and a total of £6 million of additional capital consent was made available to the councils to assist with that project.

The detail of the project is entirely a matter for the two councils. They received a further award of £6.6 million from the second public transport fund competition, to assist them with the development of another two quality partnerships in the city.

Bus lanes cannot be introduced regardless of public opinion, which is where the key issue of consultation comes in. The comments of many members present about the consultation in which they have already been involved are extremely important. I stress that this is pre-consultation that is taking place in advance of the statutory procedures. The councils should be commended on the extent to which they have been prepared to engage with individual members of the public and the business community. Significantly, a number of workshops have been held. Those are not about signing on the dotted line, but about enabling members of the community—of the business and shop communities in particular—to express their views on the detail of the proposals.

Patricia Ferguson's point about the Maryhill corridor raises detailed issues of operation that are, quite rightly, part of the consultation process. Pauline McNeill, Robert Brown and Sandra White also made some detailed comments. Robert Brown's point about the ownership of schemes was particularly crucial, while Mike Watson made an important point about co-operation. I am sure that the councils will read the *Official Report* of tonight's debate and will take on board the points that members have made.



When dealing with an issue of this sort, which has aroused huge public interest, councils need to go beyond the statutory consultation process. Important work has been done so far, and the consultation process will give people an opportunity to contribute on the principle and the detail of the proposals. This is an excellent example of local democracy working as it should. Neither council is starting with preconceived ideas, and both are listening to the concerns of those who believe that they may be affected by bus lanes. As the member for Edinburgh Central, I am aware that it is critical to get the detail right. That is why we need informed discussion, particularly at local level. I urge the MSPs who have spoken in and been present at tonight's debate, and local residents and businesspeople, to raise their concerns directly with the councils.

I know that members have not been able to make all the points that they would have liked, but their views are important and should be taken into account when schemes are being considered. The councils are listening, and people inside and outside this chamber must not miss the opportunity to make themselves heard. Until the councils promote a traffic order for bus corridors and have been through all the statutory procedures, I will not be able to comment directly on the proposals.

I hope that members have found the debate useful and I look forward to the two authorities taking on board the points that have been made tonight and in the workshops.

*Meeting closed at 17:53.*



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**Thursday 30 March 2000**

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