

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 10 May 2000
(*Afternoon*)

Volume 6 No 5

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2000.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 10 May 2000

Debates

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	429
MOTION WITHOUT NOTICE	431
<i>Motion—[Iain Smith]—moved and agreed to.</i>	
STATE OF THE NATION	432
<i>Motion—[Mr Salmond]—moved.</i>	
<i>Admendment—[Mr Jim Wallace]—moved.</i>	
<i>Amendment—[David McLetchie]—moved.</i>	
Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	432
The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace)	440
David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con)	446
Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)	455
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)	457
Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)	459
Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)	460
Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con)	462
Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)	464
Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	466
Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)	468
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)	470
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	471
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)	473
Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab)	475
George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)	477
Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con)	479
The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish)	481
Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)	484
DECISION TIME	488
A90 UPGRADE	493
<i>Motion—[Mr Davidson]—debated.</i>	
Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con)	493
Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	495
Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)	497
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)	498
Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)	498
Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab)	500
Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP)	501
The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack)	502

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 10 May 2000

(Afternoon)

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We welcome to lead our time for reflection today the Right Reverend John A Mone, Bishop of Paisley.

Right Reverend John A Mone (Bishop of Paisley): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for inviting me to lead the Parliament in this prayer and time for reflection.

I want to share one or two of my favourite prayers with members. The first is for all who love the poor and all who love peace. It is the prayer of St Francis of Assisi.

LORD make me an instrument of your Peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

The short prayer that I now wish to say is the prayer of the Alcoholics Anonymous, which is said every day and which I say because I find great strength in it in my leadership role. It is called "Serenity".

God grant me the
Serenity to accept the things
I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
and Wisdom to know the difference.

The final prayer that I want to say was written by my sister, who is terminally ill. She wrote the prayer through a possum machine. It is called "Grace Before Meals".

Lord God
We welcome you
To our table.
We invite you
To be present
In all circumstances
Of our lives
With your power and goodness.

May we eat and drink
And live
With simplicity
And without extravagance
So that our sisters
And brothers
Less fortunate than ourselves
May eat and drink and live
With dignity.
May all who share
The meal
Rise in justice
To wash the dishes
And clear up the kitchen.

God bless you and your work.

Motion without notice

14:33

The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Iain Smith): I request permission to move a motion without notice, to swap today's members' business with that of tomorrow.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I have decided to accept the motion without notice. The effect of my decision is to allow the Parliament to decide whether to consider business motion S1M-828, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe.

Are we all agreed?

Members: Yes.

Iain Smith: The effect of the motion is to swap members' business today with members' business tomorrow. In moving the motion, I thank Mr David Davidson in particular for agreeing to the late swap. I also thank the ministers who are affected by that swap.

I move, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau,

That Parliament agrees to the following revision to the Business Programme as agreed on 4 May 2000: Members' Business on Wednesday 10 May will now be on the subject of S1M-737, David Davidson: A90 Upgrade and Members' Business on Thursday 11 May will be on the subject of S1M-769, Mr John Munro: The Black Cuillin.

The Presiding Officer: As no one has asked to speak against the motion, I put the question to the chamber. The question is, that motion S1M-828 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

State of the Nation

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a Scottish National party debate on motion S1M-818, in the name of Mr Alex Salmond. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:34

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I have great pleasure in moving the SNP motion in my name.

I welcome the Deputy First Minister to his place. I know that he will not take it amiss if I say that I hope that his stay in that place is brief, as everyone in this Parliament wants to see the First Minister back in action, fit and well, as soon as possible. [*Applause.*]

I imagine that the next two months will be interesting for the Deputy First Minister, who is, I understand, the first Liberal in a position of power since David Lloyd George. I certainly hope that those two months will be more successful than the two days that he enjoyed in the post a couple of weeks ago, when he managed to turn a massive parliamentary majority—with the exception of the Conservative party, of course—against the iniquity of sales by sheriff warrant into a humbling of the Executive as it tried to stall the process.

Although many comments were made about the Deputy First Minister's performance then, nothing that the SNP or other parties had to say could compare with the words attributed to one of his own colleagues in last week's *Scotland on Sunday*, which reported:

"The Liberal Democrats were incensed that their leader had been made to look 'a right plonker', as one of them colourfully put it."

Now that he is in a position of authority and power, I hope that he will insist that, as a bare minimum, his Labour colleagues do not conspire to make him look a right plonker over the next two months.

However, things could be entirely different over the next two months. Perhaps the Deputy First Minister will go back to the Liberal Democrat manifesto on which he fought the elections a year ago. Perhaps we will have an announcement that proportional representation for local government will be delivered in this session of Parliament; perhaps the private finance initiative will be swept away and replaced by something more acceptable to the public interest; or perhaps there will be a declaration against the unnecessary 1p reduction in income tax so that that money can be invested in public services.

This might come as a surprise to those on the Labour benches, but only a few weeks ago Jim Wallace and I were together in the House of Commons lobbies on a joint Liberal Democrat-SNP motion against the 1p reduction in income tax, calling for the money to be invested in public services. As we marched through the lobbies together, I wondered whether, at some point in the shuttle journey from Scotland to London, Jim had been transformed from a Government loyalist to a rebel back bencher. I hope that, now that he is in charge, the Executive will take a different direction over the next two months.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will Mr Salmond give way?

Mr Salmond: After I develop the point. [MEMBERS: "What point?"] Here it is: perhaps the signs of rebellion have started already. On the radio this morning, the Minister for Rural Affairs was asked about the damage that the strength of sterling was doing to the food exporting industry in Scotland. His first answer—that there was not much that he could do about it—did not surprise me. However, I sat up, took notice and desperately scribbled down his next comment: he said that there was a desperate need for a currency realignment. He also said that he had made clear to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in no uncertain terms the difficulties that the strength of sterling was causing for the food processing industry in Scotland.

I was trying to imagine the confrontation in 11 Downing Street between the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Captain Mainwaring was telling General Brown, "Something must be done about the strength of sterling and the food processing industry in Scotland." Gordon Brown was replying, "Don't panic, don't panic—something will be done in time."

I am hoping for a change in direction in the two months that the Liberal Democrats are in charge of the Executive. However, I fear that we will continue with the past year's muddle and confusion, which has stretched from special advisers to the resignation of Lord Hardie and from the Holyrood project to the debacle on warrant sales two weeks ago.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Mr Salmond has rightly recognised the effective way in which Parliament—particularly our committee system—is working. However, does he accept that his failure to prevent the SNP group from vetoing George Reid's chairmanship of the Parliament's progressing committee hits hard at the very independence of the Parliament that we strive to defend?

Mr Salmond: I am impressed with Mr Rumbles's language: he talks about my failure to prevent the SNP group from doing something. Perhaps, according to the Liberal Democrats, I should have made a leadership instruction. Given that 60 members of the Parliament were foolish enough to vote for the Holyrood project, I would have thought that one of those members would want to step forward and take charge of the project over the next few months.

To get back to the muddle and confusion of the Executive parties, I think that we can say, after a year, that two things are absolutely certain. Those things may have been matters of debate in the Scottish Parliament elections one year ago, but they are beyond debate now.

First, there was the argument—replayed in the Executive's amendment today—that the constitutional settlement represented the "settled will" of the Scottish people. I reflected, when I saw that amendment, that the Deputy First Minister—the acting First Minister—is, nominally at least, a federalist, so I was not clear how he could believe that the current settlement represented the settled will of the Scottish people. None the less, we now have substantial evidence that the Scottish people, by a majority of three to one—across every political party's support—do not share a belief in the fixed point in time that is suggested by the Executive parties. According to the BBC poll, people in Scotland want more powers for the Scottish Parliament. We know that that must be true, because even Tom McCabe, the Minister for Parliament, seized the initiative on the radio yesterday morning and said that, of course, the Parliament could develop in time and, of course, this was a process, not a once-and-for-all event.

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): Does Mr Salmond understand and accept that there is a process within the United Kingdom that is welcomed and appreciated by the people of Scotland? The process of our democracy, here in Scotland, will take place within the benefits of a United Kingdom, but not after we have been ripped from the United Kingdom and all its benefits.

Mr Salmond: Yes,

"and Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripped."

The Minister for Parliament argues that he wants a development in the Parliament's powers, but within the context of the United Kingdom. When the Minister for Finance was asked exactly the same question on the radio this morning, he did not give that position, but said merely that the Parliament would grow; he did not mention the powers. So, according to the Minister for Finance, we will grow, but not necessarily in powers.

According to the Minister for Parliament, the Parliament will get increased powers. What a pity that that was not reflected in the Executive amendment that is before us today.

It is unfortunate that both the unionist parties in the Parliament do not recognise the reality that people in Scotland are recognising in ever-increasing numbers. The Scottish people recognise that the powers of the Parliament will develop; that things are not fixed in time; and that this is not a once-and-for-all settlement, but a Parliament that will develop and grow. We believe that the end destination is Scottish independence. *[Applause.]*

Devolution—

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mr Salmond: I am tempted, but I will develop my second point, if the member will allow me.

Dr Simpson: Was that a yes?

The Presiding Officer: I think that it was a no.

Mr Salmond: The second forecast—

Dr Simpson rose—

Mr Salmond: If the member will sit down, he will hear my second point and perhaps he will want to debate that. *[MEMBERS: "What was the first point?"]* The first point was that the Parliament will, indeed, grow in power. In the ranks of the Executive—even from someone as powerful as the Minister for Parliament—there is recognition of that fact.

The second forecast that was made a year ago, by Lord Robertson of NATO, was that devolution would kill the SNP stone dead. Modesty forbids too much boasting from the SNP benches, but a glance at the Scottish opinion polls, or the by-election results, or the local election results, would indicate that the SNP is alive and kicking and overtaking the Labour party across Scotland. I think that we can dispense with Lord Robertson's forecast. Some of us, of course, may be slightly uncertain over the fact that a man with such acute powers of observation should have the fate of the western democracies hanging in the balance, in his position as general secretary of NATO.

We can safely say that both forecasts have been consigned to the unionist dustbin of history. What I want to do today—

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

Mr Salmond: Not just now. I understand the member's anxiety, but if he lets me develop a few points, no doubt I can make room for him as we move along.

I want to look at the centre of what the Executive claimed in its programme that it could do. I want to look at the economy and how it is performing in Scotland. I want to look at public services and I want to look at the reality of what is happening in local government services round Scotland.

The economy is the major boast of the new Labour party. According to Gordon Brown, the economy is undergoing an unprecedented boom. The reality in Scotland is that we now have fewer than 300,000 manufacturing jobs for the first time since the industrial revolution—that is the reality of what is happening in the Scottish economy under the governance of the new Labour party in London and in Scotland. Of course, the argument that is made by the Executive is that a decline in manufacturing employment is inevitable; it is to be accepted in the modern world. How is it, then, that manufacturing employment has increased in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Ireland over the past few years? They are all small, independent countries in Europe.

As we pointed out last week, the Labour party spent 18 years in opposition telling the Tory Government that the real unemployment figures were the International Labour Organisation figures, not the claimant count. On those real figures, Scottish unemployment is 7.5 per cent, which means that 189,000 people are unemployed. If one looks round Europe, one will see that we are not a country of low unemployment. On comparable ILO figures, unemployment is lower in Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Norway, Portugal, Denmark, Ireland and Sweden, all of which are small, independent countries in Europe.

Far from being an economic success, the Scottish economy is suffering huge economic underperformance; there have been missed opportunities by the barra load, which means lost opportunities for individuals round Scotland. Only today, another 200 textile jobs in Kilmarnock have gone. As the Minister for Rural Affairs was forced to recognise this morning, the strength of sterling is an albatross round the neck of the Scottish agriculture sector and manufacturing economy.

Mr Kerr: How do Mr Salmond's arguments account for the lowest unemployment in Scotland in a generation and the more than halving of youth unemployment in Scotland in the past 12 months?

Mr Salmond: After waiting so long for the intervention, I found it something of a disappointment. Unfortunately, the member was not in Westminster during the years in which the Labour party said, "Don't look at the claimant count, it's been fiddled 26 times. It's not a real measure of unemployment." On the ILO figures, not only is unemployment at 7.5 per cent in Scotland, but it has risen over the past few

months. That is the reality. The member should go back to his constituents—not just to those who are unemployed, but to those who are in low-paid jobs and part-time jobs, who are disguising the unemployment figures—and recognise the reality of what is happening in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. There is far too much barracking. Members must listen carefully to the speech.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It may be that most people in the unionist parties do not want to hear Mr Salmond, but I would like to hear him, and I cannot.

The Presiding Officer: We would all like to hear him.

Mr Salmond: Winnie, I quite enjoy the barracking from the unionist parties.

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

Mr Salmond: Not just now.

I have learned through long experience that the more the unionist parties barrack, the more they are worried—they are certainly worried today.

Public services are at the heart of what this Executive claimed that it could do. The health service in Scotland is confronted with the reality that spending on medical equipment has declined alarmingly in Scotland. What does the Minister for Health and Community Care do? She instructs her civil servants to go back and revise the statistics. What a triumph that was. After that revision, we are told by the minister that health spending on medical equipment did not decline from £100 million to £25 million, but declined from £49 million during the Tory years to £25 million last year under Labour. Admittedly, spending on medical spending is now not 25 per cent of Tory spending—it is 50 per cent.

As we talk about the health service, is it not shameful that in a country that has the highest incidence of coronary heart disease in Europe, we will not have a heart transplant facility in the next year? Is that not a matter for shame for the health service in Scotland?

The Minister for Children and Education is fond of telling us how we should consider comparisons with south of the border. Why do we not consider comparisons across Europe? Why do we not raise our sights to look at what is happening in education spending across the continent? Denmark was spending 84 per cent more per pupil in 1995 than Scotland is today. In secondary education, Finland was spending 18 per cent more per pupil in 1996 than Scotland is today. Instead of comparing Scotland with south of the border, we

should have an international outlook and examine the best practice in Europe for public services.

Housing is the next major test of the Executive. For many years, we have argued with the Labour party about the importance of relieving local authorities of the burden of debt. Labour said for many years that that was impossible, but it suddenly seems to have become possible. Unfortunately, it is to be accompanied by a block transfer into the private sector—the option of community housing associations is not being considered immediately. If the Executive's proposals are implemented, that will signal the beginning of the end of the socially rented sector in Scotland. Furthermore, VAT of £200 million will be imposed on the proposal.

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

Mr Salmond: I see that there is some puzzlement on the Labour back benches. I think that the Minister for Communities will find it extremely difficult to force through her proposal for the future of the housing stock in Scotland.

On health, education and housing, the Executive stands condemned of failing public services in Scotland. It is clear that there is a massive underspend in local government. The Minister for Finance tells Aberdeenshire Council that everything is all right. As a member for Aberdeenshire, I can say that everything ain't all right in the north-east of Scotland. The Scottish Liberals in Aberdeenshire, which is the only Liberal Democrat-run council, condemned the underspend in local authorities. Arthur Midwinter's analysis makes it absolutely clear that local authority spending in Scotland is 9 per cent lower in real terms than it was in 1993-94.

Today, the Parliament is being lobbied by pensioners from the Irvine pensioner group, who point out the reality of the withdrawal of warden services by their local authority. How can any member not be aware of the real cuts in local authority provision that are taking place the length and breadth of Scotland? The Executive has failed on public services, just as it has failed on the economy.

It is time for the Parliament to raise its sights and to tackle those issues in a national and international context. People want the Parliament to have real powers so that it can deliver real things for real people.

An answer that I received from the House of Commons library points out that Scotland's share of natural resources would make it the 11th most prosperous country in the world in terms of gross domestic product per capita. Why is it that a country with such natural wealth should be left by the Executive and by the London Government with

an underperforming economy and underfinanced public services? Why should we settle for second or third best in Europe when we could achieve equality with other nations?

The Scottish people recognise that this is not an event—a once-and-for-all transfer of power. It is a process, the end-product of which will be Scottish independence. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr Salmond: I wonder whether the unionist ministers recognise the absurdity of their position. The Minister for Children and Education says that Scotland can run its education system but cannot run its economy. The Minister for Health and Community Care says that Scotland can run its health service better but cannot run its social security system. Wendy Alexander thinks that she can run everything better, but does not think that Scotland should have European representation in its own right. That is an absurd position and an unsustainable argument—it will not stand the test of time.

When we debate the future of Scotland, we are debating not the end destination, but the time scale. A majority of the supporters of every political party in Scotland believes that the Parliament will have more power in the future. The Minister for Parliament thinks that the Parliament will have more power within the context of the United Kingdom. I believe that we are engaged in a process whose destination is Scottish freedom and independence.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that in its first year many members working in committees, in the whole Parliament and in their constituencies have been active in moving Scotland forward; regrets that the Executive has failed to match the positive approach of Scotland during the referendum campaign of 1997 and the continuing mood of Scotland for radical change and progress; notes that in particular there is a crisis in manufacturing, a reduction in local authority services including housing, a lowering of morale in the education and health services, growing impoverishment of the elderly, the reliance on expensive PFI for public investment, a deterioration in the transport infrastructure, the abdication of responsibility for genuine consultation and good governance and a general confusion and malaise in the partnership administration; recognises the support of a majority of Scots for increased power for our Parliament to tackle these problems; notes that independence and equality of status is the best possible constitutional settlement for our nation, and looks forward to offering the people of Scotland the opportunity to choose a future of economic progress and social justice based on such a settlement.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Mr Salmond and other speakers for the fact that the speech-timing clocks are not working properly. Members will have to rely on the visual signals that I give.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On a point of order. I was going to point out that the clocks were suggesting that Mr Salmond had spoken for 14 hours and 55 minutes; perhaps it just felt that long. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. As I explained, the clocks are not working today. I call Mr Wallace.

14:56

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): I will begin by thanking Mr Salmond for his kind opening words. I am sure that the First Minister would accept them in the generous spirit in which they were offered. I know that Mr Salmond speaks for the whole Parliament in wishing Donald Dewar a very speedy recovery.

Few would disagree that the past 12 months have been a time of momentous change in Scotland. A year ago this week, the Scottish Parliament—which was adjourned in 1707—reconvened. That, for many of us, was the achievement of a goal that had been fought for long and hard. It was the start of a new and greater challenge for us all: to make the Parliament work and to make it different and very much better than what had gone before.

At an early stage, we endorsed the principles that were set out by the consultative steering group, which was chaired by Henry McLeish. Those principles are: the sharing of power between the people, Parliament and the Executive; accountability, openness and participation; and the need to promote equal opportunities for everybody in all we do.

We have embraced new technology, not only in our voting system, but through the publication of our proceedings and reports on the internet and through the use of video-conferencing to link parliamentarians and constituents. Parliament's committees have established themselves and have been crucial to the achievement of greater power sharing, accountability and openness in a way that is unrecognisable to the old hands of Westminster.

Members will recall—as I do—that in February, the Equal Opportunities Committee made a powerful case for including a question on religion in the census. The Executive listened and changed its position and in March the Parliament passed amending legislation, which now has royal assent. In next year's census, there will be a question on religion. In Westminster, the parallel bill languishes on a long list of bills that are objected to regularly on Friday afternoons.

I always said that if all we did with our new Parliament was to transplant Westminster from London to the Lawnmarket, we would have failed.

In much of what we do and the way in which we work, the Scottish Parliament is already a much better place than Westminster.

However, the matter goes beyond our new Parliament. Many of the debates in the constitutional convention and in the referendum focused on the new politics and the opportunities that a system of proportional representation would bring in challenging the parties to work together in partnership. The Labour party and the Liberal Democrats have responded to that challenge.

In partnership, we have ensured stable and effective government. We have taken forward a full programme for government: investment in health and education; pursuing social justice; promoting an enterprise economy; and making government more open and accountable. Thirty-seven commitments in the programme for government were scheduled for completion by this month. Only one remains outstanding.

In our legislation we have responded to issues raised by the committees.

Mr Salmond: Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: The member must hold on for a minute.

We have issued 75 consultation papers in the past year. Many individuals and organisations feel involved and that their views are valued in a way that simply did not happen before. That is the case not least because the Executive has shown willingness to listen and to change proposals in the light of representations that it has received.

Mr Salmond: Given the importance of the committees to the structure of Parliament, does the Deputy First Minister regret not taking the committees' advice on the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Bill?

Mr Wallace: The member will recall that the Justice and Home Affairs Committee recognised that the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Bill was incomplete legislation and that it said that the Executive ought to introduce legislation that would fill the gaps in Mr Sheridan's bill. That committee took the view that we should pass the bill and introduce a new bill. The Executive took the view that we should not pass the bill, but still introduce a new one. At the end of the day, the will of Parliament prevailed. I accept that and the Executive will introduce amending legislation.

We have given financial and practical support to the establishment of a Scottish civic forum. In short, we have not simply established a partnership between two parties—we have worked to forge a partnership with Parliament and with the people to deliver a programme of change for the better.

In the midst of change, however, some things never change. We need only listen to Alex Salmond today. We need only read the SNP's motion. About the only thing it does not accuse the Executive of is slaughter of the first-born. The old politics lives on and the old story still holds true. People know when the nationalist plane has arrived because long after the engines have stopped, they can still hear the whining. *[Interruption.]* Listen to Alex Salmond—we can still hear the whining.

Alex Salmond and his party perpetually paint a picture of a Scotland where doom and gloom abound and say that the only solution—for some of them, at least—is to rip Scotland away from the rest of the United Kingdom. My colleagues on the coalition benches and I live in a Scotland where—for the first time—the Administration has established a strategy to tackle social exclusion, combat poverty and improve housing. It is a Scotland where the economy is performing well, where unemployment is low and employment is high and where unprecedented resources are being channelled into health and education. We are not complacent—we know that there is always more to be done and we are working constantly to improve things.

Let us consider a number of specifics. We are delivering a legislative programme that is more substantial than any programme that was ever possible at Westminster. Six bills have been passed by the Parliament, at least three more are due for completion before the summer recess and six more have begun, or will shortly begin, their passage through Parliament.

Phil Gallie: Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I will give way in a moment.

We have introduced legislation such as the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill, which will bring compassionate relief to 100,000 Scottish households. We are bringing about the long overdue abolition of the feudal system—the system that has brought misery to many unsuspecting people. We have introduced legislation to promote standards in schools and to establish the long-awaited national parks. We are also acting on a range of transport issues.

Phil Gallie: Does the minister agree that the Executive is forcing several bills through Parliament and boasting about the number of pieces of legislation? Is not it the case that some committees are not being given sufficient time to scrutinise bills and consider them appropriately? Is not the Executive boasting about a weakness in the system?

Mr Wallace: Mr Gallie was a Westminster MP for some time, so he knows that the amount of consultation of committees and their involvement

in the passage of bills is unknown in the Westminster system. There is ample consultation. I accept that we did not consult on, for example, the Mental Health (Public Safety and Appeals) (Scotland) Act 1999. In that case, a sheriff exposed a loophole in the law on 2 August and by 9 September the Parliament had passed amending legislation. I do not believe that Westminster would have returned from recess to do something like that. *[Interruption.]* Mr McLetchie is muttering from a sedentary position. Let us remember that the loophole was in legislation that was passed in 1984 by a Tory Government.

This year, there is an additional £126 million for schools plus budget payments of up to £50,000 per secondary school. Tuition fees have been abolished in a £50 million package of support. We did that—the SNP opposed it. We have a £50 million package of new money for student finance, which is targeted at students from less-well-off families. We are fulfilling our commitment to widening access to further and higher education.

Further education has received a 9 per cent increase in funding on the previous year.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: I am spoilt for choice. I give way to Mr Swinney.

Mr Swinney: I am glad that Mr Wallace has exposed his customary generosity in giving me the chance to intervene.

Does Mr Wallace recall the manifesto on which he fought the election last year? It included a commitment to abolish tuition fees for all Scotland-domiciled students. Will he—for once in the debate—be honest and concede that he has failed to live up to that commitment on one of two grounds: that not all Scotland-domiciled students have had their tuition fees abolished or that the cost has just been covered by a back-door tax?

Mr Wallace: As Mr Swinney knows well—it was explained to him many times, and I am sure it will be explained to him many times again—it was our will to abolish tuition fees for all Scotland-domiciled students. It has been explained why that was not possible for some 3 per cent of students, but for 97 per cent of students tuition fees will be abolished. Furthermore, we are extending abolition to full-time further education students and we have honoured our commitment to abolish the anomaly for fourth-year students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland who attend Scottish universities.

On pre-school education, we have secured a place for every four-year-old and for 60 per cent of

three-year-olds. On health, nearly half a billion pounds of new money—more money—is being spent on the national health service in this financial year. That includes £26 million for health promotion and, as Susan Deacon announced last week, £60 million to modernise the NHS. A three-year pay deal has been achieved for low-paid workers in the NHS. Those are real increases each year, which are above inflation and are not staged.

We have more open government, with consultation on public appointments and a much more robust regime on freedom of information. Judicial appointments have been opened up and willingness has developed for examination of an independent police complaints process.

The claimant count unemployment rate is at 5.1 per cent—the lowest level since 1976. Before Mr Salmond gets up, I will say that we are willing to publish both the claimant count and the International Labour Organisation statistics, so that people can see all the figures. As he is wont to do, Alex Salmond gave a lot of statistics in his speech, but omitted to say that the Scottish figure for unemployment is well below the European Union average of 8.8 per cent. Unemployment is lower than it is in France, where the figure is 10 per cent. In Italy, the figure is 11 per cent and in Spain it is 15 per cent.

Employment is up by 23,000 in the year to the period November 1999 to January 2000. That ILO figure is the highest level since 1976. The employment rate for Scotland is 72 per cent, which is well above the European Union average of 63 per cent. Manufacturing output and exports both continue to increase.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will Mr Wallace give way?

Mr Wallace: No.

In real terms, manufactured exports in Scotland were up by 8.4 per cent in 1999.

There is a rural affairs department that brings the voice of rural Scotland to the Cabinet table. There were gasps of incredulity on the Labour and Liberal Democrat benches when Alex Salmond suggested that we were trying to abolish all socially rented housing—nothing could be further from the truth. Our clear commitment to rural Scotland is that we will increase significantly the amount of socially rented housing that is available. There is a 10 per cent uplift in Scottish Homes funding to do that.

We have a radical social justice action plan—the first of its kind—that sets targets and milestones. We are committed to defeating child poverty in Scotland within this generation.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will Mr Wallace give way?

Mr Wallace: No.

Today, the SNP has grandiosely styled the debate as the “State of the Nation”. Last week, we were led to believe that this was to be a debate on Scottish independence. True to form, the SNP has reined back. “Independence” creeps into its motion in line 10, where we are asked to note it. In Alex Salmond’s speech, the word crept in at 10 minutes. At last year’s election, independence ranked only 10th on the SNP’s list of priorities.

The people of Scotland identify the SNP with one policy only, but the trouble with the SNP is that it cannot make up its mind whether it wants to be identified with that one policy. Only two months ago, Alex Neil—who was not here for the beginning of Alex Salmond’s speech, which might be significant—said:

“No party has gone into a general election campaign saying ‘vote for us and if we win the election we won’t implement the central part of our policy’.”

Perhaps the debate was intended to put a sticking plaster on the divisions and to divert attention from the “general confusion and malaise”, if I may borrow from the SNP’s motion.

You know, Sir David, it is not so much a state-of-the-nation debate as a state-of-the-nationalists debate. While they have been stuck in the groove of the old politics and the old ideas, the debate has moved on. At election after election, the overwhelming majority of Scots vote for parties that reject independence. Even in its motion, the SNP does not go beyond the bland assertion that, somehow, independence is good for you. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give way?

Mr Wallace: There was no attempt in Alex Salmond’s speech to answer any of the hard questions. There was nothing about the impact of independence on Scotland’s finances and nothing about the consequences and costs of dismantling common machinery such as pensions and benefits. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr Wallace: There was no attempt to address the consequences for our armed forces or our defence industries and nothing about whether Scotland would have a separate currency or—having surrendered any right to involvement in decision making—tag along on sterling’s coat tails.

Here we are, a year on from the election and from the establishment of a Parliament that was endorsed by more than two thirds of those who

voted in the referendum. With all the benefits of hindsight, we can see that if we had followed the Tories down the road of no change, Scottish issues would have struggled for parliamentary time over the past year and, instead of 15 bills, we would have had one or—at best—two.

If we had followed the nationalists down the road to independence, there would have been an unnecessary and costly divorce, but the people confirmed their settled will and opted for a Scottish Parliament that is anchored within a United Kingdom and which is eager to engage positively with Europe. In the past year we have started to deliver on education, on health, on jobs and enterprise, on promoting social inclusion, on open government and on equal opportunities.

Thanks to the work of Parliament and the stewardship of Donald Dewar and the partnership Executive he leads, the state of the nation is sound—but there is more than that. By devolving power and creating the new Parliament, by giving life to the settled will of the Scottish people and by making the Parliament work, the state of the union is strong too.

I move amendment S1M-818.2, to leave out from “regrets” to end and insert:

“recognises that the Partnership Executive working with the Parliament is already delivering on the commitments contained in the Programme for Government to make real and sustained improvements to the economic prosperity and social wellbeing of the people of Scotland; recognises that devolution is the settled will of the majority of the people of Scotland, and rejects independence for Scotland as a backward step.”

The Presiding Officer: I call David McLetchie to move his amendment to the motion.

15:12

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer—a welcome intrusion of the voice of reason and common sense in this increasingly disorderly squabble.

The title of today’s motion—“State of the Nation”—is a shining example of the SNP’s capacity for self-delusion. Alex Salmond clearly fancies himself in the role of a putative president of the people’s republic of Scotland.

If we set aside the rather ludicrously overblown title of the debate, it at least gives us an opportunity to give our verdict on the performance of the Executive over the past year and to consider the prescription in the SNP motion. For Labour and the Liberals, it has been a year of living dangerously, as their coalition has lurched from one disaster to another, seemingly without any direction or concern for the opinions of most people in Scotland. Jim Wallace said that they have started to deliver for people in Scotland.

Well, that message is not being received out there among those people.

Is it any wonder that there is growing public disillusionment with the performance of the Executive in running the Scottish Parliament? Two recent polls—one of which was by ICM for *The Scotsman*—came to the conclusion that 91 per cent of the population believe that the Parliament has achieved little or nothing to date. Only the other day, in a System 3 poll for the BBC, only 27 per cent of respondents thought the performance to date of the Parliament was “quite good”.

Ian Jenkins: Does the member agree with that? The performance of the Parliament has been superb. People are wrong. Does he agree with them?

David McLetchie: I will come to that, because I will draw an important distinction between the performance of members of the Parliament and the performance of the Scottish Executive. That distinction is not frequently made.

The Executive's friends and colleagues do not think it is doing much of a job either. We see Labour members of the Parliament queuing up to distance themselves from the Scottish Executive, presumably because they fear—rightly—that its performance to date will cost them their seats at the next general election. I have no wish to intrude on those private feuds, but—this is Mr Jenkins's point—I am angry and concerned that, in everyday parlance, it is the Parliament that has to take the public blame for the failures of the Scottish Executive, although it is the Executive that has damaged the reputation of the Parliament. The people in charge, not the institution, are at fault.

It is a commonly held view that politicians are more concerned with their own interests than those of ordinary people. I think that that is, generally, an unfair perception. The Executive, however, seems to be waging a campaign not to change that perception but to reinforce it. Accordingly, the number of ministers in Scotland enjoying the perks, privileges and salaries of office has quadrupled, going up from five three years ago under the previous Conservative Administration to more than 20 now. The building at Holyrood of a monument to the ego of politicians is seen by the public as the Executive's highest priority, although the cost is a staggering £200 million—five times the estimate in the referendum white paper.

Mr Rumbles: Will Mr McLetchie comment on the fact that Conservative members have called for the appointment of two further ministers—one for tourism and one for the Holyrood project? Mr McLetchie called for the latter himself.

David McLetchie: Mr Rumbles misinterprets our position. I called for an existing minister to take

specific responsibility for the Holyrood project. I think that that is absolutely necessary and I recommend that Mr McConnell cast his sight over the spending of £200 million of public money. I think it is important that there is a ministerial focus on tourism as it is one of Scotland's most important industries. The overall tally of ministers in a Tory-run Scottish Executive—which is not very far away—will be at least half the number that is required by the present Executive.

As another part of the Executive's campaign to reinforce the public's negative perception of politicians, I cite the Lord Advocate's decision to resign on the eve of one of the most important trials in Scottish legal history, appoint himself to the bench and bring our legal system and international standing to one of its lowest ebbs.

Even when the Executive stops thinking about its own interests for a second, it pauses only to pander to the sectional interests of the politically correct. The Executive has shown breathtaking arrogance in its handling of the repeal of section 28. It has ridden roughshod over mainstream opinion in Scotland and ignored completely the views of parents on the issue. So much for the culture of consultation of which the Deputy First Minister boasts. What bewilders people is that the Executive happens to believe that the repeal of section 28 is worthy of parliamentary attention when there are many other pressing problems for the Parliament to address.

The bewilderment extends to other fringe issues, such as land reform and fox hunting, which are not high on most people's list of priorities and are hardly the talk of the steamie. In contrast, rising crime is at the top of almost everybody's list of priorities. What is the Executive's response? It has cut the number of police officers, it is closing three prisons and it has presided over an increase in the number of dangerous criminals who are released early from prison. The figures show that our acting First Minister has meekly accepted a 10 per cent reduction in his department's budget.

I see that Dr Richard Simpson is leaving. He should not rush off, as he might learn something. As the budget consultation paper that was published the other week shows, the justice department's budget is down from £589 million last year to £528 million this year. If the Deputy First Minister cannot win an argument in Cabinet on behalf of his department, how can he expect to lead that Cabinet? He has failed his department just as he and his colleagues are failing Scotland.

People want higher standards in our schools and hospitals, but the centralising approach of the Executive will not achieve that. The Minister for Health and Community Care is taking more and more power to herself and her edicts are distorting NHS clinical priorities. The Executive's education

bill does nothing to give parents a greater say in the education of their children—which is the only effective way to raise standards in schools.

The Executive also seems unaware that people living in rural Scotland are facing unprecedented hardship with farming in crisis, post offices at risk and the highest petrol prices in the world. Yet—

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP) *rose—*

David McLetchie: One moment, Fergus. Yet all the Executive offers for rural Scotland is so-called land reform—a response equivalent in sensitivity to Marie Antoinette’s “Let them eat cake”.

Fergus Ewing: An issue that concerns Scottish people, especially in the Highlands and Islands, is the highest fuel tax and fuel costs in the world, despite the fact that Scotland is Europe’s major oil producing nation. Does David McLetchie think that it is in Scotland’s interests to continue to have our fuel tax set by Westminster? He has condemned the tax as bad so why does he not support us in repatriating that tax power to Scotland so we can end that iniquity?

David McLetchie: That is an interesting point from a party that wanted, at the Scottish Parliament election, to increase taxes on Scots.

Michael Russell: Not fuel tax.

David McLetchie: No. Our argument on fuel tax is that under the present chancellor at Westminster, who accelerated the fuel tax escalator, the burden has become unduly onerous. We have long advocated that that should stop.

Mr Salmond: You started it.

David McLetchie: I will come to that on another day, Alex. The policy of that period was a consequence of our international obligations. Alex is usually enthusiastic about that sort of approach.

Andrew Wilson *rose—*

David McLetchie: I am sorry, but I must move on.

The Executive’s response to Scotland’s transport problems is equally insensitive. Scottish motorists contribute more than £2 billion a year to the Treasury in fuel taxes and excise duties yet spending on transport, as the budget document shows, is only £270 million—14 per cent of the tax revenues. Considering the taxes motorists pay, the very least they are entitled to is a fair level of spending on developing the roads network, yet in the budget document we see that spending on new motorways and trunk roads in Scotland has been cut from £120 million in 1996-97 to a derisory £18 million in the current year.

The motion shows that those who look to the SNP to oppose the Executive’s agenda will find that party as elusive as the Tartan Pimpernel. The truth is that there are far more issues on which Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP agree than on which they disagree. They are all wedded to the same politically correct agenda. That Lib-Lab-Nat pact is failing Scotland. On section 28, on transport and on land reform, there is a common agenda to ignore the views of the majority of parents, to tax ordinary family motorists off the road with new tolls and taxes, and to fiddle with irrelevancies such as community right to buy while our rural economy is in crisis. Even more damaging for Scottish interests, the Lib-Lab-Nat pact extends to abolishing the pound and replacing it with the euro—

Mr Salmond *rose—*

The Presiding Officer: Mr McLetchie is on his last minute.

David McLetchie: I will just finish my point. Since its inception in January 1999, the euro has plummeted in value by more than a fifth.

Mr Salmond: Mr McLetchie will recall that there have been two opportunities in recent weeks to defeat the Executive. The first was Mr Harper’s motion on genetically modified foods, on which the Tories abstained and saved the Executive. The second was on warrant sales, when the Tories supported the Executive even when everybody else in the Parliament had deserted it. How can that be described as opposition?

David McLetchie: It has to be said, Mr Salmond, that we judge issues on their merits: there is no opposition for opposition’s sake. We opposed those motions because we do not believe in them and they were not in our manifesto. We stick to our policies and principles in this Parliament and we vote accordingly. We will not ally simply for tactical purposes.

The truth of the matter in relation to the euro is that the SNP wants us to join a sinking ship. It is not possible to reconcile the situation that we have with surrendering control of our economy to unaccountable bankers in Frankfurt who will be more concerned with what goes on in Berlin than what goes on in Bellshill, with Paris rather than Paisley, and with Athens rather than Aberdeen. Not for the first time, I agree with Jim Sillars in his conclusion that the SNP’s headlong rush into a European super-state will sound the death knell for Scotland’s independence—not its birth, as the SNP fondly imagines.

The SNP has failed Scotland in this Parliament. We saw from the statistics that were published yesterday that the self-styled Scotland’s party cannot even be bothered to attend Scotland’s Parliament. That was demonstrated by the voting

records. It is the Tories who turn up for 90 per cent of the votes in the Parliament.

Mr Salmond: They have nothing else to do.

David McLetchie: Next come the hard-working Labour members, who turn up for 87 per cent of the votes. A distant third are the SNP slackers, who turn up for barely 80 per cent of the votes, just ahead of the lazy Lib Dems. Our voting record demonstrates our commitment on a daily basis to making this Parliament work for Scotland as part of the United Kingdom. We are the party that is holding the failing Executive to account. It is the Scottish Conservatives who are coming up with commonsense solutions to Scotland's problems. The SNP should stop indulging its independence fantasy, stand aside and let a real Opposition party do its job.

I move amendment S1M-818.1, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"regrets that the Scottish Executive has failed to address the issues that really matter to the Scottish people, which has led to growing public disillusionment with its performance; believes that far greater priority should be given to addressing rising crime, raising standards in our schools, improving our transport infrastructure and tackling the crisis in the countryside and the problems of our health service, and notes that the SNP, instead of addressing these issues, continues to promote further constitutional upheaval which would be deeply damaging to the interests of everyone living in Scotland."

15:27

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): I knew that the SNP would welcome that. I am proud to open today's debate on behalf of the Labour party.

Today's debate is on the future of our nation and allows us to talk about what we are in politics to achieve. The Labour party is the party of the ordinary working people of Scotland, wedding pragmatic and good governance to our abiding core mission of social justice. Jim Wallace spoke exceedingly well, laying out just some of the achievements so far of the partnership Administration. The nationalists, the Opposition, have one goal and one goal only: the creation of a separate Scottish state, divorced from the rest of the UK.

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will Allan Wilson give way?

Allan Wilson: I ask Kay Ullrich to allow me to develop this point.

In the past year or so, that has been the nationalists' policy that dare not speak its name. Indeed, their leader was 14 and a half minutes into a fairly boring 25-minute diatribe before he even mentioned the word independence. I am reliably informed by *The Guardian* that Mr Salmond

mentioned independence only twice in the first six months of the Parliament. In Angus, the local SNP newsletter has not mentioned independence since 1995—with good reason.

Andrew Wilson rose—

Allan Wilson: Despite the hype from SNP members—and Andrew Wilson in particular—the nationalists have again and again had their core vision rejected by Scotland's voters. They lost the 1997 general election, they lost the 1999 Scottish Parliament election, and they lost the 1999 European elections.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): If Allan Wilson thinks that independence is so unpopular, will the Executive conduct a referendum on it?

Allan Wilson: I would not wait seven years for the referendum that the SNP will conduct.

Mr Gibson: Put it to the test.

Allan Wilson: It will never materialise, because the SNP will never win the majority that is needed in this Parliament to implement that proposition.

The SNP has a problem, which a lot of its back benchers—Kenny Gibson included—have identified.

Mr Gibson: I am not a back bencher.

Allan Wilson: Divorcing Scotland from England is the SNP's only reason for existing. However, the people of Scotland have had the good sense, time and time again, to reject that core vision—hence the silence from Mr Salmond and the astounding change of policy that was announced at the recent meeting of the SNP's national council. A decision made by the council places another referendum before any independence negotiation—a desperate attempt to con voters into believing that they can vote for sectorists without voting for separation.

Mr Swinney: Vote for what?

Allan Wilson: Another problem looms for John Swinney in the form of the SNP's spring conference. There are rumblings on the back benches and mutterings in the grass roots and, lo and behold, the independence word is back—but for how long? Only for a week, I suspect. It is not mentioned in the motion; again it is buried. It is the nationalist policy that dare not speak its name.

Mr Salmond rose—

Allan Wilson: Alex Salmond had 25 minutes to bore us. I have only six, so I think I have the right to carry on.

We can talk about independence. We can show the real costs of separation and the financial incompetence of the nationalist economics of independence. Time and again, the nationalist

party has proven itself to be inaccurate and incompetent when it comes to making financial and economic arguments. One of the greatest economic U-turns in recent political history in Scotland has to be the SNP's shift in its calculations of Scotland's fiscal balance under independence.

Kay Ullrich rose—

Allan Wilson: In 1997, the SNP predicted that in 2000-01 there would be a surplus of more than £6 billion. By the time the Scottish elections came along in 1999, it had revised that prediction to accept that a deficit of £1 billion would exist in this financial year. No matter what excuses SNP members have for that, and no matter how they count up North sea oil revenues, they cannot get away from the fact that that demonstrates sheer financial and economic incompetence.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): Will Mr Wilson give way?

Allan Wilson: In 1997, the SNP accounted for debt repayments of around £4 billion. In other words, there was an acceptance then that an independent Scotland would take with it a proportion of the UK national debt. For the purposes of the Scottish election campaign, the SNP conveniently forgot about that. It lost that debt and decided that an independent Scotland would not be liable for a share of the UK debt burden. Again, no matter what arguments are used to justify it, there can be no denying that two years can make a big difference to accounting practices in the SNP. Does the SNP seriously think that the responsibilities of government would allow it to get away with that?

On the basis of a report—

Mr Gibson: Will Mr Wilson give way?

Allan Wilson: Kenny Gibson should calm down and listen.

On the basis of a report published in March 2000 by City accountancy firm, Chantrey Vellacott, the SNP claims that Scotland's budget would be in balance on the basis of an oil price of \$25 per barrel. Given the erratic nature of oil prices, which varied between \$10 and \$20 a barrel in 1999, what would the SNP do in times of low oil prices? Spending on priority public services, such as education and health, would be determined on the basis of the fluctuating market value of oil.

When Chantrey Vellacott predicted a £4 billion deficit for an independent Scotland, Andrew Wilson went on record as calling it

"back-of-the-envelope economic gibberish . . . written by an adviser to the Liberal Democrats with a clear axe to grind".

What was on the back of an envelope was the SNP's recalculation of the fiscal deficit when

journalists pointed out that it had got its sums wrong during last year's election launch conference. Andrew Wilson had to grab an envelope to remake his calculation.

There is more to the cost of divorce than the fiscal deficit. Scotland gets a good deal on public expenditure because of the Government's principle of targeting spending on the basis of need. Scale, geography and the climate of Scotland require extra public funding. It is available in a UK context and it would be much more expensive for an independent Scotland to provide.

There are also the non-fiscal costs of divorce. The SNP's citizenship policy remains hazy.

Kay Ullrich: Is Allan Wilson not ashamed of putting down his fellow Scots and rubbishing his nation?

Allan Wilson: I am not saying that, and I will go on to answer that point. The economic dangers of divorce can begin long before separation happens. Let us take a warning from our friends in Quebec. There, voters have rejected independence in two referendums, but still the nationalist party comes back for more. It is a neverendum—the concept that John Swinney advocated as a model for Scotland. The poor voters of Quebec will be required to go in and out of the polling booths until they deliver the desired result, and that could happen in Scotland too.

In the meantime, there is economic instability, and uncertainty is the result. Decisions about investment are stymied and minority communities are unsure of their future. A divisive tone is set by the suggestion that someone is a true patriot only if they support an independent state. I reject that, as does this Parliament and the people. The SNP talks about Scotland being a normal small European state. What would be normal about the costs and upheavals that would be required to bring about a separate state?

What is normal is being a powerful member state of the European Union—like Spain, Germany and France—in which regional and national autonomy is combined with a strong voice on the international stage and in which decisions are taken at the appropriate level, combined with economies of scale. Most of all, it is about the focus not being on constant preoccupation with constitutional trivia and navel gazing, but on most people's priorities: new schools, new hospital developments, the lowest unemployment for decades and a strong and growing economy. That record of achievement will carry Labour and its Liberal Democrat partners to election victory and the SNP—with its policy of independence—to election defeat.

15:36

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Allan Wilson has unwittingly just offended Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium and other countries by his definition of what he considers normal within Europe.

One year on, we have a Parliament, but it is a limited Parliament and not an independent Parliament—yet. We are already seeing the frustrations and contradictions that come from the constitutional settlement that we have reached so far. Just because we have a settlement does not mean that everything is settled and that we have reached our final constitutional destination.

The Scottish people are ambitious for this Parliament; they want it to have more powers and to be all it can be. The SNP is ambitious for Scotland; it is ambitious for Scotland to use all the powers it can and to be all it can be. That is why we believe in independence.

Remember the words of the consultative steering group, which were used when the Parliament opened: sharing of power; accessibility; equality of opportunity; accountability; and transparency in decision making. We are now one year on. What is the state of the nation? Is the Executive allowing Scotland to be all it can be? The real measure of the state of the nation is the acid test of what people experience in their lives—for their children in schools, for their parents needing health care and for the homeless needing housed.

On accountability, why is it that in the NHS we have doctors working in our hospitals with equipment that is old and dilapidated? Our vision for an independent Scotland is one in which the NHS is at the cutting edge and is a state-of-the-art modern health service that would compete with the best in terms of provision; it would not be struggling to make ends meet with emergency cash handouts from Westminster.

In a written answer on Tuesday, Susan Deacon admitted that in the past year alone, £40 million that could have been spent on equipment such as scanners, X-ray machines, intensive care machines, dialysis machines and incubators had been raided to pay for basic services and, in the words of the Scottish Executive, to help NHS trusts meet their financial targets. The Executive has been robbing Peter to pay Paul to keep the health service going.

That is what has been happening in the first year of the Scottish Parliament.

Dr Simpson: Does Fiona Hyslop recognise that expenditure is increasing throughout the health service and that—unless her party has a different policy—it is up to local trusts and boards to decide

on the best way to spend the money? Is she saying that her party—were it in government—would determine provision of every piece of equipment at a national level?

Fiona Hyslop: Can Dr Simpson assure me that doctors working in hospitals are satisfied that they have the modern equipment they need? Staff are having to work with old equipment—or no equipment—to paper over the cracks in funding.

Labour's conscience has finally caught up with it, so for 2000-01 it has decided that it will stop the practice of allowing capital to be shifted to revenue funding. Since new Labour came to power, £117 million has been raided. Now, money for the NHS has been prised from the people's war chest—out of the hands of Gordon Brown. Will it be new money, or will it simply replace the money that has been taken previously from capital equipment accounts? The Minister for Health and Community Care has spent the past year saying that everything is fine and that there is enough money in the health service. Why, then, does Tony Blair caw the feet fae under her by admitting that there is a problem and saying, "Fair cop, the NHS needs more"? We need transparency and we need assurances.

Ms Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: No, I want to move on.

To use a medical analogy, the Government cut back on life support services for the NHS in its early years by embracing Tory spending. It is now trying, a year before an election, to resuscitate the patient with cash handouts and expects to be congratulated on bringing it back to life.

If we want public services, we must pay for them. How many schools are planned to close? Why were only 108 houses built in 1998? We want real powers for a real Parliament so that we can decide how much we want to borrow and how much we want to spend—so that we can decide on our priorities, from our finances, for our needs. That is what independence is all about. This Executive is not even making proper use of the powers that it has, whether it be to issue public bonds or to relax 75 per cent clawback. No wonder the Parliament wants more powers. No wonder 62 per cent of the people want more powers.

Johann Lamont rose—

Fiona Hyslop: I am winding up. We can tinker at the edges and make minor improvements, but we need full independence. Independence for Scotland is right, it is just and it is needed now. The state of this nation needs to be a state of independence.

15:42

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Today there is a palpable excitement on the Scottish National party benches, as the word independence has been mentioned. However, it is very sad that so far—with the exception of Fiona Hyslop towards the end of her speech—there is a palpable reluctance to debate what independence means.

Nevertheless, I would like to thank the SNP for allowing us to examine the core issue of its belief in a separate and independent Scotland. Although we have to deal with the turmoil of daily political life—constituency work and so on—at the end of the day, politics is about competing ideals and the different visions that we in this chamber put forward and aspire to.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: Will the member allow me to get started?

It is quite astonishing that in the 21st century, amid all the messy nationalisms that we see across the globe and the pressing problems that we face at home, the top priority and the No 1 issue for the SNP Opposition should continue to be the fetish of a separate Scotland.

Mr Salmond: It is a process.

Robert Brown: It is not a process. Alex Salmond's motion refers to "the opportunity to choose"—in other words, a decision.

Mr Hamilton: Does Mr Brown agree with his colleague Mr Lyon, who is on record as saying that progress towards independence for Scotland is "inevitable"?

Robert Brown: I have not seen the quotation, so I cannot comment on it.

Mr Hamilton: Does the member agree with it?

Robert Brown: I do not agree with it. I think that we are moving logically and naturally within the United Kingdom towards a federal end result, which is the alternative to independence that is being presented. Iain McWhirter claims that the SNP is also moving towards that position.

The nationalism that we are now offered is not open and above board. It is not red—or tartan—in tooth and claw. It hides behind slogans such as independence in Europe. It is designed not to frighten the horses. The SNP may soon follow the Welsh and forget about independence altogether. However, others say that independence has been restored to its central role. In today's debate, we have not yet dealt with the consequences of independence, except in Allan Wilson's excellent speech, so I will do so.

Andrew Wilson *rose—*

Robert Brown: I cannot take an intervention, as my time is limited.

An independent Scotland would no longer be able to draw on the common UK pool in bad times or contribute to it in good times. Health spending per head in Scotland would no longer be higher than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom. There would no longer be the current levels of support for housing benefit. Far from contributing towards finding solutions to problems on a common basis, the SNP wants to up the drawbridge and opt out of the whole thing. Liberal Democrats cannot accept the narrow, confining straitjacket of nationalism that the SNP would impose on Scotland.

Mr Gibson *rose—*

Robert Brown: I shall not give way.

If the SNP had its way, all Scotland's hopes, all our dreams and all our aspirations would be forced to fit into a narrow box called an independent Scotland. We would be left with a Scotland where our aspirations had been shrunk to fit the frontiers of the state. Nationalism, by definition, is an exclusive faith. It defines people using one exclusive criterion: some are in the ark and some, most definitely, are not. Nationalism exalts the state; liberalism—and, I believe, the chamber, exalts the individual.

What does freedom mean in an SNP context? It means an awful lot more than being a separate nation. It means an awful lot more even than this Parliament. Independence is not freedom; borders are not freedom. Our freedom, the freedom that the chamber will go for, is a freedom in which no one suffers from poverty, in which individuals and businesses can invest and grow, and in which jobs and prosperity can develop.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Age Concern statistics reveal that 70,000 Scottish pensioners live in severe poverty. Will the member comment?

Robert Brown: If that is the case, I am surprised that the SNP wants to opt out of the benefits of the United Kingdom that will sustain the ability to deal with that problem.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): The Government is spending its money on Trident.

Robert Brown: The decision on Trident is a UK decision that will go one way or the other. We cannot opt out at the border. If the bomb comes, it will affect Scotland just as much as England.

The SNP has promoted the idea that freedoms will descend like manna from heaven with the creation of an independent Scotland, as will all the money that it has promised us over the years. Those freedoms are, in fact, being fought for, inch by inch—by this Executive, by this Parliament and

by voluntary groups in communities. People are working in partnership in this Parliament, in the UK and across Europe. We want partnership and federalism, but certainly not separatism or independence.

15:47

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I am slightly disappointed that David McLetchie has left the chamber: I had hoped to ask him whether he had described Alex Salmond as a “potato president” or a “putative president”. Much of what Alex Salmond said today could be described as being the words of a potato president. He spoke for 25 minutes and barely mentioned independence; in effect, he said nothing.

I understand what Robert Brown meant when he said that he welcomed the debate as an opportunity to discuss independence. However, we have not had the opportunity to discuss independence. The Scottish National party is willing to talk about everything except independence.

It is disappointing that, instead of focusing on some of the real opportunities that the Parliament presents, we are having a sterile and very puerile debate that is leading nowhere in particular. Fiona Hyslop exemplified the contradictions in the SNP. She said that the Parliament was not using its powers properly. What was her conclusion? Not that we should use the powers properly, but that we should break away from the United Kingdom. That was completely and utterly illogical.

Fiona Hyslop rose—

Hugh Henry: No, I will not give way.

Today's debate is, in a sense, a political expedient to protect Alex Salmond. We know that he is under threat from his fundamentalists, who are unhappy that Alex will not put independence back at the top of the agenda. In the language of SNP members, we hear what they really think about this Parliament. They call it a “pretend Parliament”, not a real Parliament. It is a difficult situation for Alex Salmond; I sympathise with him. He tries to talk about the achievements of the Parliament, but he is dragged back by people who say that it is a pretend Parliament that is doing nothing.

There is another contradiction. The SNP has told us, during this first year, that it wants the Parliament to work. Let us think about that logically. If the SNP wants the Parliament to work, it should want to make happen what the people of Scotland voted for, and they voted for a devolved Parliament within the United Kingdom.

Andrew Wilson rose—

Mr Hamilton rose—

Hugh Henry: The SNP has no interest in making this Parliament work, which explains some of the SNP's pettiness during the past year. The party has not wasted any opportunities to denigrate and to make facile comments about many of the things that have happened. We need consider only one example. Mike Russell launched himself into condemning the Parliament for awarding medals, saying, “This is a disgrace—you're just in and you've voted to award yourselves medals. What have you done to deserve it?” He said that, irrespective of the fact that that decision had not been taken by the Parliament, and was made before the election. Is that the same Mike Russell who, shortly thereafter, took £2,800—the equivalent of the cost of 56 medals—from the Parliament to go on a trip to India? Where is Mike Russell's consistency in those circumstances?

As was said earlier, the SNP has been hypocritical in not allowing George Reid to try to manage the Holyrood project; the party does not want the Parliament to work. We have seen motion after motion on reserved matters, on which we can do nothing. The SNP does not want the Parliament to work.

As Allan Wilson and others said, people in Scotland reject independence, time and again. In opinion polls, they have indicated that their support for independence is falling.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Please come to a close.

Hugh Henry: Alex Salmond faces within his party the dilemma that, if the Parliament works, people might start to vote for the SNP as an alternative to other parties but, at the same time, they will say quite clearly that they want to stay within the United Kingdom. That is the dilemma at the heart of the SNP, and it is why Alex is worried about trying to keep his fundamentalists in order. People want the Parliament to work, but the SNP does not.

15:52

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): In a week in which oil is at \$27 a barrel, it is tragic and ironic that the privatisation of our skies continues relentlessly.

The people of Scotland are entitled to have us take stock. In the first flush of victory, the Executive appointed Scotland's first Minister for Transport and the Environment. Prior to 1707, such a remit would not have been countenanced, given that we had neither rail nor aviation and that neither John MacAdam nor even General Wade had begun their creation of a transport

infrastructure. Nigh on 300 years since then, and one year since the arrival of a Labour Administration which promised that things could only get better, just what is the state of the nation?

Let us look at transport on a modal basis, starting with the railways. The document "Travel Choices for Scotland" intimated that there would be a right to instruct the shadow strategic rail authority on matters related to Scotland. However, Westminster's Transport Bill deleted that right and inserted "directions and guidance". That waters down the powers of this Parliament, and the dilution continues, as the directions and guidance will apply only as long as they do not conflict with those issued by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Why does the Executive aspire to so little, when there is so much to be done? Why is it beyond its wit and competence to seek the electrification of the east coast main line? Why is it beyond its imagination to provide a rail link to the Borders? Why is the limit of the Executive's horizon in connecting the capital of the Highlands to the capital of Scotland to reduce travel time by five minutes by 2004? At that rapid rate of progress, the length of the train journey might match that of the car by the time a child in the Highlands picks up his pension.

What about aviation? Apart from the subsidy to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd, the powers and plans are pathetic—the Executive has nothing to say on the privatisation of National Air Traffic Services. Aviation is important to us as a nation, given our geographic location and the fact that we now have a truly global economy. Why are both Ireland and Iceland, with smaller populations, better served for direct flights? The Executive is not flying high: as far as aviation is concerned, it is grounded on the runway.

On maritime issues, it is absurd that, at the start of the 21st century, an island nation such as Scotland finds that its main ferry port for exports is Hull, a town located many miles away in a neighbouring country, and accessed by a poor road network. Links to the continent were superior before the union, never mind before the Executive. Why was it easier to get to Europe in the days of sail than it is now with the new generation of fast ships? Far from having the wind behind it, the Executive has not even set sail.

That brings us finally to roads. It is probably apt that we finish on that subject because it appears that the Minister for Transport and the Environment is more the minister for potholes. Studies aplenty have been carried out; in fact, such is her fondness for consultancies that we have studies into studies. As I have said before, how many studies must we have before the Executive finally builds us a road? The tragedy is

that, with so much to be done, so little has been achieved. There is work to be done on every mode of transport: our nation has the talent to design and build what is needed. Regrettably, as in previous generations, those skills are used for construction in lands far away.

In 1968, when Robert Kennedy sought the Democratic nomination to be President of the United States, he finished his speeches by saying:

"Some see the world as it is and say why. I prefer the world as it can be and say why not."

The difference between the Executive and the Scottish National party is that the Executive sees Scotland as it is and says, "We cannae do it," but we say, "Yes, we can." We can aspire and deliver; we can build a nation for the 21st century. The key to the future is independence.

15:55

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to begin by sharing with members an extract from an article that I found in a journal just last night. The article states:

"The promises made during the devolution debate will leave a dangerous legacy for First Minister Donald Dewar and Labour. They promised us the world . . . and they must now deliver for fear of voters seeing Holyrood as a gumsy dog that's all bark, with Millbank controlling the bite."

For the entire year preceding the election for this Parliament last May, I warned anyone who would listen that the promises being made by senior politicians in the Labour party on what a Scottish Parliament would deliver for the people of Scotland were not only unrealistic, but dangerously irresponsible.

I have been repeating that warning ever since, because in the never-ending search for votes, the fantasy was fed—on a diet of ever-increasing pledges—that the electorate's delivery of a new Labour Executive would for ever rid Scotland of all her ills and deliver to her people a paradise of which they had only dreamed.

The electorate delivered that Executive and even got something that they did not ask for and did not really deserve: a prop-up mechanism to make sure that Labour always got its way, called the Liberal Democrats.

It is no wonder that the electorate are somewhat disillusioned: they have an Executive whose sense of priorities is such that it gave us the maximum three hours to debate the vital subject of Scotland's preparedness for the millennium bug and, if my memory serves me right, the minimum one and a half hours the very next week to debate Scotland's homeless. I should say that my opening quotation did not come from *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* or the *Scottish Daily Mail*, but came

from *The Big Issue in Scotland*.

This Executive has some queer sense of priorities and of democracy; and frankly it has been some let-down for Scotland's people.

The pity is that, as the start of the Scottish National party motion points out, the individual MSPs, the committees and the Parliament are working actively and remarkably well to move Scotland forward post-devolution. As David McLetchie pointed out, the tragedy is that neither the press nor the public yet distinguish between the Executive and the Parliament: what we have is a Parliament that is working, but an Executive that is failing time after time to deliver the impossible dream that it fostered and promoted.

I agree with the first part of the SNP motion. However, the SNP predictably falls into the same trap that has become Labour's curse: it promises the earth through independence and "equality of status", which I think is a relatively new phrase. Although I certainly agree that it will be up to the Scottish people to determine Scotland's constitutional future as far as independence is concerned, I will strongly argue about this "equality of status" business. It is abundantly clear, even to a country lad such as me, that our present constitutional status—as a country with its own legislative Parliament—places us first among equals in the United Kingdom.

Andrew Wilson: Will the member give way?

Alex Fergusson: Briefly. I am very pushed for time.

Andrew Wilson: I am grateful. Does Mr Fergusson agree with the gentleman who is sitting on his right, Brian Monteith, that Scotland should have total control of her taxation and expenditure, or is there a split on the Conservative benches?

Alex Fergusson: There is no split on our benches. I am sure that we will have a debate on the subject that Andrew Wilson mentioned some other time. I will not speak for my colleague Brian Monteith; he is more than capable of answering for himself.

A majority of people who were questioned in a single poll might well have supported increased power for the Scottish Parliament, but it is clear to me that in poll after poll, and—most important—in election after election, the people of Scotland have voted consistently and overwhelmingly against the SNP's separatist view and in favour of a unionist position for this country. The latter part of today's SNP motion is a mere distraction and does the Parliament and the debate no service whatever.

Mr Gibson rose—

Alex Fergusson: I am sorry; I am out of time.

Even SNP members seem to have a continuing

debate about whether they really want to separate from the rest of the United Kingdom—why else do they have to make periodic statements to reassure their republican wing that that is the case?

I wanted to join the Scottish Parliament very much, principally to see it develop into a successful catalyst that will bind the union ever closer together, for that is the true path to Scotland's economic and social prosperity. It is the easiest thing in the world—yet something that the SNP has not managed to do this afternoon—to wax eloquently in the Parliament about the perceived benefits that might come with independence and to promise the earth to the electorate. But as even the Executive has found out to its cost, delivering is another thing altogether.

I support David McLetchie's amendment.

Dr Simpson: On a point of order. I am sorry to interrupt but, for the second time, my name appeared on the annunciator screen while Alex Fergusson was speaking; not temporarily, but throughout the speech. It was one thing at the beginning of the Parliament when our pictures were transposed on the web, but I wonder whether you could ensure that it does not happen again. I do not particularly wish to be associated with the previous speaker's views.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will check that out for you, Dr Simpson. I am sure that it was just a glitch.

16:02

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)
(Lab): I must begin with an apology—not usually a good start to any speech—to a couple of old rockers in the Scottish National party ranks. I taunted those old rockers just after the national council, when John Swinney was going about like a Cheshire cat and Alex Salmond like a dog with two tails; they were really pleased with themselves. I put it to the old rockers that the battle for independence was lost and the union was safe. They told me, "You must be joking. Watch this space." That is why we are having this debate today. The issue has been decided; the battle to break Britain—between John Swinney's mods and Margo MacDonald's rockers—has been settled within the SNP. If anyone wants to know who won, they just have to ask Alex—not Alex Salmond, but Alex Neil; he will tell them who won and who lost. There is no doubt who is in charge on the back benches. Make no mistake—it is full steam ahead for independence; that is the only game in town.

Let us take a look at the motion, on the "State of the Nation". It sounds a bit like Bill Clinton, until we read it—then it sounds like Victor Meldrew. The

motion has 168 words—regrets, but not too few to mention. The motion is written in the language of failure; it is a suicide note from SNP members. All that they have done, since they arrived in Parliament, is grieve about manufacturing, moan about health, whine about local government, grieve about education, and complain about public investment; they whinge, whinge, whinge.

Andrew Wilson rose—

Mr McNeil: No, I will not give way.

SNP members open their mouths only to run Scotland down. If the motion is anything, it is a fair summary of the performance of the SNP over the past year. SNP members revel in the language of failure, delight in disaster and gloat over misfortune. Why? It has been said already—because they want the Parliament to fail. They need it to fail, and they are doing everything in their power to see that it fails. They have voted against more money for the national health service and for education; they voted against scrapping tuition fees. The motion is a sad reflection of the SNP's priorities. Independence is above everything else—above jobs, above schools, above hospitals and above crime. It is independence at all costs.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Let her in.

Mr McNeil: I am not letting anybody in. We have had enough of them.

The SNP is more concerned about taking Scotland out of Britain than about taking drugs and poverty out of Scotland. But that should not be a surprise to us. Nothing has changed. Let us take an example from the SNP motion. Top of the moan list is manufacturing. It was the blind commitment of the SNP to independence that led its members—with the notable exception of George Reid—to vote against the nationalisation of shipbuilding, and to vote a Labour Government down.

Andrew Wilson rose—

Mr McNeil: That act gave the party of David Davidson, that friend of the shipyard worker, the opportunity to run our manufacturing industry and end our shipbuilding industry. It will never be forgiven.

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Andrew Wilson: Will the member give way?

Mr McNeil: The fact is that the Conservatives came to power, and as a result we do not have Scott's in Greenock, Lithgow's in Port Glasgow, Hall Russell in Aberdeen and the Caledon yards in

Dundee and Leith. Posturing has cost our shipbuilding communities dear. We are not surprised to have come full circle, because how does the SNP negotiate independence at the same time as it negotiates a share of the Ministry of Defence contracts for Yarrow's and Ferguson's in Govan? How can it do that? When push comes to shove, there can be no doubt. If it is a choice between the workers in Govan and independence, the SNP has made its case quite clear: it is independence, and to hell with the Govan workers.

16:07

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I support the positive and constructive amendment lodged by Jim Wallace. There is no doubt that our Parliament, working together with the Scottish Executive, has in its first year achieved a great deal for the people of Scotland. I should like to highlight some of the achievements so far.

Bringing the process of government closer to the people is one achievement, and it is essential. When the Rural Affairs Committee travelled to the community of Laid in Sutherland, I was most impressed by the residents' moving reaction to the fact that we had come to their small community to hear their views on land reform—land reform, David McLetchie—and community development. They made the point that that would never have happened with Westminster. I would like to remind David McLetchie that land reform is important to the people of the Highlands and Islands, but as usual he is not listening.

The committee system is working effectively and constructively, and is questioning and challenging the Executive on its legislative programme. While I am on that point, I suggest that this chamber would rightly resist any attempt to interfere in the good work of the committees. I see John McAllion in the chamber. I would like to highlight the good work that he, as convener of the Public Petitions Committee, has been doing over the past year.

On policy issues, the Parliament and the Executive have worked together to deliver real change for the people of Scotland. I refer to the £51 million that the Executive is giving for the abolition of tuition fees, and the boom that that has produced in our colleges. I quote *The Herald* from 14 April:

"From all sides, there is now acknowledgement that the removal of fees has won popular approval."

It is such a pity that the Scottish National party and the Tories voted against the abolition of tuition fees when they had the chance.

Other policy achievements include the abolition of feudalism—at last—several hundred years behind its abolition in England. Why? Because

Westminster never had the time for it. Things have changed now that we have home rule. There is the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill, the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Bill, Tavish Scott's Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Amendment (Scotland) Bill—a version of which was so easily and so badly ambushed in the House of Commons—and the National Parks (Scotland) Bill, which at last sets up national parks, so long after they were established south of the border.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Would the member like to comment on why he regards his fellow countrymen and countrywomen as being uniquely incapable of being 100 per cent in charge of their own affairs?

Mr Rumbles: As we live in a democracy, my countrymen and countrywomen have total, 100 per cent, control over their affairs—there was an election, which the SNP lost.

There are many initiatives that I have not mentioned, and many more to come.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mr Rumbles: I have just given way.

I find it sad that, in the debate marking the first anniversary of home rule, the SNP and the Conservatives are so happy to dwell on the negative in an attempt to undermine the success of the Parliament. Of course, there have been some difficulties, such as with the local government finance settlement, for example in my area, Aberdeenshire. However, I am heartened that the Minister for Finance is committed to reviewing the settlement for next year, and I am convinced that the problems will be overcome.

Unlike the SNP and the Tories, I do not dwell on the problems. I celebrate the positive and the many achievements of the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition Executive and the home rule Parliament. This anniversary is an occasion for celebration, so I am disappointed by the attitude of SNP and Conservative members.

Richard Lochhead: The member referred to Scotland's interests being ambushed at Westminster. Does he accept that Westminster once more acted against Scotland's interests by ambushing the attempt by a member of his party to return 6,000 square miles of Scottish water to Scottish jurisdiction? Does he accept that was a prime example of Westminster acting against the interests of Scotland?

Mr Rumbles: My criticism related to the structure of debates and the way in which bills are so easily ambushed in the House of Commons. That is not the case here, where we have a modern and effective Parliament.

Of course, it would be in Scotland's interests to be in a federal system. I remind members that the Liberal Democrats are committed to a truly federal system—that is our long-term goal.

This is a time for celebration of our achievements rather than for the negativity of the SNP and the Conservatives. I hope that the chamber will resoundingly back Jim Wallace's amendment and send the SNP and the Tories packing.

16:12

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): This is perhaps one of those debates in which more heat than light is generated. One of my greatest experiences in politics was the referendum two years ago, when Scotland took a giant leap forward by setting up this Parliament. It was the crossing of the Rubicon, which put the negative politics of fear of the Conservatives behind us.

I am disappointed that many of the tactics that the Conservatives used against devolution are being employed to argue against independence. It is important to recognise that, if we in Scotland trust ourselves to run Scotland in limited ways under devolution, we should trust ourselves in all things. Surely if we can trust ourselves part of the way, there is nothing to stop us trusting ourselves all of the way.

Scotland has the ingredients to be a successful country in the 21st century. In 1977, Norway and Scotland were eeksie-peeksie and had identical GDPs per head. Today, Norway is 25 per cent richer. What did Norway do in 1977 that Scotland did not? The Norwegians discovered oil; we discovered oil. They used it, but we failed to embrace the opportunity it gave us.

Surely Hugh Henry, the former Militant activist, who is now a squeaky new Labour representative and the convener of the European Committee, should look around to see what is happening in some of the progressive European countries, rather than wedding himself to a 19th-century imperial state. Surely the Militant Tendency taught him to oppose that.

We should consider the growth forecasts that are produced by the Government and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Our forecast growth is lower than that of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway. We should look positively to European examples.

I hope that Robert Brown will comment on what Edward Davey, the Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesperson, said last week:

"There is appalling underinvestment in some of our public

services.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 3 May 2000; Vol 349, c 172.]

Why do the Liberal Democrats say that in Westminster, but cosy up with a warm embrace to Labour in Edinburgh?

Robert Brown: I thank Andrew Wilson for that point. It shows that pluralism can exist in a federal or pseudo-federal system. Will he comment on the fact that in Denmark the rate of tax as a percentage of GDP is 48 per cent higher than it is in the UK?

Andrew Wilson: Denmark makes that choice because it has the opportunity to do that. Many countries in Europe have lower taxes. Scotland might want to make that choice if we had the opportunity. I suggest that, if we had the chance, Robert Brown might find that we have more in common than he does with the right-wingers in the Labour party who argue for cuts in tax. The point is that independence and normal status would give us the opportunity to make that choice. I would be interested to hear whether the federal model that the Liberal Democrats have invented today would give us that ability. We have not heard a word about what that would mean or what its powers might be.

I would say to Duncan McNeil—who has left the chamber, but I hope not for long—that I understand his concerns for manufacturing and I know that he has a trade union background. However, when he slags off the 1979 no-confidence vote, I would point out that he is in coalition with a party that voted with the SNP on that occasion. Since Labour came to power, 22,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost. For the first time in history, there are more people employed in manufacturing in Ireland than there are in Scotland. Ireland has a population far smaller than ours, yet it is generating more jobs in manufacturing. Duncan McNeil should focus on that and consider his trade union background. There are far more things that we could be doing as a normal part of Europe than we can constrained within the United Kingdom.

As Alex Salmond has said, unemployment is higher in Scotland than in all the other small countries in Europe. It is twice as high in Scotland as in Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria and Norway. Even Sweden, Denmark, Portugal and Ireland have lower unemployment. We must ask what powers devolution gave us that are different from those we had before. What can we do now to tackle the problem of unemployment? Creating legislation cannot tackle unemployment; investing in the nation's wealth can tackle unemployment. That is the power that we would have if we were independent, with normal status in Europe. Scottish ministers might turn up to more meetings of the Council of

Ministers than they attend at present, when the figure is less than 8 per cent. We must be focused and positive and we must join together.

16:17

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): It is not surprising that the SNP should finally lodge a motion calling for independence. After all, that is the party's only substantial policy, even if it is substantially wrong. However, it is surprising that it should have taken the SNP so long to lodge such a motion. Perhaps the delay is indicative of the hesitancy and confusion that the single-issue party has been experiencing over the past few months.

The poor souls cannot quite make up their minds which way to play it. Should they emphasise the importance of independence, thereby alienating large sections of the Scottish public who have continually made clear their unwillingness to vote for independence, or should they concentrate on undermining the Scottish Parliament, placing before it motions on reserved matters, arguing that more devolution would be better and hoping that that would eventually lead to the separation of Scotland from the United Kingdom?

Consider some of the issues that the SNP has chosen to debate over the past year: the Act of Settlement, air traffic control and the Barnett formula. Those are all reserved matters. That is evidence of the SNP's reluctance to accept the settled will of the Scottish people and to accept the terms of devolution and make them work. It is a form of political myopia, an almost admirable ability to ignore the facts. The people of Scotland do not want independence and they never will. They understand and appreciate the benefits of a devolved Parliament within the UK. However, for the separatists to accept that reality would be to accept the destruction of their political party and its reason for being.

Close examination of the nationalist policy reveals that the SNP is committed to the politics of spend, spend, spend; yet it claims that taxes will not have to go up by very much. In the last year, the SNP has promised an additional £3 billion of spending without explaining from where that money will come. Those are the spending commitments of never-never land, a place where sums do not have to add up and the resources are limitless. Those are truly the policies of a party that knows in its heart that it will never be in power and will never have to fulfil its promises.

While we in the Labour party remain committed to making our health service truly world class, the nationalists would rather spend our money on setting up and maintaining a separate army, navy and air force. While we remain committed to

eradicating child poverty, the separatists want to squander money creating new embassies and separate benefits systems. The SNP claims that its policy is to run Scotland's Parliament in Scotland's interests. I put it to the nationalists that their policy is to scupper the Scottish Parliament to further their ambition for Scottish independence.

In an SNP press release, Mr Swinney states:

"The development of the Scottish Parliament is part of Scotland's Independence process."

I was under the impression that the development of the Scottish Parliament was part of the process of bettering the lives of ordinary Scots—women, men and children.

Mr Swinney: Got it in one. Bingo.

Karen Whitefield: Well, that depends on whether people believe that independence would work. We do not, and neither do the people of Scotland.

Mr Swinney's statement should remain a warning signal to the overwhelming majority of Scots who last year chose devolution over separation. People will continue to do that and should always remember that a vote for the nationalists is a vote for the separation of Britain.

16:21

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. *[Interruption.]* I thank Andrew Wilson for his words of encouragement.

This debate says little about the state of the nation; it says more about the SNP.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): We have had that line.

Mr Monteith: A good line is worth repeating.

Alex Salmond's motion is code for "Help! I must show my nationalist credentials before Roseanna or John or Kenny or Alex or Mike takes my seat." The SNP tries to portray itself as a serious, credible Opposition, or even, dare I say it, as a Government in waiting. What tripe.

Take the SNP's likely justice minister, Roseanna Cunningham. She may be a competent committee convener and even a leader in waiting, but she failed to condemn the vandalism of Winston Churchill's statue. What words would veterans of the Black Watch have for Roseanna's failure to defend the memory of the allied leader against the Nazis? They would have two words: unpardonable folly.

Michael Russell: I know that Brian Monteith believes everything he reads in the newspapers—unfortunately, even his own column—but the

reality is that Roseanna Cunningham is making a complaint to the Press Complaints Commission. She is quite clear about what she said and has circulated that quite widely. I hope that the member will withdraw his statement, as it is not based on the truth.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Will you address that point, please, Mr Monteith?

Mr Monteith: I would be delighted to hear the details from Roseanna Cunningham. On the basis—

Michael Russell: Withdraw the statement.

Mr Monteith: If the member will listen to my answer, he will hear me say that if he is sincere and Roseanna is correct about what she said, I will be happy to withdraw the statement unequivocally. The words, however, were printed and have left a bad taste.

As David McLetchie pointed out, although individual members strive to make the Parliament work, the SNP is part of the problem of the poor public perception that the Parliament enjoys. The SNP struggles to vote in more than 80 per cent of divisions. I did not think that the day would come when I would agree with Hugh Henry, but I thought that his words about Mike Russell were entirely apt. It was Mike Russell who rushed to the papers to complain about the award of a medal. No doubt Mike will give a report to the Press Complaints Commission about that.

Andrew Wilson: This is a point of accuracy. Perhaps the member would like to have a word with Mr Harding, who is sitting next to him, who has voted in less than 72 per cent of votes. People in glass houses should not throw stones.

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order. Andrew Wilson should read the full facts. My voting record is 89 per cent. It happened to be low in March due to personal commitments.

Mr Monteith: The important point is the mean attendance at votes, which puts the Conservatives at 90 per cent compared with the SNP's 80 per cent.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: No. I have taken a number of interventions.

The SNP panders to public concern on section 28, but even now continues to avoid the publication of any amendments seeking to reassure parents.

Not only is the SNP unfit to govern here; it is unfit to govern locally. Let us take a couple of

councils. In Stirling, the SNP did not oppose the burning of the Bruce, at a cost of £50,000. Only Conservatives, along with local people, fought to avoid it. Despite there being 40 community councils that can relay the issues which concern people locally, £100,000 is spent on area forums. The sole SNP councillor takes the £7,000 allowance to work with the Labour administration, despite the youth congress that she is working with having to be closed down due to lack of support.

In Perth—

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As we are on Perth, does Mr Monteith agree that it was unwise of the Lib-Lab-Conservative group—a real unholy alliance—that controls that council to give £5,000 towards the City of Perth gold cup while doubling the cost of concessionary fares? That is administration for you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you address that point, Mr Monteith? I will give you a minute to wind up, as you have taken quite a number of interventions.

Mr Monteith: I am winding up anyway, Presiding Officer. That was the very point that I was coming to make. The reason for that sponsorship was to promote local area tourism. It was interesting that the SNP could not support tourism in what is clearly an important industry for Perth.

The SNP is not fit to govern in this Parliament: it is riddled with personal jealousies, and it is full of policy contradictions. The SNP is not a Government in waiting; it is a party found wanting.

16:27

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to refer back to what Tom McCabe said on the benefits of the union. I want to put the benefits of the union for Scotland's pensioners to the test. There are a million people of pensionable age in Scotland, more than all the schoolchildren at primary and secondary school put together. The basic state pension, however, is only £66 for a single person and £106 for a couple. That places Scotland third from the bottom in Europe's pensions league. According to Age Concern statistics, 185,000 Scottish pensioners rely on income support, 70,000 already live in severe poverty and one in three lives in fuel poverty. I think that that makes my point.

Ask any Scottish pensioner what he or she treasures most in life and will fight to retain, and the answer that will come uniformly and in one word is independence. Central to that independence is a basic state pension that

secures dignity and choice. However, I recall the scaremongering when we were campaigning for independence that pensioners would not get their pension the next day—scaremongering of the “The buses will not come the next day” type. Have their pensions been secured? No, they have not.

Pensioners were vulnerable to persuasion then, but not any more. Grey power is alive and kicking back—kicking out against a 73p per week increase in the basic state pension. Shame. That is not enough for a cup of tea and a scone, let alone for paying for the increase in water charges.

I could have used these quotations instead of my speech—and Richard Simpson should not shake his head. This is Labour's pre-election pledge to pensioners. It is headed:

“The Tories have betrayed . . . pensioners.”

That is from Tony Blair, John Prescott, Harriet Harman and Gordon Brown.

It would be educational to read this unabridged, but I shall give members the flavour, with a few representative highlights. I quote:

“Too many of today's older people do not enjoy security in their retirement.”

I quote:

“Having paid tax all their working lives a whole generation now finds it cannot be sure of the national health service or the continuing care they have provided for others.”

I quote:

“Millions of people face poverty in retirement—today's pensioners have lost £20 a week through the Government”—

the Tory Government—

“breaking the earnings link with pensions.”

That situation is being continued by the Labour party. Labour is continuing Tory policies and, courtesy of this Executive—

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will Christine Grahame give way?

Christine Grahame: No.

We should ask Strathclyde, Troon or Fife elderly forums what they have to say about that. Pensioner poverty and fuel poverty in an oil-rich Scotland: it should be an embarrassment to Labour members to defend what I would consider the indefensible, but I suspect that it is not.

What could independence do? Look to Ireland: it is smaller than Scotland, with less by way of natural resources, yet the Irish Government has put in place a programme to secure a first-level pension of £80 a week by 2000. Ireland has a fuel allowance, which covers standing charges and so many free units of usage. It has a telephone rental

allowance, with 20 free calls in a two-month period. Ireland has a national travel concessionary scheme: all public transport is free and a substantial number of private operators, including—

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

Christine Grahame: I am sorry. I do not want to hear from George Lyon.

Average male life expectancy is 74, yet in Ireland, everyone over 65—not just those who manage to reach 75—qualifies for a free television licence. No wonder Scotland's pensioners are angry and I am angry. Ireland, once mocked as the poor relation, puts the Executive to shame.

What of an independent Scotland? The link between pensions and average earnings would be restored immediately. The minimum income guarantee would be universal.

Dr Simpson *rose—*

Christine Grahame: The member can sit down.

Independence would mean universal cold climate allowance of £9.20 a week for the five winter months. Standing charges would be a thing of the past and television licences would be free for all pensioners; longevity would not have to be guaranteed. A national concessionary fare scheme would be introduced, with through-ticketing and, at last, Sir Stewart Sutherland could toast the implementation of his report.

Independence is the solution. It is what Scotland's pensioners fight for day in and day out. It is time that the Parliament, which grandly calls itself Scottish, demonstrated the same spirit and did the same.

16:32

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): I thank Mike Rumbles for his kind words earlier in the debate. I am conscious that it is not me who deserves congratulation, but the Public Petitions Committee, which remains one of the most innovative, popular and groundbreaking committees in the Parliament.

To turn to the debate, I was fascinated by Kenny MacAskill's invocation of the late Bobby Kennedy as some kind of prophet of Scottish independence. I tried hard to make that leap of imagination, to see Scotland not as it is, but as it might be. Try as I might, I cannot quite see Scotland as an island, as Kenny described it in his speech. When I was at school, it was Britain that was entirely surrounded by water, not Scotland. At my dad's knee in Springburn, I learned an old Irish song, in which the Irish pitied the Scots because they would never be free, whereas the Irish were

entirely surrounded by water. That leap of imagination has always been central to the politics of the SNP but, in speeches by the likes of Kenny MacAskill, it sometimes gets out of control.

The core of the SNP's argument is that the only possible Government for a successful Scotland is an independent one, with what it describes as equality of status with the other countries in Europe. Indeed, I heard Andrew Wilson on the radio this morning, arguing—in an attempt not to frighten anyone—that the SNP's demands are really very modest. All it is asking for is normal status in Europe.

But that is not the only choice available to Scotland. It is not the only choice available in Europe. Independence is certainly a choice; it is a choice that has been taken recently by many European countries: Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, to name a few. However, there are other choices. The people of Catalonia and of Bavaria and of the Länder in east and west Germany went down another road. They chose home rule; they chose self-government. They chose autonomy within a multinational state, because that state also brought benefits to the people in those countries.

Scotland has a choice of futures. As my old friend George Galloway used to put it, we can choose to use Vilnius as the model for the future of Edinburgh, or we can choose to use Barcelona. No offence to Vilnius, but I would like Edinburgh to be seen in terms of a city such as Barcelona.

It may well be that 62 per cent of Scottish voters want the Parliament to have more power, but that does not mean that they want an independent Parliament in Scotland. There are many different terminuses between where we are now and independence at the end of the road. The Scots do not want to go all the way to the end of the road.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will the member give way?

Mr McAllion: I do not have time.

Alex Salmond told us to glance at the opinion polls for evidence that the SNP is in line with the people. Look at yesterday's opinion polls. On the question of voting intentions in a Westminster election, a Labour lead of 11 percentage points over the SNP in March has been turned into a lead of 18 percentage points. That does not sound to me as if the Scottish people are inexorably on the march towards independence.

Ian Bell, one of the commentators in the press who is friendly towards the SNP, wrote this morning that the SNP will have an almighty struggle to convince anyone that it is still relevant to the Westminster contest. That is what the SNP's friends tell it.

The election to the Scottish Parliament showed no overwhelming support for the SNP position—on the first and second votes, the SNP and Labour were virtually neck and neck. The critical point is that neither the SNP nor Labour is in any position to win an outright majority of seats in this Parliament. With the proportional representation system, no party will win a majority of seats. That would have been unlikely with the old four-party system, and it is even less likely with the six-party system that we have now.

The reason why the SNP has had what is the equivalent of the clause 4 debate that took place in the Labour party is that its members know that the game is up. Never again will they be able to make the old argument that when the SNP wins an election, it will negotiate independence. Now they talk about growing gradually towards independence and having a referendum.

The SNP will require the support of voters of every party to secure independence but it will not admit that to its fundamentalist supporters. That is why we have heard all the rhetoric of independence this afternoon. I see that Margo MacDonald is not here. I hope that she was not told to stay away. She would not tell the same story that Alex Salmond and others have told this afternoon.

The SNP is irrevocably split. Independence, as it used to imagine it, is not on the cards and never will be. Let us begin the debate about the kind of Scotland that we want within a devolved UK and within the European Union.

16:37

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): This has been our first chance to debate the SNP's flagship policy of independence, and it has been illuminating. It has highlighted the contradictions at the heart of SNP policy: contradictions in its ideas about the route map to independence, the kind of Scotland it would want after independence and whether to be constructive in the Parliament. The SNP's answer to everything has been that independence would deliver the promised land. Yet, as many speakers have already highlighted, independence was No 10 in the party's list of priorities and has been well camouflaged in today's debate. Alex Salmond mentioned it only three times.

Is independence to be achieved by the fundamentalist route or the gradualist route? John McAllion highlighted that problem in his speech. The SNP's latest position—a referendum after the next Scottish election, leading to independence by 2007—was endorsed by only 60 per cent of the membership at the recent SNP national council meeting. According to a fundamentalist, who shall

remain nameless, that happened only after Alex Salmond put his leadership on the line over the issue. Which SNP MSPs supported Alex Salmond's line? Which ones voted against him with Margo MacDonald and Alex Neil, neither of whom is in the chamber today?

Another major contradiction is what kind of country this independent Scotland would be. Would it be a low-tax, deregulated economy or a European model of high taxation and high regulation? We are often told, and have been told in today's debate, that we should emulate Denmark, Norway or Sweden. Alex Salmond said at a Scottish Council Development and Industry event last night that we must adopt radical reforms and cut corporation tax and business rates. How can that position be squared with the SNP front benchers' promise of more than £3 billion of extra public spending?

What about the SNP's much-trumpeted comparisons with other small European countries? Alex Salmond believes that we should emulate the Irish example: low personal and corporation tax and an open economy. However, as I tried to explain to an earlier speaker, Ireland has a health service that is means-tested at £11,250.

More recently, SNP spokesmen have trumpeted the example of countries such as Denmark, Finland and Norway, which they claim have high levels of investment in public services. What the SNP does not say is that direct and indirect taxes in those countries as a proportion of gross domestic product are 46 per cent higher in Denmark than in Scotland, 33 per cent higher in Finland and 20 per cent higher in Norway. How does Alex Salmond square that level of tax with his supposed aim of making Scotland a low-tax, business-friendly economy to compare with the economy of Ireland? That is a complete contradiction. What kind of country would independent Scotland be?

The SNP claims that it wants the Parliament to work, yet George Reid, who wants to take on the job of setting up our future home, the Holyrood building, was barred from doing so by a majority vote at the SNP parliamentary group meeting. That puts political opportunism before the survival and success of the Parliament. That should have been a non-party political discussion.

Bruce Crawford: On a point of order.

George Lyon: Today's motion has nothing to do with creating Scottish solutions—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A point of order from Bruce Crawford.

Bruce Crawford: I realise that this is a difficult situation for you, Presiding Officer, but I would like to ask your advice on whether it was in order for

George Lyon to use the material he just did when you are in the chair.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have some doubts about that. We will make a ruling on that later.

I ask Mr Lyon to bring his remarks to a close.

George Lyon: Today's motion has nothing to do with creating Scottish solutions for Scottish problems. Alex Salmond wants to advance the proposition that the SNP is a credible Government in waiting for Scotland. Yet when the spotlight is on nationalist policies there is nothing there but contradiction, opportunism and a party riven between fundamentalists and gradualists. There is nothing that will deliver real benefits on education, health and housing for the people of Scotland.

16:42

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I suppose a celebratory motion is permissible to commemorate a parliamentary birthday, even if it is loftily entitled "State of the Nation". If the motion is the SNP's birthday cake, I will not be coming round to Alex Salmond's for tea—

Mr Salmond: Is that a promise?

Miss Goldie: Perhaps Mr Salmond will live with that disappointment—but I will not be the only one to find the cake unpalatable. If this debate were to take place in any city, town or village in Scotland, I am certain that the prospect of further constitutional change would stick in the craw, not just because people feel raw and bruised by the nightmare costs scenario of the new Holyrood building, but because there is a deep-seated unease about further constitutional upheaval, particularly when it involves severance from and disruption of the rest of the United Kingdom, where the people of Scotland have family connections, friends and strong business relationships.

I kept waiting for Mr Salmond's birthday cake to burst open with some alluringly clad figure called the independence tooth fairy leaping out, brandishing a compelling list of persuasive arguments for independence.

Mr Salmond: Will the member give way on that point?

Miss Goldie: Mr Salmond, I—

Mr Salmond: On the birthday cake?

Miss Goldie: All right.

Mr Salmond: Does Annabel Goldie know that in the BBC poll yesterday a majority of Conservative

supporters wanted increased power for this Parliament? I know that that is a small sample, but why is she not reflecting her supporters' opinion?

Miss Goldie: That small sample did not seek independence. That is what I reflect.

Mr Salmond: Answer the question.

Miss Goldie: I am trying to do that. Mr Salmond says that, in that poll, an allegedly small sample of Conservatives wanted more power; however, more power is not synonymous with independence. As I understand it, independence is the political agenda of his party. If Mr Salmond insists on using my winding-up speech time to advance the arguments that he should have proposed during his lead speech, as I have said previously to gentlemen in my life, *je crois que non*.

Far from hearing from Mr Salmond a persuasive set of arguments for independence, I have heard and seen nothing on that subject. Indeed, a most uncharacteristic and blushing coyness overtook Mr Salmond because, I suspect, he detects from the Scottish people no hunger for independence, no interest in becoming the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom, no interest in flinging to the four winds the defence of the nation—relying for defence on an unconvincing hotch-potch of half-baked facilities—and no interest in a political agenda that, judging from SNP speeches in this Parliament over the past year, ranges from uncoded and unlimited spending proposals to republican neo-Marxism. The candles on the cake would indeed blow out.

While rejecting the independence agenda of the nationalists, Mr McLetchie's amendment rightly judges the performance of the coalition Executive. If this debate were taking place in other parts of Scotland, the question that the people would ask is this: in the first year of the Parliament, did the Executive expect or want a farce over the building of Holyrood, which will cost five times the original estimate; an Executive ministerial team of 20, with perks and salaries four times greater than under the Conservative Administration; a criminal justice system in chaos, with a Lord Advocate who departs the chaos to make himself a judge; a preoccupation with the repeal of section 28; and consideration of issues that are remote to most people in Scotland, such as land reform and fox hunting?

By contrast, the Conservatives have in opposition challenged the crisis in the health service, rising crime and falling police numbers, the repeal of section 28, the turbulent problems of indiscipline in schools, and the dislocated and unco-ordinated strategy for dealing with drug abuse in Scotland. Those are the issues that matter to the people of Scotland, which the

Conservatives have been here to speak on and—more than any other party in the Parliament, as Mr McLetchie indicated—vote on. That is why I reject Mr Salmond's motion and support Mr McLetchie's amendment.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before I call Henry McLeish, I shall rule on the point of order that Bruce Crawford raised with Mr Reid. I heard the exchanges as I was working on papers in my room. The Presiding Officer cannot be expected always to rule on points of order and create a list of things that are out of order. However, it is important that the occupant of the chair is kept out of any controversial discussion. While Mr Reid was in the chair, it was inappropriate for George Lyon to raise the matter that he did. However, I shall not rule it out of order. This is a matter for judgment by individual members.

16:48

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): This debate has been characterised by three key messages. The first message is that, despite the protestations of the SNP, there have been real achievements in the first year of this Parliament. That is to the credit of the Parliament and the Executive and it shows the wisdom of the Scottish people, who voted in elections and referendums to ensure that we had this opportunity.

The second message was the rather downbeat, dispirited and disappointing speech from the leader of the Opposition. The sour note that was injected into our proceedings characterises the SNP. If long faces could speak, they would have been a more fitting testimony to what Alex Salmond was saying than anything that I can say at this juncture.

In sharp contrast to that was the third message, which was given by Jim Wallace in an excellent speech. He said that it is the partnership between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament that is delivering for Scottish people. The SNP puts the party first—that is nothing new. I would like to think that this Parliament has some consideration for the Scottish people, who voted to put us here.

The SNP motion is unbelievable if it is dissected forensically. What the SNP does not want to mention, but I want to speak about, is independence, divorce, separation and the break-up of Britain. What do we get in the motion? Seven moans in the run-up to a tentative embrace of independence. Does not that give us a clue about the frenzied state of confusion in the SNP at present?

SNP members laughed wryly when the point was made about fundamentalists and moderates,

but it is as obvious as night follows day that there is a fault line running through the SNP that is hardly bridgeable by any stretch of the imagination.

Phil Gallie: I go along with many of the comments that Henry McLeish has made, except to say that Mr Salmond made one good point. He referred to today's announcement of the loss of 200 jobs in the textile industry in Kilmarnock. Just a month or so ago, the minister boasted with some pride about the Executive's handling of the textile industry. Will he now acknowledge that the textile industry in Scotland is in crisis, and will he do something about it?

Henry McLeish: We never boast about job losses in any form, and Phil Gallie knows that the Executive has set up many groups and organisations to deal with the problem. We have debated it before and we will debate it again soon. I look forward to responding to Mr Gallie's comments then.

Mr Salmond *rose—*

Henry McLeish: I will not give way to Alex Salmond now, as I would like to make some progress.

We are celebrating the first anniversary of the Parliament, but in a few months we will also be celebrating the 10th anniversary of the SNP leader taking over his role. Photographs of Alex Salmond over those 10 years show how he has changed; it is interesting to see what a wearing effect being leader of the SNP can have on someone.

Let us ask why this debate is taking place. Is it about the welfare of Scots? No. That is evident from the debate. Is it about taking Scotland forward? Of course it is not. It is about the fact that the fundamentalists have got the leadership by the throat and, with the conference coming up, they are having a debate at public expense as a warm-up exercise. That is ridiculous; people who are listening, watching and reading will know that the SNP takes advantage of the public purse because its members are in a panic about the fundamental fault line that divides them.

Mr Salmond: On the subject of divisions in political parties, I have three pages of quotations, the first of which is from an influential back bencher from the Labour party—that narrows the field—who said, "Who does Henry McLeish think he is? He's going to be the leader over my dead body." Would Henry the first care to comment on that and reflect on the fact that the difference between us is that I lead my party whereas he merely wants to lead his?

Henry McLeish: I gather that I have touched a raw nerve with the leader of the SNP, but I offer a special welcome to Margo MacDonald, who has

just entered the chamber. [MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] She is a fundamentalist and proud of it and is leading the attack that is under way.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): I am grateful not to have missed the highlight of the highlights. I have been keeping in touch with what has been said and I am willing to put on record my total support for Alex Salmond in his fight for independence for Scotland. I have been disgusted by how many Labour members have been willing to say, "We're too poor. We're too stupid. We couldn't do it." That is what they said; they have wasted a whole afternoon talking like that. They could have saved that time and taken out an advert in the paper.

Henry McLeish: I should have borne in mind the maxim that one ought to be careful who one lets in when one is trying to be generous in accepting interventions.

I want to take on Alex Salmond's statement that Scotland needs to move on. We are concerned about children who have no nursery education moving into a nursery place. We are concerned about people who are unemployed moving on to jobs. We are concerned about people who are ill and want to move on to better health care services. Those are the crucial issues. How long will we be bogged down in constitutional proprieties?

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will Mr McLeish give way?

The Presiding Officer: No. He is in his last minute.

Henry McLeish: Is Scotland not sick and tired of constitutional debate? It wants more action.

Tricia Marwick: Will Mr McLeish give way?

Henry McLeish: I am not giving way.

The SNP again wants to move on to procedures; we want to move on to action.

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

Henry McLeish: I am not giving way.

Mr Quinan: Will Mr McLeish give way?

The Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Quinan. Mr McLeish is in his last minute.

Henry McLeish: I will finish with this little reference to the leader of the SNP. We see a situation where the SNP is failing Scotland. It whinges and moans on every occasion, it denigrates the country and, of course, it denigrates the key partnership between Westminster, which it still attends, and this Parliament. The SNP is guilty under Alex Salmond's leadership of a decade of failure,

disunity, delay, dishonesty and, of course, defeat.

If one thing sums up the SNP, it is this. On a radio programme at the weekend, when Nicola Sturgeon was asked about independence, she said that it would now be in 2010.

There is silence, so it must be true.

Nicola Sturgeon rose—

Henry McLeish: I am not giving way.

There has been "Free in '93" and "2007 and the SNP will arrive in heaven". Is that not pathetic? Is not this Parliament a proud, patriotic, passionate place in which to get on with the real business and to isolate even further those who will not embrace the future, but live in a tired, dated way of the past?

We want members to support Labour's amendment and reject a motion that would not take Scotland forward, but see her languish in the policies of the nationalists.

The Presiding Officer: I get complaints from members when decision time starts after 5 o'clock. Again, we are running out of time. I appeal for reasonable silence to hear the winding-up speech.

16:57

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): It is my pleasure to close the debate.

The first sentence of the motion in the name of Alex Salmond puts into context an important part of Parliament's work. It is about the commitment of members working in committees, in Parliament and in their constituencies to move Scotland forward.

That is an essential part of what Parliament has been able to do to assist in the government of Scotland. The remainder of the motion highlights the reality of some of the issues that we face. I did not hear the Deputy First Minister, or the deputy Labour leader—if that is his title—talk about the problems in the manufacturing sector. [Interruption.] I know that those problems concern Duncan McNeil, but they should concern us all.

As Alex Salmond said to the First Minister last Thursday at question time, the chief executive of Scottish Engineering—reporting on the first quarter of this year—said that things were still very difficult in the manufacturing sector. Since the Labour party came to government in Westminster, 22,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector and fewer than 300,000 people are now employed in manufacturing in Scotland.

I did not hear the Deputy First Minister refer to the crisis in our local authority services, which has been raised by members from across the political spectrum in the chamber. I did not hear the

Deputy First Minister refer to the problems in our transport infrastructure. Those are real issues that have been raised by SNP speakers in the debate, but I did not hear any rebuttal of those arguments.

Mr McNeil: Tell that to Margo MacDonald.

Mr Swinney: Duncan, just you wait.

I did not hear the Deputy First Minister, or the deputy Labour leader, rebut the legitimate challenges that were made about unemployment in Scotland.

I did not hear the Minister for Rural Affairs—although I am glad that he is here now—illustrate that he has been putting ferocious pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to lower interest rates to create the right economic climate for the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. I met the Minister for Rural Affairs on the platform at Paddington yesterday. He was leaving London as I arrived. Perhaps he had been to see the chancellor to give him a rollicking about the level of interest rates, although I doubt it.

The debate has hinged on aspirations for Scotland. One of the SNP's aspirations—which we share with Mr Finnie—is to release the wealth of Scotland that is trapped in Gordon Brown's war chest and invest it in Scotland. We also have aspirations for this Parliament to become an independent Parliament. Duncan McNeil should make no mistake about that.

There is a contradiction at the heart of the Executive. We have heard from the Deputy First Minister that devolution is the settled will of the Scottish people. This is one of the rare occasions on which I have heard him say that. I heard Mr Rumbles and Mr Brown refer to federalism, or pseudo-federalism, or perhaps even quasi-federalism. What on earth has happened to federalism? Are the Liberal Democrats still committed to it? They are committed to it at Westminster, but heaven knows whether they are committed to it in Edinburgh. They say one thing down there, but they do another up here. That is true about taxation, public services, local authorities—you name it.

Ms Curran: SNP members lodged the motion and it is their debate. Instead of criticising us, they should put the case for independence.

Mr Swinney: Margaret Curran's timing is absolutely impeccable.

The debate about the future powers of Parliament is a lively one. Yesterday morning on the radio, it captured the imagination of the Minister for Parliament. He said that we were involved in a process, that things would change and develop and that we might get more powers. I can tell members that his Labour colleagues at Westminster gave that a very warm welcome last

night. What is wrong with Parliament having legitimate aspirations to debate the issues that a normal independent Parliament would want to deal with? Why should not we set petrol duty at the rate that the country wants, rather than the rate that the Conservative and Labour parties at Westminster want? The Liberal Democrats voted against that in the House of Commons.

Why cannot we have our own stance on asylum seekers? Why cannot we take the approach that we want to take to air traffic control? Plenty of Scottish Labour MPs voted against the Government on that issue yesterday. Why cannot we take our own stance on the European matters that are important to Scotland?

Mr Kerr *rose*—

Karen Gillon *rose*—

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD) *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way.

Mr Swinney: We want to strengthen Parliament's powers on some key issues, so that it can discuss properly the future of Scotland.

Duncan McNeil said—

Mr McNeil: So the member was listening.

Mr Swinney: Duncan McNeil should not be surprised to hear that I listen to what he says. I see him—unlike most of his colleagues—as the realistic voice of Labour. Duncan said that the SNP moans and whinges about things. I would prefer to say that we set Scotland's sights high and are determined to deliver on that. There has never been any question of the SNP putting independence on the back burner. Why on earth would I have joined the SNP 20 years ago if not to support the campaign for independence and to work relentlessly for the most effective way of delivering that in the shortest time possible?

In a characteristically uncharitable performance, Mr McLeish—[*Laughter.*] In an uncharacteristically uncharitable performance, Mr McLeish talked about divisions. That came from a man who is sitting beside a Deputy First Minister whose colleagues think that he was treated like a plonker by the Labour party. Of the current turmoil in the Labour party, a Labour back bencher said:

"They're all as bad as each other. If this lot were told to form a firing squad they'd stand in a circle and turn the fire on each other. The only thing they seem able to do well is fight like ferrets in a sack."

I do not think that we will take any lessons from Mr McLeish on that point.

Johann Lamont *rose*—

Mr Swinney: I want to close—because I am on time and I do not want to keep hard-pressed, tired-

out Labour MSPs from getting home tonight—by addressing the issues that were raised by Allan Wilson. Allan Wilson used the same arguments to attack independence that the Tories used to undermine this Parliament and devolution. It reminded me of a memorandum from Douglas Alexander, MP for Paisley South, to Gordon Brown that was leaked to *The Observer*. The memorandum states that

“few voters fear the SNP or independence”

and that new Labour has to

“engender fear of the SNP”.

Objectivity and substance do not matter—that is about scaremongering and trying to undermine the views of the people of Scotland.

My final point relates to the speeches that were made by Hugh Henry and Karen Whitefield. From the minute that Parliament came into being and started its work and became a success—a success in which the SNP has played its part well—I have believed that the people of Scotland will say, “If we are good at working at that level of policy, let’s do the rest. Out of the success of this Parliament, we will build the strength of an independent Parliament.”

That is the process in which we are engaged. I am delighted that Mr McCabe is one of our converts and supporters. We will take the matter to the people of Scotland. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. Can we have some quiet, please?

There are no Parliamentary Bureau motions, so we will go straight to decision time.

Decision Time

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first question is, that amendment S1M-818.2, in the name of Mr Jim Wallace, which seeks to amend motion S1M-818, in the name of Alex Salmond, on the state of the nation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 47, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Because that

amendment has been agreed to, amendment S1M-818.1, in the name of David McLetchie, falls.

The next question is that, motion S1M-818, in the name of Mr Alex Salmond, as amended, on the state of the nation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that in its first year many members working in committees, in the whole Parliament and in their constituencies have been active in moving Scotland forward; recognises that the Partnership Executive working with the Parliament is already delivering on the commitments contained in the Programme for

Government to make real and sustained improvements to the economic prosperity and social wellbeing of the people of Scotland; recognises that devolution is the settled will of the majority of the people of Scotland, and rejects independence for Scotland as a backward step.

A90 Upgrade

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The final item of business today is the members' business debate on motion S1M-737, in the name of David Davidson, on the A90 upgrade. The debate will be concluded after 30 minutes, without any question being put.

I remind members that business is continuing and that, if they are not staying for the debate, they should leave quietly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's announcement on the roads improvement programme and, in particular, the inclusion of a scheme to upgrade the Hatton Bends on the A90 near Peterhead, but believes that all of the single-carriageway sections of the Aberdeen to Peterhead road should be upgraded and that the construction of an Aberdeen bypass should proceed as a matter of urgency.

17:09

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to have obtained this debate, which gives the north-east the opportunity to have two of its most serious concerns debated—the upgrading of the Aberdeen to Peterhead road and the construction of a peripheral route round Aberdeen. I welcome the cross-party support that I have received for my motion.

Even when I was a young lad in Aberdeen, the city was very busy. Even then, the city council was trying to put in pedestrian protection schemes. I remember as a youth—which was not last week—that the dualling of the A90 started with the co-operation of other councils. Today, roads in the city and in many of the surrounding areas suffer from gridlock, a term that was used by a senior policeman only the other day. The lack of a modern and effective trunk road system in a major Scottish city is a disgrace. It is not only a major cause for concern for the local economy, as there are also environmental and safety concerns.

It is a scandal that the pan-European dual carriageway network grinds to a halt at the Bridge of Dee, forcing heavy vehicles and buses through the city and along minor roads, such as the B977 and the B979. Those roads cannot cope. They are dangerous and expensive to maintain.

Vehicles that make it across the Bridge of Dee are faced with 17 sets of traffic lights when they try to get to the north end of Anderson Drive, through densely packed housing areas, reaching the bottleneck at the Bridge of Don to the north and tailbacks almost every day, at any hour, going out to the airport.

Those blocks result in a series of rat-runs through the city and on some of the peripheral, small, country roads around Aberdeen. That produces pollution and is a hazard to all, costing businesses time and money.

The gridlock of the city causes tremendous economic difficulty to those who live and work to the north of Aberdeen, particularly those in north Aberdeenshire, Banff and Buchan, Gordon, across the coast through Moray, and even in the Inverness and Huntly areas. Those areas would all benefit from a bypass.

Local businesses claim—I think that the figures are accurate—that simply negotiating the difficulties of Aberdeen city costs in excess of £1 million a month.

The A90 is mostly single carriageway, with dangerous bends and junctions and poor sightlines. It is used by hundreds of large lorries that are essential to the economy, particularly in the area up towards Peterhead and Fraserburgh. I remind the Parliament that agriculture in Aberdeenshire depends on the movement of stock and material by road.

However, at this point, I must thank the Minister for Transport and the Environment for responding to my campaign on the Hatton bends. I know that I am not the first to mention that issue, nor will I be the last, but I am pleased that the minister has now responded to us.

However, there are more problems on the A90 than that. Aberdeenshire Council would be willing to share the long list with the minister. Two such problems come to mind: Hatton village crossroads, which is beginning to be a major problem, and the Inverugie bridge.

The fishing ports and many other areas in the north depend totally on the A90 for transportation, for business purposes and commuting to work. Every day of the week, there are tailbacks, bumps and bangs, and the frustration caused by the difficulties on the road results all too often in accidents—unfortunately, some of those accidents have tragic outcomes. We cannot allow that situation to continue any longer.

The dualling of the Balmedie to Tippetty stretch of the A90 is being held in abeyance officially. I ask the minister to give that project proceed-to-construction status, as a next step towards the improvement of that road.

The Peterhead economy has taken many hits in the past and now RAF Buchan and Peterhead prison are threatened with closure. To counter those closures, we must have an essential, basic tool—a road fit for the purpose of supporting and developing further the economy in that area.

Aberdeen is now clogged with traffic, and

congestion tolls or increased fuel prices will not alter that situation—they will simply cost jobs and add to the burden of indirect taxation on individuals. The city and the surrounding area require usable trunk roads that do not pollute our living spaces with either particle emission or noise.

Many brown-field sites are available for development in Aberdeen, but they remain landlocked. Other sites just outside the city would benefit from a bypass, which has been talked about for years. We must consult further on its route, as housing and working patterns have changed since the idea was first developed. However, it is essential that the idea is progressed as soon as possible.

The north-east Scotland economic development partnership commissioned a study by Halcrow Fox, which will report soon, on the options for alternative transport strategies for Aberdeen and the north-east. With the agreement of the partnership, I can tell members that the report will almost certainly conclude that an integrated transport strategy incorporating a western peripheral route gives the greatest significant benefit across a range of factors. However, any western peripheral route must connect with the northbound A90; there is no point in developing the bypass otherwise.

In conclusion—and I will try to be brief because I know that others wish to speak—Aberdeen and the north-east must be allowed to share equally in the development of Scotland's infrastructure. The heady days of rising employment in oil and gas, fishing, agriculture, food processing and engineering are over. Despite the headlines, employment is dropping and the region has many black spots of deprivation and exclusion. To build a new economy, we need sustainable employment and a safer and cleaner environment for everyone, all of which will require a reasonable infrastructure.

I hope that, today, the minister will tell the north-east that she has listened to us, accepts the need for these road improvement projects and agrees to work in partnership with councils and agencies to deliver those vital parts of an integrated transport strategy for the area as soon as possible. I thank her for responding to me in the past. Will she do so again to prove to the north-east that it will not be ignored?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Several members have indicated that they wish to speak, and we will be able to accommodate all of them if they keep their remarks to three minutes.

17:16

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I welcome the debate and congratulate David

Davidson on securing it. I will certainly stick to three minutes: as I have explained to David, because of the change in members' business, I have to leave the debate to make a speech on the anniversary of the Parliament. However, I want to make a few brief points on this important issue.

First, although I congratulate David Davidson on securing the debate, he should have the modesty to admit that these issues have been raised by constituency MPs and councillors from the north-east of Scotland for some years. Obviously, as the constituency member for Banff and Buchan, I greatly welcome the progress on the Hatton bends. However, it has been a *sair fecht* over the years to get the Hatton bends—which has frequently appeared on project designs or on lists to be done—to reach this stage in its development. I welcome the minister's commitment to the project.

Although I agree with the bulk of David Davidson's case for improvements to the A90 and the western peripheral route, I want to raise two particularly important points. First, Banff and Buchan is not stuck in the middle of nowhere in the north-east of Scotland. It has one of the largest gas terminals in Europe at St Fergus; the largest whitefish port in the whole of Europe; another major fishing port in Fraserburgh; and there are other key industries in the community. Given that economic infrastructure and its contribution to the economy, I think that the inhabitants of Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Buchan are entitled to ask why the road infrastructure is still so poor and why the dual carriageway ends mysteriously just outside Banff and Buchan. This is an economically vital and vibrant place with a huge amount of heavy road traffic.

Secondly, as there is not an inch of railway line in the whole of the Banff and Buchan constituency, everyone has to go by road, either using an inadequate bus network or in private cars. The fact that there is no alternative to road transport should be a factor in the minister's calculations, unless she can announce that there are to be new railways in Banff and Buchan. However, I suspect that is beyond even her powers as the Minister for Transport and the Environment.

Finally, I want to raise a point that would apply as much to other improvements to the A90 as to the western peripheral route, and which would certainly enjoy great support. In many areas of Scotland, people have deep uncertainty and opposition to proposed road schemes. We have seen such opposition in the west of Scotland, for example, in recent years. However, there is cross-party, substantial—I will not say unanimous, but certainly overwhelming—public support for the western peripheral route and for any improvements to the A90. That should be an

important factor in ministerial calculations; road schemes and public support for them should have some connection. I hope that the fact that the north-east of Scotland is substantially behind the improvements that have been mentioned in the debate so far will be a factor in the minister's thinking and calculations on the subject.

17:20

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I, too, congratulate David Davidson on securing the debate and on combining two important aspects of the roads and transport policies for Aberdeen and the north-east.

As members would expect, my main interest is in the construction of the bypass, or the western peripheral route, round the city of Aberdeen, and how that fits into a wider strategy. Clearly, we need a better road system in the area; we need a system that addresses freight traffic going from areas to the north of the city to areas to the south, and the linked question of commuter congestion on routes in and out of the city. In creating that system, we also need to see how far we can divert traffic off the roads altogether. Alex Salmond said, quite rightly, that Banff and Buchan lacks any railway lines, but that is not true of the whole of the north-east. I welcome the proposals for developing an Inverurie to Stonehaven commuter rail system that will help to speed people into and out of the city and to take some traffic off the roads.

I also welcome the moves that have been made to make Aberdeen airport more user-friendly regarding delayed flights in the evenings. That is important.

On the rail side, the integration of road and rail requires investment in the main routes from Aberdeen, in particular the Aberdeen to Edinburgh route, for which there is a proposal to save half an hour on the journey time. The proposal is to do that over 10 years, but I see no reason why the shadow strategic rail authority should not set that as a priority over five years.

I also want to mention the role of sea transport, which is important and growing; it must be linked to the things that Mr Davidson spoke about. Members will be aware of the growing international trade through Aberdeen harbour. There are twice-weekly freight sailings to Norway and to Amsterdam and weekly container ships to Rotterdam and Antwerp, as well as the tourist links through Shetland to Faroe and Iceland.

When we develop our transport strategy, it is essential that we protect and maintain the opportunity for sea-to-road and sea-to-rail transfer in Aberdeen. That means that heavy road freight traffic in the city will always continue. Protection of the position of the harbour and the maritime trade

through the city is a further argument for the importance of diverting as much through-traffic as possible off the city roads by developing the western peripheral route. I welcome the developments that point in that direction.

17:23

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): There is no doubt that there are glaring gaps in the strategic road network in the north-east. One of those gaps is the section of the A90 between Tippetty and Balmedie in my constituency, which remains the only length of single carriageway between Ellon and Dundee, apart from the urban section through Aberdeen.

The A90 is the key route from Aberdeen to the north-east corner of Scotland. It is a key route for agricultural produce, for fish from the biggest whitefish port in Europe, as Alex Salmond said, and for the oil industry. It is also an extremely busy commuter route and an arterial public transport route. It services a rural park-and-ride initiative with sites at Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Mintlaw and Ellon and takes people to the busy park-and-ride facility at Bridge of Don on the outskirts of Aberdeen.

The stretch of single carriageway, with few safe overtaking opportunities, is a constriction on the free flow of goods and travellers. That has economic consequences which add—perhaps, admittedly, only slightly—to the much more severe consequences of the constriction caused by the overloaded road network through Aberdeen, which other members have dealt with.

The other and more important aspect of that stretch of road is safety. The accident statistics speak for themselves: over a three-year period, there have been 23 minor accidents, four serious accidents and, tragically, three fatalities. The safety aspect is the strongest argument for dualling this stretch of road.

I was disappointed that the road was not included in the first batch of major projects that were prioritised in the strategic roads review. The completion of a decent, pan-Scotland strategic roads network and the filling in of the gaps in the north-east could have been given higher priority, but it is one of the three projects that are held in abeyance and I hope that it will take highest priority of those three.

17:25

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I thank David Davidson for providing the opportunity for me to make this speech, and for giving members from the north-east the chance to express their grave concerns about the A90. I hope that the Executive will do more.

Slowly, and drip by drip, the north-east has faced measures that have restricted its economic prosperity. The higher fuel costs and Government changes to road tax have left our hauliers unfairly penalised, and have also deterred tourists from coming to our part of the world. Our farming, which is increasingly under pressure, already faces an uncertain future, and the lack of good transport links makes our producers even less competitive with people in the south and in the rest of Europe.

I am sure that it has not been missed by many north-east members that last year, eight of the 10 constituencies in Scotland that experienced an increase in unemployment were in the north-east. An upgraded A90 and peripheral route are vital if we are to compete with the rest of the United Kingdom and open up the north-east. Better transport links for us in the north-east will help us to achieve equal status, and I hope will allow our businesses the same chance as those further south in Scotland.

On the subject of road safety, last year deaths on Grampian roads amounted to one fatality per week. I tell the Executive that by completing the dualling of the A90 and upgrading the junctions we can expect fewer fatalities, but I urge that more be done. I welcome the Executive's road improvement programme, but by doing more, it will demonstrate that the north-east deserves a chance equal to the rest of Scotland to compete economically.

17:26

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To some extent we are going back over ground that we covered last June in a similar debate, but I make no apology for that. With regard to some of the things that have happened since then, I hope that the minister will be able to give more positive responses than she was able to give on that previous occasion.

One of the significant changes has been south of the border, where Mr Prescott is apparently sitting on a large amount of money, which will be available to tackle the transport strategy. I hope that the minister has been able to achieve a significant share of that money. I do not doubt that that will be announced in the near future. Like Ben Wallace, I lay claim to the north-east's share of that money, in particular to try to implement the integrated transport strategy that the local authorities, in partnership with other interests, have been working so hard to deliver.

The changes at Hatton bends are welcome, but they are only a small part of what is required. There is a need to move forward with the Tippetty to Balmedie dualling. The western peripheral route is a key component of the integrated transport

strategy. We need a commitment at an early stage from the Executive to include that in its plans for the future. We realise that unlimited money is not available, but to have that measure accepted into the overall plans for the future would be a major step forward that would be welcomed in the north-east.

I wish to refer briefly to the rest of the integrated transport strategy. Like Lewis Macdonald, I welcome some of the rail changes that are coming. However, I am disappointed that, so far, the minister has felt unable to endorse the view that we ought to have a feasibility study into the reopening of the Dyce-Ellon rail link, and that we ought to look at what might be possible at Dyce airport, particularly in the light of the transfer of the goods depot from the present joint station site to Raiths farm, and the possibility of improving that area. As part of the franchising arrangements, consideration should be given to starting a number of train journeys from Dyce rather than Aberdeen. That would be most helpful. I will leave it at that in order to allow others to take part.

17:30

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): I, too, congratulate David Davidson on securing this debate. As Brian Adam mentioned, this is the second debate that we have had on the transport needs of Aberdeen and the north-east. I am happy to participate again.

We are now significantly further on in considering the transport needs of Aberdeen and the north-east. As David Davidson said, the Halcrow Fox study, which was commissioned by NESDEP to examine the options for the future of the transport system in the north-east, has been completed and will be made public very shortly. It is significant that NESDEP—the economic partnership of both councils, Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce and Scottish Enterprise Grampian—commissioned that study, because it gives a unified view of the transport requirements of the north-east. There is increasing unanimity about the future of transport across all organisations and, dare I say it, all parties in the region.

A major component of the strategy is the western peripheral route, and improvements to the A90, including dualling sections of the road north of Aberdeen, such as that between Balmedie and Tippetty. However, we need to focus on the entirety of the vision for transport in the north-east, as described in Aberdeen City Council's transport strategy. Roads are only a part of the picture. To produce a transport system that meets the needs of everybody—commuters, pensioners, city and country dwellers, business people, families—we need to consider the strategy holistically. The strategy must meet the needs of people

regardless of the type of transport that they use—pedestrians, cyclists, bus and train users, ferry travellers and users of the airport.

The implementation of Aberdeen City Council's programme of bus lanes and park-and-ride schemes is well advanced. The programme is designed to link with the western peripheral route in due course. Usage of the park-and-ride scheme in Bridge of Don, which has been running for some time, is growing year on year. Growth in the volume of traffic going through Bridge of Don is beginning to tail off.

Aberdeenshire Council is developing a further park-and-ride scheme to Ellon along the A90 to the north of the city. That scheme and the Aberdeen City Council schemes are funded by the Scottish Executive's public transport challenge fund. Aberdeen City Council has received more than £12 million over the past three years to develop bus lanes and park-and-ride schemes. The transport needs of the north-east have not been ignored, as David Davidson perhaps suggested.

It is important that we work together in this area to produce practical solutions, which deliver the transport system that the north-east requires. I look forward to the publication of the NESDEP study, so that we can have a wider discussion and begin to develop practical ways of implementing strategies. Certainly, we should have the western peripheral route by 2010.

17:34

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I promise to be very brief. I have three very quick points. This is the second time in a few months that we have discussed transport links in the north-east of Scotland. That should tell the minister how big an issue transport is in the north-east of Scotland. People want the Scottish Parliament to deliver on improved transport links, as Westminster did not.

The UK's fishing industry is based in the north-east of Scotland. The minister will be aware that fishermen have to get their produce to market while it is fresh. They have to get it to the processors and down south and, in many cases, to the continent while it is fresh. Therefore they need improved transport links.

Finally, will the minister acknowledge that there is reason for people in the north-east of Scotland to have a sense of injustice? The north-east is a corner of the Scotland and the UK that generates so much wealth for the Exchequer through the food and agriculture industry, the offshore industry and the fishing industry, yet all it gets in return is a single carriageway in the Aberdeenshire area and logjams in the city of Aberdeen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank members for keeping their speeches fairly close to the specified time. I call Sarah Boyack to respond on behalf of the Executive.

17:35

The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack): I would like to thank David Davidson for raising this issue and all members for the quality of their speeches and for raising so many transport issues in relation to north-east Scotland.

I welcome the positive way in which members responded to my announcement in March of our plans to invest £444 million on motorways and trunk roads over the next two years. That represents an increase of 22 per cent on the previous two years and is testimony to our commitment to improve and maintain Scotland's motorways and trunk roads. There are 49 schemes, costing in excess of £500,000, including the five major schemes announced in November following the strategic roads review.

I would like to pick up on the points made by Ben Wallace, Brian Adam and Richard Lochhead about the benefits for the north-east that have come from that investment. It is important to focus not only on the stretch of road directly north of Aberdeen, but on the whole area. Several major schemes have been included in the programme that will bring direct benefits to people in and around the Aberdeen area.

There are schemes on the A96 at Coachford and Newtongarry. There is the Bridge of Dee to Ellon road scheme to improve safety in urban Aberdeen. There is also a range of schemes to the south of Aberdeen—from Aberdeen to Dundee and from Dundee to Perth. I know that that does not appear to be local investment, but in terms of the access issues that Brian Adam and Richard Lochhead raised, it is important to think about the A90 as a national stretch of road.

Nora Radcliffe raised the point about the A90 between Balmedie and Tipperty. We have made road improvements that will benefit the area. I know that there are particular stretches that members would like to add.

Brian Adam: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: I am sorry—I am about to answer Brian Adam's question.

Much of the investment lacks the glamour of the Rolls-Royce new-build schemes, but it is worth £7.5 billion and is as important to Aberdeen and north-east Scotland as it is to the rest of Scotland. Our improvements focus on safety-related issues and bringing the network up to standard following years of under-investment. The investment will cut

congestion and delays and will benefit motorists, businesses and public transport passengers alike.

We have been criticised for not pressing ahead with every scheme that people would like to be implemented. As Minister for Transport and the Environment, I am conscious of the need for transport investment across Scotland, but we must face the realities of the development of transport policy. Brian Adam acknowledged that we must make choices and set priorities. That is a difficult issue. When we consider the issue of expenditure on new roads, we must face up to the consequences of less investment elsewhere, for example, in education or health. We must face up to those issues honestly.

That is why the Executive has been developing a more transparent method of allocating resources. We want local people to understand that the five appraisal criteria—integration, accessibility, safety, economy and environmental impact—of the strategic roads review are being implemented. That is why the Fochabers to Mosstodloch route came through. We have implemented several routes in Scotland. However, any new road investment must meet the appraisal framework.

We need to go further. Members made several comments about the need for an integrated approach. Elaine Thomson talked in particular about the impact of new investment in Aberdeen, which is trying to tackle the issue of congestion that David Davidson raised in his opening remarks. We need to make the links between different transport improvements by using a common framework. We will take into consideration Alex Salmond's point that not every constituency has access to the national rail network. Those are the issues that we must consider when we assess future priorities.

That is the context in which any upgrading of the A90 must be considered. I am glad that members welcome the proposed realignment scheme at Hatton bends, which is just the sort of vital but unglamorous improvement that has been ignored for too long. I can confirm today that, subject to satisfactory completion of the necessary statutory procedures, the work, worth £650,000, will commence in 2001-02.

Nora Radcliffe raised the issue of the Balmedie to Tipperty route, which was considered in the strategic roads review. As members know, the scheme was held in abeyance and will, in due course, be considered alongside other emerging priorities for inclusion in any future trunk road scheme. That means that there will not be short-term improvements on that stretch of the road, but we keep safety on all stretches of road under review and have commissioned research—

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: No. I must continue.

We are studying accidents to consider the priorities for small scheme improvements, which can be taken forward in the short term. Therefore, there is some prospect of work being carried out.

The second issue raised by Mr Davidson in his opening remarks was the Aberdeen western peripheral. As members have correctly identified, we have been there before in one of our very first debates in Parliament. Then and during a subsequent visit to Aberdeen, I made the Executive's position clear. The western peripheral is not a trunk road, nor is there any realistic prospect of the Executive trunking it—that would be an empty gesture. The cost of £85 million is, quite simply, unaffordable in the light of the other severe pressures on the trunk road programme that we have talked about.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not.

However, back in June, I urged Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to look again at the scheme in the context of their emerging local transport strategies, which is precisely what they have done. I urged them also to reconsider the plan in the light of the alternative funding mechanisms that might be open to them. The local congestion powers that we will bring forward in the transport bill, for example, might be one answer. Alternatively, the western peripheral could be promoted using the existing powers in the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.

It is to the councils' credit that they have begun to re-examine the case in the wider context with NESDEP. That is an excellent example of real partnership working and I would like to take this opportunity to signal my support for their efforts thus far. The work is now nearing completion and publication. I look forward to hearing the detail over the summer. The next stage must be to consider the impact on local communities and the arguments being raised there.

There are many ways in which the Government can assist in that process. My officials recently met the councils. I am keen for them to do so again and for them to participate in NESDEP. Officials are already working with Edinburgh and Glasgow on their key transport priorities. In my statement to Parliament on 10 February, I signalled my support for authorities that are committed to developing a charging scheme, by offering, on a case-by-case basis, matching financial support towards their research and development costs.

I know that a lot of work is being done. We are moving to the next stage of consideration at the local level. From what they have said today, I

know that members are keeping in touch with local authorities and enterprise companies, ensuring that they are well briefed.

There is no piggy bank at Victoria Quay waiting to be raided. I wish life was that simple. That message must be clear to members. To say otherwise would be dishonest. We are committed to maintaining and improving our strategic roads

network. The priorities that we have set for the network this year go a long way towards doing that. However, there will always be hard choices and a need to prioritise. We need to engage seriously in that process.

Meeting closed at 17:44.

Members who would like a printed copy of the Official Report to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

Members who would like a copy of the bound volume should also give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the bound volume should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Parliamentary Headquarters, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 17 May 2000

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY EDITIONS

Single copies: £5

Annual subscriptions: £640

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies: £70

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

Single copies: £2.50

Special issue price: £5

Annual subscriptions: £82.50

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £2.50

Annual subscriptions: £80

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

The Stationery Office Bookshops at:
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401
The Stationery Office Oriol Bookshop,
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF12BZ
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information
on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,
their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0870 606 5566

Fax orders
0870 606 5588

The Scottish Parliament Shop
George IV Bridge
EH99 1SP
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers