

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 27 March 2003

Session 1

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 March 2003

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

## Closing the Opportunity Gap for Older People

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good morning. The first item of business today is a debate on motion S1M-4064, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap for older people, and two amendments to that motion.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will finish the introduction, Mr Sheridan, and then I will call you.

Those members who wish to contribute to the debate should please press their request-to-speak buttons now.

**Tommy Sheridan:** I have already informed the Presiding Officer's office that the Scottish Coalition for Justice not War has asked for the observance of a minute's silence today at 11 am in memory of all those who have been killed so far in the conflict in Iraq. No disrespect is meant to any member who is speaking at that time, but some members will observe a minute's silence then.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have no wish to diminish the feelings of people on the subject, Mr Sheridan, but there is a public demonstration throughout Edinburgh and I suggest that the appropriate place to observe a minute's silence is with the people of Edinburgh. We will come to that at the appropriate time. I call Margaret Curran to speak to and move the motion.

09:31

**The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran):** This is an historic moment for the Parliament—although I think that I have said that in most of the debates in which I have spoken, which have been historic for one reason or another. However, this truly is an historic moment, as it is the last debate in this session of Parliament—it is a great privilege to speak in it. It is particularly appropriate that we are focusing on older people, because that signals the importance of that area of work and of that key group in our population, not only to the Executive—which I will talk about in my speech—but to the Parliament.

Undoubtedly, the debate will, by definition, be wide ranging and will cover many areas, such as

investment in and the quality of services, the need to create new opportunities and the quality of life in our local communities. Of course, fundamentally, we need to listen to the voices of older people. However, it is significant that we have framed the debate around closing the opportunity gap, because social justice has been at the top of Scotland's agenda in the past four years. This final debate should reflect that.

When the Scottish Parliament was established, levels of poverty and exclusion were a blight on our country. I would not like to disappoint Keith Harding in my last formal speech from the podium—I really should rant about the Tories at this point, but it seems too early in the morning for that and I might save my passion for a wee bit later, if he will forgive me. [MEMBERS: "Oh!"] There is an offer that he cannot refuse. I will leave my condemnation of the Tories until later in the debate.

I want to talk about the significant steps that the Executive is taking to consign the Tory years and poverty to the past. We have shown our determination to close the opportunity gap, so that those who are most at risk can make real choices and make the most of the opportunities that our society should present to them.

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted to be speaking to Margaret Curran in this, the last meeting of the Parliament in this session. Does she think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has the same objectives as she has, given that he is taking £5 billion a year out of the pension funds? Can she explain that away?

**Ms Curran:** That question gives me a pleasurable opportunity to say that perhaps the best thing that has happened to this country in the past five years has been Gordon Brown's prudent economic approach, which has led to unparalleled investment, unparalleled opportunities for our older people and a level of income for older people that the Tories could never have dreamed of. I am more than proud to celebrate the achievements of Gordon Brown. That is not bad: two minutes into my speech and I am ranting. Self-awareness is a great thing.

The Executive has shown its determination to close the opportunity gap. Often, as I have debated with my colleagues on the SNP benches and with Lyndsay McIntosh, who may not be taking part in the debate today—

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** Oh, but I am.

**Ms Curran:** Yes, she is. We have debated poverty on many occasions in the Parliament. Those debates have been robust, enjoyable and thorough, but they have often tended to focus on children and young people—quite properly,

because we know that we need to strive to prevent children and young people from falling into poverty and exclusion. It is important that we do that to break the poverty cycle.

However, it is also important that we do not do that at the expense of understanding the impact of poverty on older citizens and the need to improve services and direct resources for that key part of the population. It is appropriate that today's debate focuses on how we have begun to close the opportunity gap for older people. If I have one theme, it is: much done, still more to do. I am sure that members are familiar with that theme, because we have made significant achievements but recognise that there is still some way to go.

We have moved many people out of poverty and provided them with the means for a better life. We are ensuring that, as people get older, they can continue to enrich Scotland with their skills, experience, energy and enthusiasm. Our vision is to ensure that every person beyond working age has a decent quality of life. Therefore, our long-term goals are to ensure that older people are financially secure, to increase the number of older people who enjoy active, healthy and independent lives and to help older people to access opportunities and choices that our society offers to everyone.

We must think of older people not only in terms of their needs, but in terms of what they can offer. Too often in the past, we have regarded elderly citizens as passive recipients of services, but we should encourage elderly citizens to be proactive in shaping the society around them. At present, 1.7 million Scots are over 50. That significant proportion of our population makes an invaluable contribution to the cultural, economic and social fabric of the nation. I will talk more about that later.

As people get older, a range of support is necessary to allow them to continue to play a full and active role in society. Along with the United Kingdom Government and other partners, we aim to provide that support. Two weeks ago, we announced with the Department for Work and Pensions that, between 1996-97 and 2001-02, 80,000 pensioners were lifted out of relative income poverty and 170,000 were lifted out of absolute income poverty. That is a fall in the proportion of pensioners living in income poverty from 29 per cent to 20 per cent in relative terms. In only five years, that must be regarded as a major success.

Given the improvement in overall economic conditions, and with medium-income figures rising by 19 per cent, those particularly encouraging statistics underline our commitment to provide financial security. By April, the minimum income guarantee will ensure that no pensioner will have to live on less than £102 a week and pensioner

couples will receive £155.80 a week. From August 2003, the new pension credit will provide extra assistance for pensioners living on low and modest incomes. We will ensure that, for the first time, pensioners with savings are rewarded for their thrift.

All pensioners have the benefit of the £200 winter fuel payment and the over-75s receive free television licences, which are currently worth £112 a year. Furthermore, we are working with the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities and the voluntary sector in the partnership against poverty. That group is focused on improving the uptake of social security benefits available to older people throughout Scotland.

Not all older people are pensioners and it is essential that we take advantage of the experience, knowledge and skills of the over-50s work force. The employment rate for the over-50s is improving. In 2002, it stood at 64 per cent, but that is still below the average for working-age people in Scotland, which is 73 per cent. We want to close that gap to give older people the opportunity to get back into work and to use their skills. That can often mean giving people advice and training them in new skills. Great Britain schemes, such as the new deal 50 plus, can and do help older people to find their way back into the workplace. So far, 11,500 jobs have been found on that scheme in Scotland.

We can also record our achievements with initiatives that not only improve the quality of life for older people, but have the added benefit of reducing daily living expenses. The Scottish Executive is committed to ensuring—as far as is reasonably practical—that people will not live in fuel poverty within 15 years. We are on track to achieve that commitment.

I refer back to the bad Tory years—they were not so long ago that we cannot remember what it was like when people were living in damp, cold houses and could not afford to pay their bills. Our commitment to eradicating fuel poverty and to having it within our grasp is probably one of the Executive's most significant achievements.

Fuel poverty exists as a result of a number of factors—income, fuel costs and the energy efficiency of the home. We are taking action on all three factors. We have talked about the increasing prosperity of our older people. The UK Government has reduced VAT on domestic fuel and we have made great strides on energy efficiency. Through the central heating programme, around 18,000—

#### **Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

We have all received a briefing from Help the Aged this morning. Given the work that the Executive has done on fuel poverty, does the

minister agree with Help the Aged that 58 per cent of Scottish pensioners are classified as living in fuel poverty and that that figure is rising?

**Ms Curran:** I have not seen the Help the Aged briefing and I am wise enough not to endorse figures that I have not seen. Let me make our position abundantly clear. We have said that fuel poverty cannot be turned around in a year or so, but we have a long-term commitment to its eradication. No Government has ever made that historic commitment before. I know that the organisations that work on fuel poverty have said that that is a significant achievement and have congratulated us on our commitment to eradicate fuel poverty.

One of the most significant emblems of that commitment has been the central heating programme, which we have debated in the chamber before. It will be a lasting testament to the significant work of the Executive that older people have central heating in their homes that they would not have had before. Nearly 10,000 pensioners in Scotland have central heating because of the Executive's work. The Tories abandoned them and we did not.

**Mr Davidson:** Transco is heavily involved in delivering, on behalf of the Executive, the central heating programme for pensioners and others. Representatives of Transco have told me twice in the past six months that there are 2,500 too few technicians and that the programme cannot be delivered because the Executive is not training people. Moreover, does the minister agree that it was astonishing that Iain Gray said yesterday that unemployment in the older age group is going down when the fact is that those people are being forced to go to work because they cannot afford to live without working?

**Ms Curran:** My God, it will be quite a debate if the Tories are going to start defending the unemployed. The Conservatives are experienced in issues relating to massive levels of unemployment. I will take no lectures about unemployment from them.

Success brings its own challenges. Because we have economic prosperity and many opportunities, we require more skilled people. The construction boom in Glasgow is just one example of that. We need to keep training the engineers to deliver the central heating programme, but I am reliably informed that we are on target to deliver the work force that is required to install the central heating. Although the entire programme will be completed by March 2006, local authorities will complete their part of the programme by April 2004, which is two years earlier than planned. That means that the programme cannot be in that much disarray.

The warm deal contributes to energy savings. Our programme for government target to insulate

100,000 houses by March 2002 was achieved almost 18 months ahead of schedule. There are now 137,000 more energy-efficient homes. New building standards that were enforced this month mean that Scotland now has the highest mandatory standards for energy efficiency for new homes in the UK.

Taken together, the measures will provide, on average, annual savings on bills of £290 for those aged over 60 and £350 for those in local authority housing association properties. The measures are not just about saving money; they are also about having a warm, dry home. We all know the contribution that that makes to closing the opportunity gap.

On another front, if older people are to maintain active social, cultural, educational and working lives, it is essential that public transport is available, accessible and affordable. Last year, Iain Gray and Lewis Macdonald introduced free local off-peak bus travel for more than 1 million elderly and disabled people throughout Scotland. Again, that is an historic commitment and a key delivery for the Scottish Executive.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Ms Curran:** I must press on, as I do not want to run out of time. We can pursue some of those issues later.

Helping our older people to be more active is part of our strategy to improve their overall quality of life. Our efforts in that regard begin with listening to older people to find out what they want. In the past, once people became less able to manage for themselves, it was felt that the best solution was for them to go into care. From listening to older people, we know that they often prefer to live independently in their own homes. Earlier this month, we announced £200 million of funding during the first year of the supporting people programme, which is another major progressive delivery of support services. That new policy for housing support services will make all the difference for older people and others in enabling them to stay in their own home rather than having to go into care. Around 100,000 people are likely to be helped.

Vulnerable people will be given the assistance that they need to keep their home, live more independently and feel secure. It will not matter whether they live in a flat, a house, sheltered accommodation or a hostel, whether they live on their own or share, or whether they own their home or rent from a landlord. The care-and-repair scheme for elderly and other vulnerable people allows improvements, repairs and adaptations to be made to their homes.

We are closing the opportunity gap for older people not only in their individual households, but in the community, because that is what older people's organisations tell us that we must do. We must ensure that the needs of elderly people are centre stage in all our policies.

Safety is an important element of our regeneration agenda. Older people must be safe and must feel safe in their own communities. It is not acceptable that there is an effective curfew on older people in their communities, where they do not feel that they can use their own streets at night. If there is one aim that we must pursue, it is that elderly people can reclaim their own communities and live properly and safely in them.

That is why Jim Wallace has provided record numbers of police to deal with violence, drug crime and housebreaking. We have introduced youth courts and fast-track hearings to tackle youth crime and have introduced more than 2,000 additional closed-circuit television cameras to help to prevent crime and to make our communities safer. At the other end of the spectrum, we have provided support to Age Concern Scotland's elder abuse project. We have also committed £20 million to rolling out my proposal for the community wardens scheme and £10 million to other community-based initiatives that will allow us to contribute to safer communities.

We know that good health and quality of life go hand in hand. Promoting good health for Scots of all ages has been a top priority for the Executive. By encouraging older people to improve their diet and to take regular exercise, we can help them to avoid debilitating illnesses and to retain their independence for as long as possible. We have some way to go—there is no doubt about that—but recent statistics are encouraging. Between 1997 and 2001, deaths per 100,000 for under-75s from coronary heart disease fell by 25 per cent. In that age group, deaths from stroke fell by 16 per cent and deaths from cancer fell by 4.8 per cent over that period.

Last week, Malcolm Chisholm launched the health improvement challenge paper, which sets out a framework for action. It focuses on the key risk factors, all of which affect older people. We are determined to accelerate the rate of health improvement and to reduce health inequalities by improving the health of our most disadvantaged communities, because we know that that will impact on the opportunities of older people.

Last month, along with many colleagues from the Executive, the First Minister launched "Let's Make Scotland More Active: A strategy for physical activity". We will encourage older people to participate in physical activity, so that they can play a part in that strategy. The healthy eating and healthy living advice line and website should make it easier for older people to access information.

One of the Executive's most significant policies has been the introduction of free personal and nursing care for people aged 65 and over. The Executive has taken away the burden of financial worry from more than 75,000 pensioners. That means that they can be confident that they will get the level of personal care and support that they deserve, which will give them dignity and security. A critical part of creating a fairer Scotland is that we ensure that free personal care delivers and works. The Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002, which the Parliament passed, represents a major step forward in improving the arrangements for community care in Scotland.

Older people rarely need the services of just one agency, but it is at the boundaries between agencies that we have perhaps faced difficulties in the past. Older people do not particularly care which agency provides a service, but we must ensure that all the agencies meet their needs. In community care, we have been making major strides towards integrated responses by implementing the joint future agenda. That agenda is about better local integrated services and about how the national health service and local authority resources should be used jointly. Older people in some areas are already benefiting from better and faster assessments, access to a wide range of services from a single entry point and more co-ordinated responses to their general needs. Those benefits should be available more widely and, by April 2004, we will be applying the same principles to all community care.

We should always be careful not to stereotype older people, because their needs and issues extend far beyond basic care and support. If we are sincere about valuing our older people, we must provide the conditions that allow them to play the active role that I talked about.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** The minister mentioned stereotyping older people. Does she agree that the experience of older women can be very different from that of older men? Given their work patterns when they were younger and their lack of a pension, older women are more likely to be low paid and are certainly more likely to be carers. In my constituency, there are many grandmothers looking after the children of drug-abusing parents. Does the Scottish Executive have a strategy to address the specific needs of women pensioners, who may be among the most vulnerable of our older people?

**Ms Curran:** I thank Johann Lamont for introducing another theme that is dear to my heart. In the equality strategy, we have now recognised that age is itself a key determination. We have to join up our understandings of gender discrimination and age discrimination. We have categorically stated that that must be



mainstreamed across all policies in the Executive. It is important that all ministers, holding all portfolios, are engaged in elderly-related issues. They must understand the distinct experiences that women have had in their working lives and through their caring responsibilities and they must understand the impact that those experiences have later on in women's lives. The experiences of women from ethnic-minority communities can have their own particular dimension. We are on the cusp of delivering sensitive services that meet the needs of different groups, but there is no doubt that the inequality of women shows itself as much within the elderly section of the population as it does more generally.

The lifelong learning strategy is significant for ensuring that elderly people get their fair opportunities. I emphasise the need to ensure that digital inclusion extends to the elderly population. We have committed ourselves to providing public internet access points to ensure that elderly people, too, can access the web. Age Concern Scotland is working with us to identify target venues that may be particularly geared towards older people.

One of the most significant aspects of my work lies in recognising the contribution that elderly people make, through volunteering, to services provided for other people. Often, it is elderly people who run lunch clubs, for example. That breaks down the stereotypes around older people. We must ensure that older people get their fair share in our voluntary sector and volunteering strategies.

We recognise that older people in rural communities face particular challenges. The report of the rural poverty and inclusion working group highlighted the issues around poverty and social exclusion for older people living in rural areas. It is important that we pursue those issues.

Listening to older people is a key plank of our approach. If the Government does not listen to the people, we often get the policies wrong. If we work in partnership, we can move towards much more radical policies. There is some evidence that we have done that. Frank McAveety set up and chairs the older people's consultative forum, which provides a basis for partnership working with older people, who can tell us about the barriers that they face, the additional opportunities that they want to have and how they want to contribute. I am sure that they laugh at Frank's jokes and that the meetings are most entertaining, but the forum allows us to develop an agenda for taking forward that partnership working.

This is the last Executive debate of this first session of the Scottish Parliament and, as I said, it is appropriate that we are discussing the needs of elderly people and the real, practical changes that

we have introduced to lift standards of living and to raise opportunities for them. We have demonstrated that, with the proper resources and the right action, it is possible to make a real difference to people's quality of life. We are not complacent, however, and we recognise that much more needs to be done. It is with great pleasure that I now conclude my last speech as Minister for Social Justice in this session of Parliament by moving,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to close the opportunity gap for Scotland's older people by building first-class public services and developing initiatives in health, transport and other priority areas, which will support older people in living healthy, active and independent lives.

09:53

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** That was a nice, cheery speech from the Minister for Social Justice. She is obviously demob happy, and I do not intend to lower the tone too much in my speech.

There are 944,000 people of pensionable age in Scotland—about 19 per cent of the total estimated Scottish population. By 2026, there will be about 1.3 million people of pensionable age, or approximately 27 per cent of the total Scottish population. Life expectancy stands at 72.9 years for men and 78.2 years for women. As was recently reported, those figures are, sadly, among the lowest in western Europe.

Despite the advances that have been made, of the 641 mainland parliamentary constituencies in Britain, 10 of the 20 poorest are in Glasgow, so there are certain areas of health inequality still to be addressed. That will take not just years but generations. A majority of people of pensionable age are female, because of women's longer life expectancy. As a result, many of them will live alone and will consequently suffer high morbidity rates.

We would all agree that many of the attitudes held by some people in our society towards older people must change. Jess Barrow, head of policy at Age Concern Scotland, said:

"Some of the ways we treat old people we just would not accept for any other section of society."

Unfortunately, the European Union is not due to implement anti-ageism legislation until 2006. A recent King's Fund guide found that ageism is difficult to identify because people are not used to having to recognise it, given the lack of anti-discrimination legislation that is related to age, unlike that which exists for race or gender for example. However, more than half of Scots believe that

"this country treats older people as if they are on the scrap-heap"—

and almost half believe that

"old people in this country are considered to be a burden on society."

Ageism, or discrimination against older people, may not consist of deliberate sentiments against older persons, but may involve them being patronised through ignorance of their need to be treated as fairly as everyone else. The Executive has set up an equalities strategy, the older people's unit and the older people's consultative forum, and it is great to see the forum's chair, the esteemed Frank McAveety, here today. However, more must be done to reverse the deep-rooted social acceptance of patronising and discriminatory behaviour towards older people so that we treat them with the respect that they deserve.

Age discrimination occurs because a low value is associated with older people's lives. The idea exists that older people had their chance and that their quality of life, as an older person, is not worth saving as much as that of a younger person. Some people believe that older people are a burden to others, such as their family or friends or the NHS.

Many older people face not only discrimination as a result of their age. They may also suffer from multiple problems due to age and disability—indeed, they may face discrimination on the ground of disability. As Ros Levenson, author of "Auditing Age Discrimination: A practical approach to promoting equality in health and social care" stated:

"Tackling age discrimination is too low on the agenda for many health and social care organisations. But ageism is a serious equality issue."

I am pleased that the minister touched on that matter.

Of course, the majority of older people are fit and healthy and should not be thought of merely as a burden on the NHS. Health is one area of older people's lives in which they are likely to encounter both positive discrimination—for example, exemption from prescription charges—and negative discrimination, such as age limits for transplant services in the NHS. Executive targets for reducing the incidence of cancer, heart disease and stroke apply only to those below the age of 75. In the words of Maureen O'Neill, the director of Age Concern Scotland, that approach will "entrench these inequalities". My colleague Kay Ullrich will explore the impact of health care on elderly people in greater detail, as it is an important issue for older people.

Some initiatives are proactive, but they will not make a difference until other problems in the care of older people are rectified. One survey—"Hard Times: A study of pensioner poverty" contained the following message from an older person:

"Thank you very much for my free TV licence but I would really like to have my cataracts done so that I could see the television."

A quarter of suicides occur in older people, although they make up less than a quarter of the general population. Ninety per cent of those concerned had serious depression and most visited their doctor in the three months prior to their death. That may indicate that general practitioners are not taking the mental health needs of older people seriously. I encountered that problem, especially in the treatment of depression, in a previous life. When older people who are suffering from depression visit a doctor, they are often given older drugs such as tricyclic antidepressants, which can dope and slow down older people, making them more liable to falls and so on. Younger people, who tend to work or have families, receive drugs such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, which cost 20 times more per day than the drugs that are given to older people. I encountered that apartheid in primary health care on many occasions before I was elected to the Parliament, which may want to examine that issue.

Long-stay hospitals have closed in favour of treating older people in the community, and that is to be welcomed. Implementing the joint futures agenda to provide more seamless care between the NHS, local authorities and community and social care has reduced the number of delayed discharges. As the minister indicated, the Parliament has introduced free personal care for the elderly and the regulation of care services in Scotland. However, although welcoming the progress that free personal care is making in local authorities, a recent Age Concern Scotland report argued that there was a continuing need to publicise it and to provide clarity about the policy. The report found that there is a postcode lottery in available care places and that waiting times for care provision vary. Its authors were also very concerned about long-term funding.

Scottish Care, the Executive and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities need to renegotiate funding for private care homes, before older people who require care become the innocent victims of the crisis in funding in community care. Their human rights may be breached. As Tessa Harding, head of policy at Help the Aged, states:

"Homes have to be closed with care ... if the Human Rights Act is not to be breached ... Where are these residents to go? There is already a major crisis in the care home sector and few areas have spare capacity."

Bedblocking remains a problem. Some 2,798 patients are awaiting hospital discharge, 239 of whom have waited more than 12 months. If the Executive does not find it acceptable for people to wait more than 12 months to get into hospital, why

is it acceptable for them to wait more than 12 months to get out? In addition, the number of people receiving a home-care service has declined since 1999 by 7,357, and the number of residential care places has fallen from 16,300 to 15,150, which is a decline of 1,150.

An issue in which many MSPs have been interested in the past few years is that of Scotland's carers. There are approximately 626,000 carers in Scotland and about one in six is over 65. Two thirds of carers look after elderly people. It is therefore vital that we take on board the considerations of older people and carers and end the opportunity gap for carers, older people and older carers.

Benefit provision for Scottish older people, which is reserved to Westminster, is necessary to reduce and prevent poverty. Two thirds of pensioner households do not claim state benefits—of course, some are not entitled to them—but an estimated 57 per cent require some form of state benefit. Unfortunately, almost a quarter of those who are eligible do not claim. Indeed, 50,000 pensioners who are entitled to the means-tested minimum income guarantee do not claim it. Each person who has not claimed it is really entitled to an average increase of £18 in their weekly income at present, which would raise their pension levels to more than £90 on average—that was the amount that Age Concern stated was necessary in 2001. The minimum that we can guarantee is an admission that the basic state pension is inadequate to live on. Pensioners might not collect benefits because there might be a stigma attached to claiming them among older people, but it is also likely that the process is time-consuming and confusing for some of our older people.

**Mr Davidson:** Does Mr Gibson agree that it would be far better to raise the basic pension level, including the amount of money that people have to apply for through the bureaucratic system of means testing? That would avoid the problem that many pensioners face of having to work their way through a system that is bureaucratically inclined, favours the employment of even more civil servants and does not get the money to where it should go.

**Mr Gibson:** I believe that the basic pension should be raised. However, I am astonished that the Conservatives did not address that issue when they were in power. They decoupled the relationship between earnings and pensions. *[Interruption.]* As Frank McAveety has just shouted out, they had only 18 years in which to address the issue. We are all aware—except those on the Conservative benches—that pensioners gained no favours during the Conservatives' 18 years in power.

An Age Concern members' survey said:

"Ageing persons do not welcome complicated forms to fill in—

as Mr Davidson rightly said—

"What they hope for is minimal fuss when they find themselves obliged to call in financial help in these matters."

In 1999, a Scottish Executive survey of older people's needs and services found that there was a lack of knowledge about services and how to access them and that that was a major reason for unmet need. People tended not to approach social services for help and advice, and information did not appear to be readily available to them.

The Executive has produced a welcome document, "Are You Over 50?", to serve as a guide for older people to the service provision that is available to them, but it does not go far enough. A more widely publicised campaign for benefit take-up in Scotland is required. Alice Jarvie of SeniorLine in Scotland states that calls to SeniorLine

"reflect older people's confusion about exactly what they are entitled to."

That is particularly important, because changes to the way in which benefits are paid are to be implemented next month. Benefits are reserved, but education about them is not. Pensions are also reserved to the Department for Work and Pensions, but pensioner poverty, which is an important issue for Scottish older people, is devolved.

Minimum income benefits should enable pensioners to have a reasonable standard of living, but benefit take-up problems continue to be rife. Women who are over the age of 65 are less likely to have an occupational pension, because of career breaks for children. The fact that women are likely to live longer through retirement means that they experience particular issues relating to poverty. Today, fewer than half of people of working age contribute to a non-state pension. As members are all well aware, there is a £27 billion hole in pension provision in the United Kingdom, because of the volatile nature of the pensions market. I am sure that the Conservatives will focus heavily on that issue. I must contradict the minister, as I do not believe that current Government policies have helped to produce stability in that area. That is ominous for the future, especially as the Scottish Executive's social justice annual report showed that it had failed to increase the number of working-age people who contribute to a non-state pension, which is milestone 20 of the 2002 report.

Poverty and the number of pensioners who live in poverty are major issues of concern. Relative poverty is the issue that we should debate, in common with other European nations. I will not argue that case, as I have very little time left.

The Scottish Executive stated:

"the poorest families have experienced real increases in their living standards since 1996/97."

On the contrary, a study on Scottish poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which was published just a few months ago, concluded that in the seven years between 1994 and 2001,

"the overall sense is one of little change".

Given that I am running out of time, I will jump ahead in my speech to an issue that has not been mentioned a great deal. I am sure that my colleagues will discuss poverty at some length, but I want to make a point about fuel poverty. I have some concerns about the Executive's line on fuel poverty. Four weeks ago, the minister issued a press release that said that some 20 local authorities had finished their central heating programmes. One of those local authorities was Glasgow City Council, which will not finish its programme for three years. When I pointed that out to officials, they said that the minister would release a retraction, but that has not happened. We must be concerned about spin on that issue.

The Conservatives quoted a figure on fuel poverty. I, too, have a figure: 25 per cent of our pensioners live in a household that is cold enough to put residents at risk of hypothermia. There is still a long way to go.

Older people are more likely than younger people to worry about being mugged or robbed. Although we know that older people are less likely to suffer from crime, fear of crime can be as much of a problem as crime itself. Forty-six per cent of people who are over 65 believe that crime in their area has got worse during the past two years. Between 7 and 10 per cent of older people are victims of some form of abuse, often from family members. The Parliament has not touched on that issue in recent years, but we should examine it, especially in light of the alarming information that Age Concern has provided, which indicates that reports of abuse of the elderly have increased by 400 per cent in the past year. Although that increase might be the result of greater awareness, it is a serious concern.

I would also like to discuss transport, but I have only 30 seconds left, so I will not.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You actually have about two minutes, Mr Gibson.

**Mr Gibson:** In that case, I might mention it after all. Half of those in the over-65 age group live in households with no car, whereas the corresponding figure for all households is only a quarter. Thirteen per cent of over-65s said that they could not use public transport because of illness or disability. In 2000-01, less than 16 per cent of Scotland's bus fleet had a low floor and

only 12 per cent had any kind of disabled access. Half of the pedestrians who were killed on UK roads were over retirement age.

The Executive has introduced free local off-peak bus travel for older people, but there should be a coherent national concessionary fares scheme, as exists in Wales, so that older people are entitled to the same level of free travel no matter where they live or where they are travelling to. That would reduce confusion about concessions, which can catch older people short. In addition, reregulation of the bus service would help elderly people, particularly those in outlying communities.

We are all aware that age discrimination in employment can start at the age of 40. I am marginally over that age, although I will probably be the youngest member to speak in the debate.

My final point relates to our *raison d'être*. From a nationalist perspective, we find shocking the level of poverty in this country. If we look at the standard of living of pensioners in most other European countries of comparable size, it is clear that they get a better deal. That shows that nations can look after their own people if they have control over their own economies, benefits and taxation systems. Those nations are clearly the most prosperous and pensioners in Luxembourg, Sweden and Austria are all certainly better off than those in Scotland. The answer for Scotland's pensioners, as for Scotland's young people and the middle-aged, is independence.

I move amendment S1M-4064.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes that life expectancy in Scotland is among the lowest in the developed world; further notes that Scottish Executive health targets entrench age inequalities; accepts that ageism is a reality in modern Scotland and must be countered; is aware that 25% of Scottish pensioners live in poverty; acknowledges that more coherence to the concessionary fare scheme is required; seeks more flexibility in delivering the central heating programme; desires that the postcode lottery of free personal care places be ended; recognises that older people have a vital part to play in our democracy; is concerned at continuing reductions in the value of the state pension in real and relative terms; demands that the closure of final salary scheme pensions be addressed to prevent future generations of older people being left with low incomes, financial insecurity and dependent on means-tested benefits, and believes that to address the needs of older people in Scotland the Parliament needs the full powers of an independent sovereign state."

10:10

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** At the outset, I should perhaps declare an interest as I fall into the category of older people and my opportunity gap may well deteriorate in the near future. Having said that, I am absolutely delighted that the minister is present today. I will do my best to match the passion that she promised me.

I shall not patronise older people by lecturing them on which opportunities they should pursue. It is not the job of any politician to patronise older people with half-price tennis lessons or whatever the flavour of the month happens to be. Older people are more able than politicians are to decide such issues for themselves.

However, we need to ensure that older people are free to choose their opportunities. They must be free from Government discrimination against them. Sadly, over the past few years, older people have faced substantial discrimination as a result of Government policy. Older people do not want patronising assistance; they want dignity. The fact is that the Government has eroded the basic needs and expectations of pensioners, without which talk of opportunity means nothing.

Older people need to know that they can save for a pension without the fear that they are wasting their money. Gordon Brown's raid on the pension funds is a £5 billion per annum stealth tax on pensioners. That loss of hard-earned pension deprives current and future pensioners of the opportunity of a comfortable retirement. Gordon Brown's hand in the pensioners' till is depriving older people of real opportunity. Pensioners need to keep the money that they have saved, for their dignity and for other opportunities. They need to know that, if they make modest savings, they will keep £1 of every £1 that they save.

The so-called pension credit is about to be introduced, which will extend means testing to over half of all pensioners. With time, that proportion will increase further because the credit will be linked to national average earnings while the basic state pension will continue to increase only with prices. Means testing is humiliating to pensioners. It cannot be right to extend means testing to such a huge proportion of the pensioner population. People may say, "So what?" but the effect of the proposed change will be that a typical pensioner who has an annual income of £6,000 will, in effect, face a marginal tax rate of 40 per cent, which is equivalent to the rate for higher-rate taxpayers. For every extra £1 of pension or savings income, Gordon Brown will claw back 40p, so the pensioner will end up only 60p better off before income tax is taken into account.

**Mr Gibson:** Does Mr Harding accept that the situation is actually worse than that? Once people go over the threshold, not only will they suffer a marginal tax rate of 40 per cent but they may also lose council tax rebate and housing benefit, such that the marginal rate of taxation can be as much as 88p in the pound for those with smaller occupational pensions.

**Mr Harding:** I agree. I was just about to make that point, more or less. It is unfair that a pensioner on a modest but average income faces

a marginal tax rate of 40 per cent but a pensioner on double the income will be able to keep £1 of every £1 saved before tax.

Furthermore, why should people save at all? If the average pensioner will receive only 60p before tax of every £1 saved, it is no wonder that so many people will now not bother saving. The Government has created a climate in which savers are discouraged and punished and the effect is to deny pensioners opportunities.

The Government takes with one hand and gives back something with the other, but older people need to know that the national health service will care for them should they become ill. Waiting lists and waiting times have steadily increased over the past three years, even with the increased levels of funding from the Scottish Executive. In the period ending December 2002, 14,769 more people were on the waiting lists than in March 1999, 83,494 fewer out-patients were seen than in March 1999, 21 per cent fewer out-patients were seen within nine weeks and 12,700 fewer elective in-patients were seen.

Older people are discriminated against by the health system. Age discrimination occurs directly and indirectly through policies aimed at shortening length of stay in hospital, as older patients take longer than average to recover from surgery or illness. Age discrimination in health and social care must be rooted out to ensure that the most vulnerable are receiving the care that they need and are entitled to.

In the Executive's social inclusion strategy "Social Justice ... a Scotland where everyone matters", which was published in 1999, the Executive committed itself to increasing the number of older people taking exercise and to reducing the rates of mortality from coronary heart disease and the prevalence of respiratory disease.

However, the Executive's policies are failing the most vulnerable. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reveals that the standardised mortality rates among the 10 per cent most deprived local areas are double those of the least disadvantaged 50 per cent.

Older people also need to know that care home places will be available for them should they require one. However, the current care homes crisis has seen Scottish Homes and the Kirk admit that they will have to start closing their homes if the Executive does not meet the deficit that exists between the funding that care homes receive and the real cost of care. I am pleased that that issue has been resolved for the current year but it will still be a concern in future.

Older people need to know that suitable and appropriate housing is available for them. The Executive maintains that it is committed to the

transfer of council housing to community ownership. However, Labour in local government has failed the council tenant. Much of Scotland's public housing is still crumbling, and new investment is desperately needed. Mismanagement has led to large rent arrears for councils that are subsequently unable to provide the funding for repairs. For example, before the approval of the transfer of 81,000 houses in Glasgow to Glasgow Housing Association last April, more than 50 per cent of rent collected serviced existing debt. The total bill for repairs was estimated at £1.3 billion. I hope that that situation will now be resolved.

In 1980, the Conservatives introduced the right-to-buy scheme. No policy introduced since then has done more to lift the vulnerable out of relative poverty in Scotland. Thanks to successive Conservative Governments, the rate of home ownership is more than 60 per cent today, compared with only 35 per cent in 1979. Scottish Office research in 1997 showed that 21.5 per cent of the homes that had been bought since 1980 under the right to buy had subsequently been resold on the open market, and that improvements, including the installation of central heating, had been made to the vast majority of them. That shows that national schemes such as the central heating programme would not always be required if more homes were owner-occupied.

**Ms Curran:** I am not sure whether either Mr Harding or I will be back in the next Parliament but I would not like to miss another opportunity to have a duel with him.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Yes—strip to the waist.

**Ms Curran:** Let us not get carried away.

I know that the Conservatives were committed to the right-to-buy policy but, as ever, their approach was half-baked. There are now many people in Scotland who bought their houses under essentially false pretences, because the Conservatives encouraged people to buy irresponsibly. They did not point out to people their responsibilities for repairs to and maintenance of their houses. People were confused about that and there is now a major problem for people who do not have the income to maintain and repair their houses but who were encouraged and given inflated opportunities to purchase them. That was, as ever, a highly irresponsible policy and approach from the Conservatives.

**Mr Harding:** That is absolute rubbish. Whether people can afford repairs to and maintenance of their properties should be assessed by the mortgage lenders, which determine people's ability to fund a mortgage. The minister should take that into account. What is she doing to give people additional assistance?

**Ms Curran:** We have just changed the criteria for the private sector grant, which is predicted to rise from £40 million to £60 million in the coming years.

**Mr Harding:** That is just another consultation document.

The Executive has done little to assist in the provision of houses adapted specifically for elderly and disabled people, especially those in rural communities who doubly suffer from the lack of suitable housing. We would encourage local housing providers to provide adapted houses for older and disabled people through grants. We would also put in place a requirement for providers to make available for sheltered housing a minimum of 5 per cent of any new development. To increase rural housing stock, we propose to relax planning guidelines to allow the building of affordable homes for sale on the periphery of rural communities.

The Executive's warm deal initiative is a continuation of yet another Conservative policy—the home energy efficiency scheme—and was introduced in July 1999 to promote energy efficiency measures to less affluent families. The home energy efficiency scheme was very successful and assisted three million homes. Under successive Conservative Governments, the percentage of UK households with central heating rose from 60 per cent in 1981 to 90 per cent in 1997-98.

Indeed, many pensioners who have benefited from the Executive's central heating programme might have already been set to benefit, either from refurbishment schemes through the landlord or from new investment from transfers to community ownership. The Executive needs to take further measures to ensure that those who are eligible to benefit from the programme are given as much help as possible to follow that through. At present, there is a worry that the take-up rate among the elderly is too low and, given the disruption that the installation of a central heating system might cause, the Executive must articulate exactly how it will improve that rate.

Older people also want to be safe. The 2000 Scottish crime survey showed that just over 10 per cent of over-60s were worried about being assaulted. By 2002, 24 per cent of Scottish old-age pensioners were afraid to leave their homes at night and one in five of them feared that they would be mugged if they went outside. Since 1997, there has been a 24 per cent increase in recorded incidents of violent crime, a 9 per cent increase in the level of vehicle crime and a 23 per cent increase in the number of drug-related crimes.

It is time to reclaim our neighbourhoods from the criminals who destroy communities and imprison fearful people in their homes. Older people should be able to walk through their communities free from the fear of crime. To make people feel safe, we must have a fully supported, fully manned police service, which would provide effective neighbourhood policing and give crime-ridden areas a constant and visible police presence. Our police officers should be backed up by a legal system that is able to dispose of criminals appropriately and efficiently, a prison service that rehabilitates and a youth justice system that prevents youngsters from reoffending.

Consideration should be given to increasing the single occupancy discount on council tax to 50 per cent for single older people. Furthermore, we should address age discrimination in the job market by allowing older people the option of signing away their rights under normal employment regulations other than basic health and safety regulations. That would encourage employers to recruit more people from that age group. However, such ideas are for the future.

We acknowledge that the Executive is committed to closing the opportunity gap. However, although some worth-while initiatives have been introduced to address the situation, a great deal more needs to be done.

I move amendment S1M-4064.1, to leave out from "by" to end and insert:

"but notes that its policies are not working, care homes are having to close due to a funding crisis, waiting lists and times are rising, more older people feel insecure in their homes and there is an insufficient level of provision of appropriate housing for older people and considers that, if the Chancellor was to abolish his punitive stealth tax on pension funds in the forthcoming budget, the opportunity gap for older people would be greatly reduced."

10:23

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I welcome the minister's speech, especially the references to rural deprivation and rural exclusion. After all, transport and access to facilities are of massive importance to older people and the need is especially acute in rural areas. Before I go any further, I should declare an interest. Like Keith Harding, I am old, and I am retiring—voluntarily, this time. Indeed, I am now retiring for the second time.

Getting old is a rite of passage. When we reach our 50s, we suddenly start receiving Saga brochures. We resent them at first, but then we start looking at the rather attractive holidays that they offer. However, I have to say that I am not so keen on the advertisements for incontinence pads and things.

Then, at 60, we become eligible for the winter heating allowance. We all think, "I don't want that". Yesterday, I received an e-mail informing me that, the day after I retire, I am allowed to have an old people's bus pass, because the age of eligibility has been reduced from 65 to 60. I now come into that category. The next thing that I have to look forward to is my pension, and then the telegram from the Queen—or perhaps it will be the King by that time. I do not think that I will last that long anyway. Those are the rites of passage.

We have stereotypes of old age. Bob Hope was asked what it felt like to be 81 and he said that he did not feel anything much until about noon, and then it was time to go for a sleep. When George Burns was in his 80s, he said that he had reached the stage when putting his cigar into its holder was a bit of a thrill.

The image of older people has changed. We are surrounded by examples of positive aging, which is the phrase that is used in one of our briefing papers. I remember attending a party for an old lady who was 90. One of her two equally elderly relatives said that the only thing that was wrong with Tina was that she was man mad. The other day, I sat at a dinner with a local dignitary who is about 85 and who gave up his 500cc Norton only a couple of years ago. My mother was 97 yesterday and played competitive bridge until about three years ago. I am holding up one of her most treasured possessions—a T-shirt marking one of her three wins, after she was 80, in the wee stinker crossword, and that is a crossword and a half. In our constituencies, we are all surrounded by silver surfers and line dancing.

It is fair to say that a good start has been made, as the minister said. That was acknowledged at the beginning of the two most recent pieces of correspondence that I received from Help the Aged and Age Concern, which both acknowledge that the Scottish Parliament has made a great and positive contribution in improving older people's lives. Those lobbyists refer to the central heating initiative, the warm deal, the concessionary fares scheme and the introduction of free care for the elderly. As MSPs, we know that none of those schemes has been introduced without individual anomalies.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the member give way?

**Ian Jenkins:** I will give way to young Mary.

**Mary Scanlon:** I appreciate that very much and I am sorry to be contentious, as Ian Jenkins has been nice enough to give way.

I must have a different Help the Aged briefing from the one that Ian Jenkins has, because the second paragraph of my briefing says:

"Current government pension policy means that in the long-term the situation will get worse rather than better."

I wonder where all the positivity comes from.

**Ian Jenkins:** I will find the document later. I do not want to stop right now, but I assure the member that the words are there. Mary Scanlon refers to Westminster pension policy, but I am talking about the Scottish Parliament.

**Mary Scanlon:** I was talking about Scottish Executive policy.

**Ian Jenkins:** No, the member did not say that.

The substantial policies that I described affect the fabric of the way in which many people live their lives.

It is important to improve information for the elderly. One of the briefing documents says that, in implementing the heating policy, the Eaga Partnership and others provided benefits advice. People who received that advice benefited hugely from understanding better their welfare benefits. Increased awareness of, and information about, benefits for older people is important.

Help the Aged's document says that the initiatives are a recognition of the value of older people, on which we must build. In our self-interest, it is important for politicians to value older people, because we must remember that more than 1 million voters are over 60 years old and that they form a quarter of the voters on the electoral roll. That group is much more likely to vote than other sectors of the population are, so we had better listen to it. We are supposed to be a listening Parliament and we have projects such as better government for older people and the Elder Voice in the Borders, which involves elder champions. We must listen to older people, otherwise we—or rather, other members—will be in electoral trouble.

That sector of the population has enormous clout in our country's economic life because of its spending power and the talent that it brings to the marketplace, the volunteering sector and other strands of economic life. In those wider terms, we must recognise older people's value to society as a whole. As members have said before, the fabric of our society depends on the voluntary sector in its professional sense and for its volunteers. In communities throughout the country, older people volunteer and are the mainstay of many clubs and societies that enhance our community life by creating interest and self-esteem in our communities and bringing music and sport to them.

I suspect that it is true of all political parties that many activists in our constituencies are close to, or over, retirement age. I remember an instance from the time that David Steel was last elected,

when an old chap of about 92, who was a good party member, came to help at the election and ended up driving the old people to the poll. I promise members that that is a true story.

Today, we are debating the opportunity gap for older people. I agree with the lobbying organisations that the health and social services provisions for older people are high on the political agenda. I do not want to turn the debate into one about the health service, but I want to address one aspect that seems to be hugely important in a debate about opportunity gaps.

It is vital that audiology services should be at the top of our list of priorities. As members know from their postbags, there is a massive wish to expand the provision of high-quality hearing aids, which to most people means digital hearing aids. We cannot have a serious debate about closing the opportunity gap for older people if we allow older people to live their lives deprived of a sense that allows them to function fully. We have the means to improve their lives immeasurably and we need to make arrangements for those means to be provided.

One of the interesting statistics that I have read highlights the proportion of older people who are carers. Kenny Gibson mentioned that. We must turn our attention to providing proper respite facilities for the individuals whom they care for, to allow the older carers some respite from their undoubted burdens. Frank McAveety knows that I am interested in this subject. In saying that to him, I also congratulate him on having come to a solution with the care home people.

When we talk about respite facilities, I put in a plea for day care centres. I am connected to the Broomhill day centre in Penicuik. I hope that ministers will give serious consideration to making day care centres a statutory provision so that local authorities have to support those centres. To do so would address the voluntary nature of those vital centres and bring them from the edges of provision into the centre. Providing in any other way the facilities that are offered by day care centres would cost social services or the health service much more.

Our attention should be focused on the areas of education and lifelong learning. We must make it easier for people who have taken early retirement from a strenuous job, or who have been made redundant, to access opportunities for a change in employment, even in their later years. Supportive employers do not discriminate on age-related grounds. B&Q, which has famously established a policy of taking on older people, has benefited from that policy not only in publicity terms but by gaining the skills and experience that older people can bring to the workplace.



We are aware of current and forthcoming skills shortages across the country. We must ensure that training programmes are made available that will allow older people to qualify for the jobs that become available. We are short of tradespeople of all sorts and we are short of carers. There are desk jobs, for which people simply require training, and jobs in areas in which posts have traditionally gone to young people, such as catering and tourism.

There is no logical reason why things should be set in aspic. Colleges and training boards must make their programmes flexible, so that people can enter them without having to undertake five-year courses or do big blocks of stuff, but can get back into the workplace and feel useful and not excluded.

I hope that there will come a point in the McCrone agreement when the stepping down arrangements that are part of the agreement, but which have not yet been fully facilitated, come into operation. Those arrangements would allow teachers to ease out of full-time posts without damaging their pension rights. They could act as a model for other employment areas.

Lifelong learning opportunities should be provided for older people on a personal level. Older people come together for social reasons in clubs that are established to improve physical well-being and provide recreational activities such as bridge and painting. Older people are becoming interested in computing and working on the web. Such opportunities are increasingly becoming available in libraries and village halls, as well as in the homes of older people.

Activities that encourage fitness and broaden the mind have knock-on benefits for individuals and for society through the sense of well-being that they create. We save on other services as a result of people being fitter and happier in their ordinary lives.

I was going to mention pensions—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You do not have a great deal of time, Mr Jenkins.

**Ian Jenkins:** There is a sense that pensions and benefits are a Westminster matter, but Scottish ministers must be interested in them and make their views known. There is a loss of faith in the whole pensions apparatus that will affect many people who are currently in work, but who will become older people, if they are lucky.

I want to conclude philosophically. I was an English teacher and am inclined to turn to poetry, much of which deals with older people. T S Eliot's "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" features an individual who feels that he has not made much of his life. He has measured out his life with coffee

spoons and recognises that he is never likely to break with convention. He says:

"I grow old ... I grow old ...  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled."

Jenny Joseph is intent on throwing over the traces:

"When I am an old woman I shall wear purple  
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.  
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer  
gloves".

Dylan Thomas is even stronger:

"Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

However, my favourite poem in this context and for this occasion is the long poem "Ulysses" by Tennyson. The old king is tired of a dull life and determined that he must go for one last adventure. He says that he feels that he must go. He cannot stay making laws for people—he mentions doling out

"Unequal laws unto a savage race".

He says:

"I cannot rest from travel; I will drink  
Life to the lees"

and adds:

"all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world ...  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!"

He continues:

"And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought ...  
my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all the western stars, until I die."

He says that he will go out

"Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

As I prepare myself to sail into the sunset, I thank all my colleagues and friends from all parties and make it clear that I will be forever grateful to my constituents in Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale for giving me the opportunity to serve in this historic Parliament.

10:37

**Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):** Yesterday, when I said to my comrade, ally, colleague, and indeed sister, Johann Lamont, that I was going to speak in the debate, she immediately said that she hoped that I would declare an interest, which I do declare, as I am an older person. As it is the final plenary meeting, I will not say what the minister said to me this morning when I said that I was going to speak.

Colin Campbell and John Young have reminded me many times that, as Winnie Ewing is not returning after the election but I am, I will be the mother of the house. I will be pleased to be the mother of the house and follow Winnie Ewing. Perhaps I have experience to speak on the subject.

I am proud of the Scottish Executive's efforts to make the lives of older people more tolerable and secure. Free central heating, free personal care, free local bus travel—which is soon to be increased to free bus travel around Scotland—much-improved pensions and free television licences for those who are over 75 have been introduced.

However, I want to turn to older people who are activists in our communities in elderly forums. There are two such forums in my constituency—one in Erskine and one in Inverclyde, which I share with Duncan McNeil. Such people play a key role in campaigns for better pensions and safer communities and generally making life much more tolerable, although sometimes I wonder whether they make life more tolerable for politicians—each time that I see them, they do not miss and hit the wall, as they say. In the best sense, they are the trade union movement for older people; more than that, they engage actively with councillors, MSPs and MPs. We should listen attentively to those wise and sometimes sharp-tongued representatives of older people.

One of the finest of those representatives whom I have met was Jack Jones, who fought with the International Brigade in the Spanish civil war and went on to become the general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. I assure members that no minister dared to pull the wool over the sharp eyes of that senior citizen.

How do we define older people today? The minister mentioned the new deal 50 plus, which recognises that there are 50 year olds who are not working. For me—at the old age that I am—50 is not old; it is still young. There is a lot more to do.

It is right and proper that we care for older citizens, but what about those who are thrown on to the scrap heap in their 50s? No doubt members would be unhappy—they would be appalled—if their constituency parties told them, "You are too old at 50. A 21-year-old is keen to do this job and we think that they could do it better than you." That happens too often nowadays in all kinds of industries. In many occupations it makes sound economic sense to recruit, employ and retain older people. If we cannot appeal to employers' altruism, we should point out to them that they could do much worse than employ older people. As Ian Jenkins said, companies such as B&Q and Asda purposely employ older people, because of—among other things—the confidence that it

gives to customers when they seek advice and help.

Much more needs to be done. It is absurd and hypocritical for people to argue for longer working lives, as they are doing in another place, when so many in their early 50s see only a life on social security payments and no prospect of change.

By all means support, respond and react to the genuine and legitimate concerns of elderly forums, Age Concern Scotland and other voluntary organisations, but at the same time let us do all that we can to ensure that people lead full working lives with good terms and conditions of employment.

10:42

**Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The debate, as we all know, coincides with the day that some of us head off into retirement and will ourselves soon be labelled as older people.

Anyone who was at Sir David Steel's dinner for retiring members last night would have to concede that we wrinklies still know how to party. By the sound of Ian Jenkins's speech, I do not think that he has been home yet.

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** Ian Jenkins made a point about Saga. Does Kay Ullrich know that that stands for sex and games for the aged?

**Kay Ullrich:** I shall move swiftly on.

Four days after the election, I will be the proud possessor of, in one hand, my state pension book and, in the other, my Strathclyde bus pass. The world will, of course, become my oyster.

I do not expect to feel or look any different when I become 60 on 5 May, but I suspect that I will be treated differently. All the statistics indicate that I will experience age discrimination. It is important that this Parliament addresses the fact that age discrimination exists throughout our society.

Carers have been mentioned. Those people save the state £3.4 billion a year through their dedicated commitment, but what does the state do when they reach retirement age? It cancels their entitlement to invalid care allowance—no matter that thousands of pensioners remain often the sole carer of their adult disabled children. It is also worth noting that many pensioners now care for their elderly parents. Why does the Westminster Government choose to remove that benefit at the very time that a family's income is reduced because of retirement?

I will take a quick look at age discrimination in the health service. In hospitals around Scotland, older people are shunted from ward to ward and from bed to bed. That is done to make room for

more acute patients. In 1999, there were about 1,800 delayed discharges. Today, at the end of the parliamentary session, there are more than 2,500. That is an increase of almost 40 per cent. The situation was bad in 1999, but it is even worse in 2003. To add insult to injury, those elderly people are commonly described as bedblockers, as if they deliberately languish in inappropriate acute wards in hospitals. We can and must do better.

Among the most disturbing reports on care of the elderly are those that reveal that up to 20 per cent of pensioners in hospitals are malnourished. The reason for that is simple—there are not enough nursing and auxiliary staff to assist frail elderly people to eat their meals. My mother was in such a situation, but, luckily, after a few days, another patient alerted me to the fact that my mum's meals were being removed untouched. That is no way in which to treat the elderly population. Those people have worked hard all their lives, they have put their bit into the public kitty and they have every right to be cared for with dignity and respect when their working lives are over.

The Parliament has the power and the will to improve the quality of life for the growing number of older people. We have shown that through what I consider to be the greatest achievement of the first four years of the Parliament—the introduction of free personal care for the elderly. We can all be justifiably proud of that achievement.

This is my last speech in the Parliament. I feel honoured and privileged to have served in the first Scottish Parliament in almost 300 years, but now is my time to say goodbye. I have made many friends from all parties and I will truly miss all members—I will even miss Duncan McNeil's cheery wee face.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Thank you.

**Kay Ullrich:** As I am not as literate as the English teacher who preceded me in the debate, and as I am Ayrshire lass, I will end by paraphrasing Robert Burns. Nae man can tether time or tide; the hour approaches, Kay maun ride.

10:48

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** I give my good wishes to the members who are leaving, but I hope that this is not my last speech in the Parliament.

The debate is an important one. My constituency of Glasgow Anniesland has the second highest proportion of retired citizens in Scotland and I have no hesitation in supporting the motion because I know that people in my constituency

have benefited from the policies of the Labour-led Executive. Those policies recognise people's needs in areas that are fundamental to a civilised quality of life, which is every citizen's right.

From the bare statistics, it can be seen that the Executive, working in partnership with our colleagues in Westminster, has begun to make improvements to the life of retired citizens. The higher state pension, the winter fuel allowance and, from next autumn, the new pension credit will result in an average gain of £1,150 a year for such citizens. Those reforms are not the be-all and end-all; they are only the start of the process of making an impact on pensioner poverty. In absolute terms, pensioner poverty has fallen by 69 per cent and, in relative terms, it has fallen by 31 per cent, but the present situation is still an indictment of our society and illustrates the work that remains to be done to repair the 18 years of Tory destructiveness.

I contend that the Executive has made real achievements, which are a good beginning. I will focus on a number of initiatives that the Labour-led Executive has set in train and which I know, from talking to my constituents, have made a real difference. One such initiative was the decision to introduce free local off-peak bus travel for pensioners and disabled people from October last year. In partnership with councils all over Scotland, that policy has benefited more than a million of our fellow citizens. In my view, the £45 million that has been invested in that scheme is money well spent. It is a practical example of socialism in action.

I am delighted that my party has pledged to extend that scheme so that it encompasses the whole of Scotland. I hope that the people of Scotland allow us to develop the policy in the Parliament's second session. That is a logical development, and will prevent the teething problems that the present scheme has encountered, which many colleagues and I have raised in this chamber. Those teething problems were caused mainly by an overly bureaucratic and inflexible application of the guidelines relating to the scheme's boundaries.

The second area that I want to touch on is the work in progress on the series of measures that have been set in train by the Executive to combat the wholly unacceptable situation of older people being forced to endure life in cold, freezing homes. Westminster has played a part by reducing VAT on fuel from 8 per cent to 5 per cent, but the Executive has put in place the central heating programme and the warm deal. The result of that innovative approach is that, since April 2001, more than 10,000 pensioners throughout Scotland have received free central heating. As one of my constituents, who is perhaps a little older than me, said, "This is an absolute boon."

I am pleased that it is my party's clear intention to produce a situation where, by 2006, no local authority or housing association tenants, or anyone aged 60 or over, will have to live in a home without central heating or adequate insulation. For senior citizens who had to endure freezing homes during the Tory years of cuts and a lack of proper funding for local government, that is real progress. It is an example of socialism in work. Meeting the basic individual needs of people young and old is a prerequisite for the creation of a better society.

We are always advised not to quote Aneurin Bevan, but I am going to go against that advice, because he put it much better than I could, to the n<sup>th</sup> degree. In his book "In Place of Fear" he said:

"There is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual. If ... policies ... do not have for their object the enlargement and cultivation of the individual life, they do not deserve to be called civilised."

That was true in 1952 and it still applies today.

Free eye tests and TV licences, free personal and nursing care, better housing and an improving national health service, with an extra £3.2 billion to be invested over the next five years, are all worthwhile reforms that impact beneficially on individuals.

**Tommy Sheridan:** Does the member agree that the very socialist he mentioned, Aneurin Bevan, would have opposed tooth and nail the increased means testing that has been imposed on pensioners in this country?

**Bill Butler:** Let me put it this way: all those things do not represent the revolution that some of us may hope for, but they add up to a beginning, which will create a revolution in the quality of life of so many of our fellow citizens. As a socialist, one deals with the situation as it is, with the material conditions as they are, and not with what one might wish they could be in the most perfect possible situation. That is my contention and what I, as a reformist socialist, believe in.

I commend the Labour-led Executive's motion, which mirrors its approach over the past four years. That approach is palpable evidence of a good beginning and is worthy of continued support.

10:54

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** This is an oddly sad day, when we say goodbye to Kay Ullrich, John Young, Dorothy-Grace Elder, Ian Jenkins and, of course, that grand matriarch of Scottish politics, Dr Winnie Ewing. When I was in Shetland at the weekend, people said, as they do wherever I go in the Highlands, "How's Winnie doing? She used to come up here so often." One thing about proportional representation in European elections is that everyone knew that

Winnie was the member of the European Parliament. Her reputation will continue.

We have heard so much about social inclusion in recent years, particularly in relation to older people. Many of the soundbites sound very good. Free personal care is free if one can get it. It is free if one can get out of hospital, as Kay Ullrich said. It is also free if one can wait long enough for it. Free personal care is free once someone has had a long wait for an assessment—up to 12 months, but sometimes longer. It is free once the care plan is drawn up, but the care plan can take several months. The care plan should not be a wish list; it should be the basis for the care and support that someone receives.

What is free, however, is the watered-down version of the care plan that gives someone the free personal care that the councils can afford and not the free personal care that is outlined in the care plan. I do not think that there is an MSP in the chamber who has not had someone visit their surgeries to say, "Here is my care plan and this is what I get." It must be the responsibility of Parliament to ensure that the legislation to which we sign up is in good faith. I sat through all the meetings of the Health and Community Care Committee, many of which Kay Ullrich contributed to and, in good faith, we thought that free personal care would be quite different from the free personal care for which people have to fight today.

Week by week in the Highlands, families are fighting for care for the elderly. A lady came to me last week and told me that she was forced to take her mother out of hospital and care for her at home. I saw her mother walking along the road and it was a tragic sight. That was reality, unlike the soundbites that we often hear from the Executive.

I have in my hand a pack from Aberdeen City Council. It is addressed to my colleague David Davidson and dated the end of October last year, which was four months after the implementation of free personal care. It says:

"The Eligibility Criteria for Community Care Services Review Group have been considering the revision of the eligibility criteria and have made comparisons of the eligibility criteria with other local authorities, particularly those of Fife Council".

When the Parliament passed free personal care, we all assumed that there would be consistent standards throughout Scotland, but instead we have a pick and mix. Highland Council has already tried to change the eligibility criteria for free personal care to say that people in the Highlands should be more ill before they receive it. The same situation exists throughout Scotland. Thankfully, the motion lodged by the social work convener at Highland Council was voted down. However, we must ensure that when we pass legislation in the

Parliament, every council in Scotland has the same commitment to it.

Whoever sits on the successor Health and Community Care Committee after 1 May must make a commitment to monitor the implementation of free personal care, but I ask the minister, too, to make that commitment. I do not doubt his good will, but I believe that he has a serious monitoring role to ensure that pensioners throughout Scotland get consistent access to free personal care.

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Frank McAveety):** Does the member accept that the legislation is clear and that the guidelines provided indicate that people should be assessed for free personal care and then allocated such care according to the services of local authorities? Does she also accept that there is no need for local authorities to introduce waiting lists because the resources and the legislation exist, as is right and proper?

**Mary Scanlon:** Yes. In fact I have found the minister supportive when I took information to him and highlighted my concerns. We all have a responsibility to do that where local authorities are writing their own guidelines that are quite different from the legislation we pass in Parliament.

The Aberdeen City Council pack to which I referred mentions high priority, medium priority and low priority. The council also admits:

"You may be placed onto a waiting list for the provision of some services."

It also says:

"we are unable to guarantee a particular type or level of service will always be available."

At least Aberdeen City Council is honest. I am happy to pass on the pack from the council because its implementation is not the same as the guidelines that were set by the Parliament. However, I must ask whether the council has heard of free personal care. There is no mention in the document of the free personal care provisions that were passed by the Parliament. I am pleased to hear the minister's commitments in that regard.

Free personal care should be applied consistently throughout Scotland. There should not be postcode provision. It should not be dependent on individual councils' priorities. As Kay Ullrich said, the number of beds blocked is over 2,700. When the Scottish Parliament was set up, however, only 1,700 beds were blocked. From his time on the Health and Community Care Committee, the minister will remember when Professor Mary Marshall told us that the condition of elderly people deteriorates considerably when they are held in hospital and are given inappropriate care.

Lewis Macdonald knows a lot about free bus travel, but I will tell him about the situation in the

Highlands. Someone who lives in Nairn can travel to Inverness, Fort William or Wick for free, but cannot cross the boundary into Grampian to go to Forres or Elgin. Many people in Nairn have a greater commitment to those two towns than they do to what they might term the wild west of the Highlands. In response to a parliamentary question on this matter that was asked by David Davidson, Lewis Macdonald said:

"The decision on whether to offer this benefit, however, is for the local transport authority to make in relation to each particular scheme."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 18 February 2003; p 3010.]

I understand that, but the minister cannot stand in this chamber and say that there will be free travel for the elderly and leave it to local operators to decide what is free and what is not free.

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** Can I take it that, in order to ensure that the scheme is a national scheme, Mary Scanlon will be voting Labour in the election?

**Mary Scanlon:** No chance. I realise that Sylvia Jackson is desperate for votes, but she should not come chapping on my door.

Although, as Ian Jenkins said, pensions are a Westminster issue, I will mention the fact that Help the Aged's briefing, in a section entitled "Creating Tomorrow's Pensioner Poverty Today", criticises the stakeholder pensions. It also says that 72 per cent of final salary schemes have stopped accepting new members, that there is a £27 million black hole in pension provision and that the state pension is diminishing in value. According to Help the Aged, things are not getting better for pensioners; they are getting worse.

11:02

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** On behalf of the young at heart, regardless of age, I would like to discuss employment and volunteering.

I should probably declare an interest in that, if I make a persuasive speech about the need to employ older people and am successful in the election, Jim Wallace might give me a job.

None of us thinks that anyone should have to work after the normal retirement age if they do not want to. However, we should be far more flexible in helping people to continue to work longer if they want to and are up to it. Winston Churchill was a pensioner when he led Britain to salvation in the 1940s. [*Applause.*] The Conservative members who just applauded might not like my next example as much, but Gladstone was in his 80s when he took on the establishment to try to secure Irish home rule. He used to speak for one, two or three hours on the subject in Parliament. I assure members that I will stick to four minutes, however.

Closer to home, I mention our two oldest members, Winnie Ewing and John Young. They have long and distinguished records of public service in Scotland, which have continued right up to the present time. Age is no impediment. We should do more to change people's attitudes.

If we are of a pensionable age and wish to continue, there are three tests. First, are we physically up to what we want to do? Secondly, do we continue to enjoy it? Certainly, I do, as do many other members; I go home happily if I have contributed a little to some local issue and helped constituents. If I have nudged the parliamentary process to support some cause I am interested in—even if I have just annoyed a Government department—that has been a good day. Thirdly, we need honest advice from our nearest and dearest as to whether we have lost the plot.

In other words, health, enjoyment and still being mentally up to it are the important factors. The Executive could lead by example; it could have much more liberal employment policies to allow people to continue working. In my brief time as an MP, I tried to help people who were losing their jobs at the Scottish Office, allegedly because of their age, although they were very keen to continue. We should also encourage Scottish employers to be liberal and flexible as regards employing older people.

The other aspect is volunteering. Again, we do not wish to compel people to volunteer; it is their choice. However, many people feel inhibited from volunteering, and we could do far more to inform them. For example, there could be a simple rule that all charities and voluntary organisations had to have a two-page summary of their activity, which would be part of the monitoring process, but would also be available on the web and in paper format in local libraries. People could then find out about voluntary organisations that they could work for. We could also give more training to help people. The fiercest and most determined organiser of voluntary activity I know is over retirement age, and two of the most valuable treasurers I have known have also been of that age. Treasurers are probably more valuable to an organisation than anything else. Therefore, if we can help local organisations to attract and train volunteers and to become better known, we will have done everyone a great favour.

Ian Jenkins finished his excellent speech with my favourite piece of poetry about Ulysses going on one more voyage. As a politician hoping to get into one more Parliament, he has expressed what I feel. I am happy to leave it at that.

11:08

**Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I suppose I must declare an interest. When I was

coming up the road, David Davidson told me that he supposed that I would be speaking today. I asked, "Why is that?" and he replied, "On grounds of antiquity."

No one has tried to define older people. It is funny—the young people in the gallery probably think that older people are 30. When someone is 30, they think that old is 45, and when they are my age, they might think 80. When I am 80—as I fully intend to be, God willing and weather permitting—I shall think that 95 is old.

Age is partly a state of mind, as other members have commented; I must admit that it is also a state of deteriorating body. That said, there are many older people who are far fitter, mentally and physically, than young people. Although there is a common condition among older people known as a senior moment—alternatively, a CRAFT moment, which I will explain later but cannot possibly say here—such fleeting seconds of forgetfulness are not the exclusive province of older people. I suppose that the only definition has to be chronological. I have been in denial on this for years, but my imminent departure has forced me to face up to it.

What is the opportunity gap? People are prevented from working beyond a certain age, and are not selected for jobs because they are too old. We should follow the example of the United States, where people work as long as they want to and as long as they are fit and well for the job. That is what Donald Gorrie said, and I agree. Older people who lose their jobs in their 50s or early 60s are not getting retrained quickly enough. For those who do not want to leave, or who are not at the end of their salary career, that is a demoralising experience.

I have looked at Age Concern Scotland's manifesto for the forthcoming election. It highlights a number of points that Age Concern feels to be worthy of consideration. Those include defects in service delivery in the national health service, in care services, in housing, in support from voluntary services, in consultation and in transport.

I will focus, however, on the need to ensure that enterprise and lifelong learning policies are fully inclusive of older people's needs. That means that vocational retraining must be readily accessible everywhere for everyone, where they need it. Non-vocational studies and courses must be available for people who no longer wish to continue to work. The two benefits of that are, first, that it enriches those people's lives—people's lives should be as rich as they can be for as long as possible.

**Helen Eadie:** I have a 101-year-old constituent who is going to learn computing at the Bowhill centre in Cardenden. I am sure that Colin Campbell will join me in recognising the real value that that represents.

**Colin Campbell:** I could not possibly disagree with Helen Eadie in this instance. That is just great and really good to know.

The second benefit of people taking non-vocational courses after they leave work is that they can share their life's experience with the other people on the course, and with the staff. Not only does that educate other people, it is good for their own self-esteem.

To give the people in this nation the best possible lives, we need to control all the levers of power. To discuss this in a devolved Parliament that is devoid of power over income tax, social security, pensions and the economy is a bit like whistling in the wind. To close the opportunity gap for older people—and indeed for all our people—Scotland needs to release the great wealth of Scotland for all the people of Scotland. That can be done only by delivering independence. That is why I joined the Scottish National Party—that is why we all joined our party—and that is why our party will be here until after independence day.

And now for my valedictory paragraph. Unlike Ian Jenkins, who used to be an English teacher, I am an historian to trade, and there will be no poetry in this. It has been a responsibility, an honour and a privilege to serve in the first democratically elected Scottish Parliament. Its cross-party committee system, with its pre-legislative scrutiny, proves that a one-chamber assembly can work. The consensus that is arrived at in the committees and often, on the really good days, in the chamber, represents the very best of Scottish politics. More than that, although we disagree radically on a number of things—most at least independence, over which we will argue until independence day—we conduct our political lives tolerantly and with mutual respect, so much so that foreign parliamentarians have been beating a path to the Parliament since we opened, to see how we do it so well. Sometimes, we do not get enough credit in this country for what we have achieved. The Parliament is a bit like a prophet without honour in his own country. Somebody once said that devolution is not a destination, but a process. The inevitable outcome of that process will be independence for this nation. I am proud to have played my part in that process on behalf of all the people of Scotland.

11:13

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I am sorry that Mrs Curran is not in the chamber at the moment to get something back—we heard a good lecture from her earlier. I have no declaration to make for the debate, unlike some of my colleagues. If we ever wish to look for value for money from the older generation, it was John Young in the karaoke bar last night.

I am amazed at the Executive's hypocrisy in securing this debate at the last possible moment of the session. It could not have got the debate in any later if it had tried. That is how much the Executive prioritises the needs of our older generation, and that is the signal that it is sending out. The Executive should be ashamed that it has taken so long to bring this subject to the chamber.

Under the Labour Government, particularly under Gordon Brown, there has been an increase in stealth taxes that cannot be avoided. Those taxes hit pensioners and those who are not on benefit particularly badly. This is the new poverty trap, and it puts people just above the benefit level. Savings have been attacked. The savings index is down, which does not bode well for the future, so God knows how we will pay for taxes, pensions and so on in future.

Gordon Brown has singled out the one area in which people can be self-reliant: the tax on the pensions system. People save up and want to be proud and have their independence and dignity, as Keith Harding rightly said. The Labour Government has destroyed that in the interest of getting money into the pot, regardless of where it comes from. That is a scandal that the next—Conservative—Government will have to address. We have little doubt that that will not be too far in the offing, despite Lewis Macdonald's smirking. I say to him that merely giving people bus passes is no substitute for giving them choice and dignity in their old age.

The new poverty zone has taken a lot from our older generation. We are all knocking on doors at the moment, and we all speak to older people. What do they talk to us about? They talk about the cost of government, their lack of purchasing power with the money that they have left, how they have to eke out a living, and how their pensions have not increased in line with inflation. Yet, council after council has inflicted massive council tax rises in the past six years. There is not a council in Scotland that has done anything to reduce council tax increases to the level of inflation. Aberdeenshire council, where I live, has managed to put it up by 63 per cent in a few years.

Who do those increases hit worst of all? They hit those who do not have an opportunity to earn a living and whose pensions are eroded. It is a fact of life that the stock market goes up and down. However, the value of those annuities that were meant to mature in the past two years has probably gone down by 40 to 45 per cent. People's hopes, aspirations and savings have been destroyed, and the Labour Government does not recognise that.

It is amazing—Mrs Curran has actually come in to the chamber. Once again, she is not giving her whole-hearted attention to a serious debate.

**Ms Curran:** That is not fair.

**Mr Davidson:** It is perfectly fair. Mrs Curran brought this debate, late, to the Parliament and she should sit here and listen, particularly since we had lectures from her this morning.

Free personal care is a joke. The document that I gave to Mary Scanlon is proof positive that the councils of Scotland do not have the Scottish Executive's support in delivering free personal care. About eight councils have issued public policy statements in which they state very clearly that there is no national scheme. Instead, there is postcode availability of free personal care, which is a disgrace. The amount of money that the Parliament has received to spend has gone up and up, but what do we see for it? As far as the older generation is concerned, we do not see a great deal.

I am pleased that the Scottish Executive has rejected the Office of Fair Trading report on pharmacy services. I give the Executive credit for that and am glad that I was able to help Frank McAveety through some of the technical issues involved. In this case, at least, the Executive has managed to get the answer right. I am pleased that people in rural and suburban communities will now be able to access pharmaceutical care. I declare that I no longer have any interest in community pharmacy.

The Executive has been late to the table on this subject: it could not have scheduled this debate any later. That is a clear signal to the pensioners of Scotland that they are not in the front line of the Scottish Executive's concerns.

11:19

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** Like other speakers, I pay my respects to the retiring members and wish them the very best. I look forward to my retirement—hopefully, in 29 years' time, after a career serving as the MSP for Glasgow Springburn.

Credit should be given to the Executive where it is due. Like other members, I am sometimes critical of the Executive, but I commend it for its response to the pharmacy report. It has listened to the wide range of members' views. The pharmacy issues are very important to the older people in our communities as pharmacies provide a valuable service and the Executive has taken that into consideration.

I see this debate as an opportunity to promote many of the services that we have delivered. I also see it as an opportunity to consider how we improve older people's experiences in our communities. I put on record my appreciation of the army of home helps and care workers and

other key staff who provide a valuable service in supporting the older people in our communities. I also give recognition to the alive and kicking project in my constituency, which provides a valuable service to the elderly.

The experience of many of my elderly constituents appears to be patchy, particularly when they have inquiries about council tax, utilities, housing benefit or other issues to which members have referred. Older people face what is almost a web of secrecy about how their inquiries are dealt with. I ask the Minister for Social Justice—I make a constructive point here—whether she will consider a one-stop-shop approach to support elderly people with the inquiries with which they encounter difficulties. As a Glasgow MSP, the minister will be aware of some of the council tax inquiries that our elderly constituents have and the difficulties that they face with how such inquiries are managed. We have many examples of one-stop-shop approaches in our communities and such an approach to support the elderly with their inquiries would be a way forward.

I referred to the alive and kicking project. The ethos of that project is that one is never too old. The project has set up an informal dating agency—if any retired members are interested—and many of the people involved have married later in life, such as Rose and Benny Walker, the founder members of the project. Their ethos is that one is never too old for many of the activities in which they are involved. That is the kind of ethos that we should develop in the Parliament. We should not allow our elderly people to be confined to day rooms and day facilities. They should be involved in the kinds of activities that the project has developed over the past 20 years. I put on record my appreciation, as the local MSP, for the hard work that has been done. I plead with the Executive to consider investing in and developing such services.

The main thing is to ensure that we build on that for the future. Shortly, I will be joined by children from St Stephen's Primary School in my constituency. As Colin Campbell said, those are the young people who see us all, perhaps including me, at 36 years of age, as old guys. We should lay the foundations to ensure that when those pupils are older, services are in place to ensure that they will have a good life in their later years.

11:24

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Like many other members, I take the opportunity to wish those who are retiring today all the best for the future. I particularly say a word or two about my colleague Winnie Ewing, because she has the



unique record of having served in three Parliaments. She opened this Parliament—the first democratically elected Scottish Parliament—and she has been not only a great parliamentarian and patriot, but has become an icon for the people of Scotland. I congratulate her and wish her all the best.

I could go round the chamber singling out many other people, but I want to mention only one other person. We should put on record our gratitude for the huge contribution that Henry McLeish made to the introduction of free personal care for the elderly. We wish Henry all the best in the future.

As one of the younger speakers in the debate—

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I was waiting for the joke.

**Alex Neil:** For members who were not here, I mentioned in yesterday's debate on the economy that I read the Toothill report way back in 1962, while I was in my pram. I received a query from the official report, which asked me to clarify what I was flicking through in my pram. I hope that the official report keeps a copy of that note for future reference.

I want to discuss the pensions crisis that we face in Scotland and in the rest of the UK. Before I do that, I want to underline the points that have been made about the threat to our pharmacies. For many older people, the pharmacy is the focal point. It is not only where they collect prescriptions; in many cases, it is where they meet their friends. They often rely on the local chemist for advice, which might be on a variety of local issues, as well as on their health. We must unite in fighting any threat to our local pharmacies.

**Mr McAveety:** I will keep the member up to speed with events. Yesterday, we announced that we have rejected the OFT recommendation and that we value the role of community pharmacies across Scotland.

**Alex Neil:** I was just about to congratulate Frank McAveety on doing that.

**Mr McAveety:** I just like to hear it twice.

**Alex Neil:** As far as older people—and many others—are concerned, the other great institution is the local post office. It is regrettable that the threat to urban and, in the longer term, to rural post offices is still with us. That is of major concern to older people.

I turn to the key issue of pensions. Many of the aspirations that Margaret Curran outlined in her speech are aspirations that we all share, not just for those who are retired at the moment, but for those who will retire in the years to come. A key prerequisite—the fundamental principle that must be fulfilled before anyone can genuinely enjoy

their retirement—is the guarantee that they will get a decent weekly income on which to enjoy it.

Any pensioner who lives on, or near, the poverty line and who relies on a pittance of a pension—the minimum income guarantee is more minimum than income—cannot enjoy their retirement, mix with their friends, go for a pint or do the things that people want to do when they have the time to do them. One of the most disgraceful measures that the Thatcher Government introduced was the breaking of the link between the annual increase in the pension and the increase in earnings rather than prices. If that link had been maintained, many pensioners would be up to £30 a week better off than they are.

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** Does the member accept that, at the time at which that link was broken, the historical perspective indicated that pensioners had been at a massive disadvantage because that change had not been made earlier?

**Alex Neil:** The bottom line is that the breaking of the link between the pension and earnings has cost pensioners about £1,500—at today's prices—every year. The same is true of the Christmas bonus, which, to be fair, the Tories introduced. Initially, it was worth £10, but now it is worth only £1.25—about 10 per cent of its original value.

I have not had time to develop all the other aspects of the pensions crisis. My basic point is that paying lip service to the pensioners is fine, but if it ain't matched with resources, that is all it is—lip service. We must guarantee that every pensioner has a decent income, so that they can enjoy their retirement.

11:29

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** A couple of weeks ago, my six-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter asked me, "Have you ever met Queen Victoria?" I sort of looked at her and asked, "Do you not mean the Queen?" She said, "No, Queen Victoria." I must admit that I think that she was put up to it.

One important thing that has not been mentioned in the debate so far is the lack of communication between the elderly and the young. For a number of reasons, there was far more communication between the old and the young 30 or 40 years ago, when large numbers of people were employed in the same firm and people came through apprenticeships. Apprentices would start quite young and would be in contact with people who were in their 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and even beyond.

I started as an office boy at 16 years of age. In those days, it was not possible to be promoted

beyond an office boy until it was seen whether the call came for national service at the age of 18. I recall that our office had not only the likes of myself who was 16, but two men who were over 70 years of age. One of them was the head clerk, who had started as an office boy in the same firm when Queen Victoria was in the last few years of her reign. There was that mix between the young, the middle-aged and the old.

Under national service, a large chunk of the male population saw that mix. The 18 and 19-year-olds had to meet corporals and sergeants who would be in their 20s, 30s and 40s. Because all those things have largely disappeared, a type of division has occurred.

We set down certain age markers, such as 60 and 65, but we should bear it in mind that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only about 60 people in this country were reckoned to have reached 100 years of age, whereas today almost 6,000 people are reckoned to come within that category. Again, world heavyweight boxing champions such as Jack Dempsey tended to retire at 31 years of age. In the past few years, people such as Riddick Bowe have fought for the same title at 45 years of age. Colonel Glenn, who was latterly a senator, went back into space at 77 years of age. We perhaps require new markers for age.

I think that it would be useful if a future Scottish Parliament reserved eight seats. Four would be for people over 65 years of age who would be appointed for one year on a rotating system. The other four seats would go to people under 21 years of age, again for one year only on a rotating system. That would be a useful exercise, which could be done outwith the mainstream elections.

We have heard all sorts of contributions today and I thank Donald Gorrie for his kind remarks. I think that the next Parliament should establish a poet laureate and Ian Jenkins would be the obvious man for that job. It might be a new departure to have such a thing in a Scottish Parliament.

Finally, a number of years ago in the United States, the Republican and Democrat parties recognised the value of what they called grey power as a huge voting block. There is the possibility that grey power in this country will become more organised as a voting block that any politician ignores at their peril. If a mass of grey-power people come together, they will be able to decide the outcome of not only Scottish Parliament elections, but Westminster elections.

On that happy note, it remains only for me to thank everybody for their kind wishes for the future. I have no intention of simply putting my slippers on, or of watching the afternoon television and all that sort of nonsense. I hope to participate

in politics in another direction. I will perhaps consider writing up my experiences of the first four years of the Scottish Parliament.

I was one of the few Conservatives who wanted a Scottish Parliament when we had the declaration of Perth in the 1970s. One man who I am sad to see did not make it here is Brian Meek, the Edinburgh town councillor and journalist. Brian is a fund of knowledge and has been a staunch supporter of the Scottish Parliament, but he is still languishing down the road at Edinburgh City Chambers. Perhaps he will make it here yet.

I thank members very much. I have made good friends across the political spectrum. However, members have not seen the last of me. I will pay the occasional visit to Edinburgh and I may even lead grey-power marches down to Holyrood if members do not behave themselves. Be warned. *[Applause.]*

11:34

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind):** Many visions have floated across our radar today. My favourite, and the point at which I really got the giggles, was when Alex Neil referred to reading various documents while in his pram. My vision was of Alex Neil sitting in his pram, dribbling mush down his bib and thinking, "I have got to like mush. When I grow up, I think I will go into politics." A bonnie fechter is Alex Neil.

I am glad that Margaret Curran and Frank McAveety are the two ministers in charge today. The three of us have been sandwiched together in the east end for the past four years and, putting all party politics aside, both of them have co-operated with good heart and good grace on constituency issues, and have been friendly and kind at all times. Yes, even Frank McAveety—I had to put that on the record.

I am one of those leaving the Parliament, but I am certainly not retiring, even if it is my silver wedding anniversary this year. I will retire when someone nails down my box—be there. Campaigns will go on, especially the chronic pain campaign, which is one that affects older people. I know that Mary Scanlon and others who have been loyal to that campaign will continue it, as will the interest of members across all parties.

I will get to the nitty-gritty of age. I am old enough to remember when the Registrar General for Scotland produced a report entitled "The population of Scotland broken down by age and sex". Obviously we could take our pick which we wanted to be broken down by, fellow parliamentarians.

I am not sure what we mean when we talk in this debate about "older people" or "old people". By the

standards of the Bundestag in Germany, everyone in the Scottish Parliament is older or old, even our youngest member who is still in his 20s. Recently, a girl of 19—a member of the Green party—was elected to the Bundestag.

Although talent occurs at any age, it is a formidable combination when talent is united with experience. I am terribly sorry to see some members leaving today, especially the unique Winnie Ewing. We are losing our mother, and that is awful for the Parliament.

The minister briefly referred to unemployment among older people. A survey by Silicon Research Services stated that age discrimination begins at 35 nowadays. That is what was found in a survey of several thousand people.

Those of us who have marched together have tackled all forms of discrimination over the years. I know many faces from those past days. We marched against racism and sexism, but we have yet to tackle the last big, horrible ism and that is ageism.

The Eden Brown employee survey of October 2001 showed that employees found discrimination at work on the basis of age was much more common than discrimination on grounds of gender or race. We can see clearly why that is—there is legislation on race and gender discrimination.

In 1996, Mr Blair promised in writing to the campaign against age discrimination in employment that he would legislate against age discrimination. Strangely enough, after the election, he did not and it has been worked on a voluntary basis, which most certainly has not worked with employers.

An NOP survey found that half of employers had work forces with fewer than 10 per cent of employees over age 50 and 10 per cent of employers had no employees aged over 50. That is a disgraceful waste of human life and I am sure that everyone in the chamber will agree on that and agree that we have to move against ageism in future, whether the subject is devolved or not.

I will leave the chamber with some final thoughts. What is the Executive's own employment policy? One Executive document states that it does not usually employ people who are over 60, while the next reassures everyone that the Executive is against all forms of discrimination, including age discrimination. As a result, I ask the minister to spell out in his summing-up whether the Executive truly sets a good example or whether it debars people who are over 60.

I think that it should be illegal for any employer to ask someone about their age. I adhere to the view of Joan Rivers, who calculated her age

according to the Hollywood movie star school of creative mathematics and then said anything she damned well liked about it. She was quite right, too. In fact, I recommend everyone to count their age in dog years.

I thank all members who have been friendly, co-operative and civilised over the past four years.

**Ms Curran:** I am sorry to intervene in the final minute. However, I want to put on record my recognition of Dorothy-Grace Elder's hard work both in the Parliament and in the east end of Glasgow. I had been debating whether to intervene on other members but, given my proximity to Dorothy-Grace and the work that we have done together in the east end of the city, I wanted to record on behalf of myself and Frank McAveety our recognition of her efforts.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** You do not need to respond at great length, Ms Elder.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** Oh, go on.

The minister's comment was exceedingly kind. I know that she will work on and perhaps take on the Carntyne incinerator case. If I can help with anything, I certainly will. I have found out in politics that what counts are individuals, irrespective of party. Margaret Curran has been a staunch supporter of people when they have needed help.

I want to finish by thanking the people who really created this Parliament from scratch: the staff. We have been privileged. They have possibly had custody of the brain throughout; indeed, fronted by our marvellous security staff, they have done everything possible in every department for us. To all of them I say, goodbye and good luck. *[Applause.]*

11:42

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I send my best wishes to all the retirees, in particular Dorothy-Grace Elder, whose passion and wit I will miss, and Dr Winnie Ewing, who was my political mentor for many years and remains so. I also give my best wishes to Ian Jenkins, who has been my sweet and dear adversary—or perhaps I have been his. I will cheer him up with the news that, in a recent questionnaire, Borders schoolchildren thought that I was a member of the Liberal Democrats. I have obviously mentioned them once too often.

Listening to the debate, I have been wondering who these older people are. Colin Campbell was quite right: it all depends on one's position on the timeline of life. I think that I am pretty young, although I am sure that lots of people think that I am no spring chicken and wonder why I am still here. Well, I intend to be here for a very long time.

For the purposes of many organisations, older people are classed as those who are over 50—which takes in my sweet young man Alex Neil. More than 1 million people in Scotland are over 50—indeed, one can hear them casting their votes based on what we have or have not done for them. Age Concern Scotland's slogan is "Age counts". We should all watch the ballot boxes to find out how politicians have let down Scotland's elderly.

We are not monotypical; we are all different and difficult and have all the usual virtues and vices. We are not simply older people. For example, my father is 88 on 1 April. He e-mails me his message list, but even that does not guarantee that I will come back with the right type of cabbage. He is truly an individual.

As we grow older, we rely more on public transport. To quote a famous film, I do not think that we should rely on "the kindness of strangers". We need public transport and a reliable health service and have to know that, when all is done, there is proper nursing care. As far as transport is concerned, mobility is at the heart of keeping one's health, psychological well-being and friends. Free bus passes might be all right, but they work only in one's own area. Someone in Penicuik can go to Leadburn, which is a couple of miles up the road, but if they want to go to Peebles, they must pay £4.50.

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald)**  
rose—

**Christine Grahame:** I will take the minister's intervention in a minute. I hope that he is on his feet to announce that the Executive will make the scheme national, as we have suggested all along. We are behind Wales and a national scheme is needed.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I would have been delighted to announce that had my colleagues not made such an announcement some weeks ago. Having caught up with that fact, Christine Grahame will want to pay close attention to the matter. The difference between our commitment to a nationwide scheme and whatever the SNP has to say is that we will deliver our scheme.

**Christine Grahame:** The minister got there—better late than never. At least the scheme has got there; some buses do not get there. There is no point in having a free bus pass if no buses operate. In Galashiels in the Borders, Meikle Street loses all its buses on 31 March. Many elderly people who live up the hills will have nothing after that and they will knock on Scottish Borders Council's door. The bus services for those who live in Ladywood in Penicuik stop at 7.30 pm. People are supposed to be in bed with their knitted

bedsocks on and are not supposed to be out gallivanting, doing internetting business and meeting friends.

Many older people are frightened to go into hospital because they think that doing so will make their health worse. Their operations might be successful, but they might catch infections while in hospital. My colleague Kay Ullrich mentioned a situation that I saw when my mother was terminally ill in hospital two years ago. Food trays that are put in front of patients have cups with lids that older people cannot open and the trays are taken away before the food has been eaten. Not a nurse is in sight to help those people to eat their meals. Some kind of resolution has been reached to the nursing home crisis, but elderly people and their families have been put through trouble in thinking that elderly people would be decanted and shifted like bits of furniture.

Growing old is not always a happy prospect, but I intend to grow old disgracefully. I will take a line from a poem that Ian Jenkins quoted: I shall "learn to spit".

**Ian Jenkins:** I think that Christine Grahame does that well already.

**Christine Grahame:** I also intend to hone my skill at drinking malt while gardening.

There is fun at 50—I know, I have been there; there is sex at 60—I hope so, I am going there; there is sin at 70, and I am looking forward to it; and at 80 and 90, there is upholstery. If members want to know the answer to that conundrum, they should read a previous speech of mine.

11:47

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I am tempted to say, "Follow that." I will try not to.

It is appropriate that the last main political debate of the session is about what the Parliament has done to try to improve older people's quality of life. In her opening speech, Margaret Curran made wide-ranging comments about what the Executive has done. I will focus not on a range of issues, but on how much more we need to do on the key flagship policies that define what the Parliament has done for older people and on the contribution that older people make in my constituency. It will probably be tough to cover those subjects in four minutes, but I will have a go.

In considering how to improve the key flagship policies that are delivered throughout Scotland, I asked my intern, Beth Shatzel, to undertake questionnaire work and to talk to older people in my constituency. Week in, week out in the Parliament, we debate policies endlessly, but how do those policies feed through to people? How do they know that those policies are being implemented?

We examined the three key policies of free off-peak local bus travel, free care for older people and free central heating. Through Beth Shatzel's work, which I followed up by attending many meetings of older people, it is clear that those policies have massive support throughout my constituency. Many older people have benefited from those policies, but many are still unaware of them. In the Parliament, we talk about the policies as if they were implemented at the flick of a switch, happened yesterday and are straightforward. We must communicate to older people what we have done in the Parliament, engage them in those discussions and talk to them about how to improve those policies.

When I talk to people in my constituency, just about every older person whom I meet is delighted about free off-peak local travel on buses. People have used it from day one—they have been delighted to get out there. People are not only using the scheme, but are massively aware of it. We have been hugely successful in making people know about free off-peak local travel on buses.

There is less awareness of what free care for older people means in practice and, as I said, it is incumbent on MSPs to communicate what policies mean in practice. Many older people whom we talked to had had free central heating installed, but many of them were suspicious about it. I was struck by the fact that they did not believe that it was going to be free. We have debated the issue in the Parliament—we know that free central heating is provided free and that the scheme is real. However, a lot of the older people whom we talked to thought that there was a catch; they thought that the scheme was something like a time-share. They said that bits of it would be free, but that they would have to pay for the installation or that there would be a catch further down the line and that 10 years hence they would have to pay for it.

It is important that we do not simply talk about those headline policies but take on the job of communicating them personally. A lot of flak has been directed at the Executive for the money that it has spent on advertising. As an ex-minister, I know that that is partly because a lot of that money used to be UK money. The Scottish Office did not have that money in its accounts and one of the benefits of devolution is that, when that money came to Scotland, we were given the choice about how to spend it.

I defend to the last the right of our Executive to spend money on publicity. I want every one of my constituents to know that they deserve and will benefit from free central heating. I have visited several old people's houses and have seen the difference that free central heating has made to their quality of life. I was struck by the fact that

those old people no longer have to live their lives in their sitting rooms; they can be comfortable in their bedrooms and bathrooms as well. Those are basic things that the Scottish Parliament has done to make a difference and we should defend them to the last.

Although we have made a big difference in this parliamentary session, I would be the first to say that there is a hell of a lot more that we want to do in the second session. I would love to be in the Parliament then to extend those policies and to take them further forward.

It is important that we do not see older people only as receivers of benefit or policies from the Scottish Parliament. Older people put a huge amount back into our constituencies and communities. As a local MSP, I am proud of the work that older people do in my constituency. They demand my support on planning issues, on sourcing grants and on getting the local authority to give them more support. They also demand my support in getting new facilities built and in the fundraising that is needed to staff the facilities.

Many of the groups on my patch are run by older people, often for older people. It is important that we acknowledge that in today's debate, which is about closing the opportunity gap. The Scottish Parliament is making its contribution to that aim not only by spending money on older people, but by working with older people. We are making the work that older people do go a lot further—we should celebrate the work that is done by thousands of older people in every constituency across Scotland.

I will finish by saying that we have done a huge amount to make a real difference to the quality of life for pensioners and older people across Scotland. For the past year and a half, I have been involved in the Pennell trust—[*Laughter.*] I am going to regret saying that. The initiative is about women aged over 45 to over 105. Older people make up a huge number of the population of Scotland and we all know that we are all moving towards old age. We can be proud of what the Parliament has done so far, but I accept that there is an awful lot more than we still want to do. There are a lot of radical ambitions for the second session of the Parliament. I fervently hope that we will have a Labour-led Government to let us deliver those radical ambitions.

11:54

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** The minister said at the beginning of her speech that we have to listen to older people. The SNP does that and when we do so the one issue that is raised all the time, particularly by pensioners, is the state pension.

The state pension gives single people £75.50 and a couple £120.70 a week. There is the minimum income guarantee, but surely if it is described as a minimum the Government must be saying that a top-up is necessary. That means that the state pension is far too low. We must get to European levels—in Germany and France, the state pension is 11 per cent of the gross domestic product, whereas in the UK it is 4.3 per cent. The Scottish Parliament cannot get away from the fact that the state pension is far too low.

Today's debate is about closing the opportunity gap. One way of doing so is, as others have suggested, to encourage and allow people who want to get back to work to do so. We know that age discrimination legislation will come into force in 2006, but I am worried that most employers and people in Scotland do not know about it. When I attended a conference in Glasgow on the subject a couple of weeks ago, Scottish employers' lack of knowledge of it was mentioned time and again. Wales and England are far ahead of us on the issue. One reason for that is that we are not promoting the legislation enough. I think that it was Iain Gray who replied to my questions on the matter, for which I thank him. He mentioned the publication of a booklet called "Are You Over 50?" How many of those booklets have been produced? Where are they being distributed? Who is taking them—employers or the general public?

**Ms Curran:** If we do not have that information to hand for the debate, I am sure that we can provide it to the member. We will ensure that she receives it.

**Ms White:** I thank the minister. I have spoken to old-age pensioners and groups and they ask about the publication when I mention it, but nobody seems to know exactly where it is distributed.

Will the Executive promote an advertising campaign on television or somewhere else that deals with age discrimination? It is important that the public at large and employers know about the forthcoming legislation. We all know that older people—by which I mean those who are 50 or older rather than necessarily 70 or 80—contribute a great deal to society. They want to get back to work. Alex Neil mentioned pensions. Some people who have private pensions in particular will be forced to go back to work. We want to give them a choice. They should be treated fairly.

I mentioned choice. I commend the SNP's amendment, especially the final words, which are:

"to address the needs of older people in Scotland the Parliament needs the full powers of an independent sovereign state."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We proceed to winding-up speeches. We are a little bit behind the clock.

11:57

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** This has been a high-quality debate worthy of the Parliament. Its tone is a suitable curtain-raiser for the tone with which we should go into the election.

I join colleagues in thanking for their service senior friends, allies and opponents who are retiring from the Parliament. In many ways, they symbolise the contribution that older people make to our society throughout Scotland. Many members have already been mentioned, but I will single out John Young and my colleague Ian Jenkins. I became a councillor in Glasgow in 1977 when John Young was the council leader. He was the best orator in Glasgow District Council and is a nice man. Through his endeavours, he has contributed to the quality of public life throughout Scotland.

Ian Jenkins made the best speech in the debate—it was erudite and had feeling, compassion and gentleness. The quality that John Young and Ian Jenkins have in common is gentleness. They have other qualities—for example, the mugging of David McLetchie by Ian Jenkins in the earlier days of the Parliament sticks in all our memories—but they behave without bitterness, rancour or nastiness, which is to be commended in the Parliament.

In summarising the debate for the Liberal Democrats, I will make three general points. First, I thank Age Concern Scotland, which, as has been said, gave us the briefing before the debate. I also thank all the other large and small voluntary bodies throughout Scotland that contribute so much to our society. They plug gaps in statutory services and provide lifeline comfort and hope to many people. They give the Parliament the benefit of their practical experience and are often the unsung heroes, possessing all the virtues that we would like our country to have.

Secondly, despite the snipers, the denigration and the bitchy detraction, the Parliament and the Executive have been great reformers. Legislative and administrative achievements over the past four years are impressive and stand comparison with the achievements of any Government of the past. More than 50 acts have been passed, many of which are significant social reforms, such as the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Free central heating provision is the single best achievement of the Parliament and, as Sarah Boyack and other members have said, it is very relevant to the needs of old people in this country.

Many members have mentioned the third issue that I want to mention. Like other people, older people are citizens who benefit from the general

health of our society. Quite possibly, they make the most significant contribution to the voluntary sector, which I mentioned earlier. Of course, they have children and grandchildren, some of whom will have benefited from, for example, the student settlement that we achieved in the early days of the Parliament.

I mention as an example the Glasgow Old People's Welfare Association, which runs clubs, residential homes and other facilities throughout the city. The association makes an enormous contribution to the quality of life of many people. It has an unbelievable 2,000 volunteers and is led by a formidable lady called Sheena Glass. It has a total lack of central support or bureaucracy, but her style and personality goes right across the organisation and all the good work that it does.

Another example is a pensioner group in my home area of Rutherglen, although admittedly the group has shrunk in numbers in the past few years. It is led by a lady who I thought was probably dead long since; she is still the chair. She is kept going by the responsibility that she feels for the older people in her group. I might add that almost all of those people are younger than she is—she must be in her late 80s or 90s at least.

I remind the chamber of the last part of the Executive motion, which refers to

"services ... which will support older people in living healthy, active and independent lives."

That is the target of all our efforts. That is the attitude behind the transport concession and free personal care. The transport concession will probably be the most popular action that the Parliament has taken, because it helps people to get out and about without financial concerns. It is talked about on the buses—I hear people talk about it all the time and it is very much welcomed. As Christine Grahame said, that facility must be matched by the availability of services when they are required. Buses that run on an hourly schedule in the evenings—they cannot always be relied on to come and sometimes leave people stranded at cold, dark bus stops—are not a recipe for social inclusion. We must look for new and imaginative ways in which to bridge the service gaps.

I commend to the Parliament the safe stations initiative, which Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive operates in Paisley. I had the opportunity to visit that project recently. A control centre monitors almost all the local stations within the Strathclyde network and there is an interactive help button at the stations. The initiative is important and I would like it to be extended throughout Scotland. Pharmacies, post offices and pensions have been mentioned. Those are also important issues.

I will finish by mentioning the fact that, a couple of years ago, I attended a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party—

that is probably symptomatic of my growing age and the people whom I happen to know. The party was held at the Overtoun park bowling club in Rutherglen. Until fairly recently, the gentleman concerned walked a mile each day up and down to Fernhill—not an easy hill to walk up—to play bowls at the club where he still regularly wins medals. As a concession to age, he stopped walking back up the hill about a year ago and now takes the bus.

That is an example of what we all want for older people in our society. We want to see healthy, active and independent older people who lead happy and useful lives. That is what the debate is all about. That is what all of us, throughout the various parties, are in various ways trying to achieve. If we can make some contribution—I believe that the Parliament has—towards reaching those objectives, our existence here over the past four years will have been worth while.

12:03

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland)**

**(Con):** Members should not let the white hair fool them—I am the baby of the contributors in this debate. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction to be closing for the Tories in the debate—and the boss ain't here.

I give the chamber my apologies for not leaving promptly. Members may wonder why I say that. I should explain that I had apologised to the minister and the Presiding Officer because I expected to have to leave for a radio engagement at lunch time; however, that engagement was cancelled because of the war. On that note, I record my support for our troops abroad and wish them safety and godspeed. I also apologise for my short absence earlier. That was a consequence of a weak bladder—something that is not confined to the old.

I restate briefly where the Conservatives stand in our approach to the debate. We are committed to a health service that is universal in its reach and available to everyone, wherever they live—it must be available free at the point of need, regardless of ability to pay. It must be high quality and apply the highest professional standards and techniques that are based on the latest knowledge. It must put the needs of the patient first as the paramount consideration.

Keith Harding touched on justice issues, which are the cause of one of the greatest insecurities that people in Scotland feel. Those issues affect minorities in our society disproportionately, especially older people. We believe that it is time to reclaim neighbourhoods from the criminals who destroy communities and imprison fearful people in their homes. People should be allowed to walk

through their communities free from the fear of crime—God knows, they have earned that.

On social justice, Keith Harding mentioned, as I have done in the past, that the Conservatives introduced the right-to-buy scheme in 1980. No policy that has been introduced since then has done more to lift the vulnerable in Scotland out of poverty.

On transport, concessionary schemes and their extension to cover peak times are all well and good, but they are no flipping use if the level of service and the access to it are not sufficient.

**Mr McAveety:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mrs McIntosh:** Happily.

**Mr McAveety:** Will she happily tell me who initiated the deregulation of bus services in the 1980s?

**Mrs McIntosh:** I concede that point and that the Executive has done well in introducing the concessionary travel scheme, but there are areas in which the scheme does not work as well as it might. For example, I am regularly assailed, through correspondence, by a gentleman—a senior citizen, no less—in a suburb of Cumbernauld called Banton, who harangues me to try to get better bus services in his area. In that area, people in their 80s and 90s have to wait for buses that, in their opinion, come on the basis of a calendar, not a timetable.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** The member is absolutely right about bus services, but was not it the Tories who deregulated those services, which is what causes such problems for her constituents and mine?

**Mrs McIntosh:** I do my level best to ensure that the member's constituents and those in the more southern part of Central Scotland get the chance to travel to Falkirk.

**Mr Gibson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mrs McIntosh:** Of course, but I ask Mr Gibson what is up with his tie.

**Mr Gibson:** I have never been able to tie it properly; I cannae ride a bike, either. [*Laughter.*] That is actually true—it is one of my many failings. In fact, I am still working on tying my shoelaces. To return to more prosaic matters, I ask Lyndsay McIntosh whether she and her group will support Kenny MacAskill's member's bill, which aims to reregulate bus services.

**Mrs McIntosh:** In a word, no. However, I can give the member a suggestion for his shoes—get Velcro fastenings, dear.

I agree wholeheartedly with the comments that have been made about skills for the over-50 work force. I know many old people, some of whom are sitting not too far from me, who have a lot to contribute—they ain't done yet.

As the minister is aware, the central heating programme has not been an unalloyed success and there are little problems here and there. It would not be fair to portray the scheme as blemish free. The minister also mentioned youth courts. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill was strengthened by our amendments and I pay tribute to my colleague Bill Aitken for lodging them. The minister also mentioned that there are more police. That is happening slowly, but there is safety in numbers.

**Robert Brown:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Mrs McIntosh:** What is this—get me day?

**Robert Brown:** Given that police numbers in Scotland are at their highest ever, how many more police does the member want? What is her target?

**Mrs McIntosh:** Police numbers are not at their highest.

Gender equality is dear to the minister's heart. Significant lifestyle changes are now possible, but, in my grandmother's day, regardless of whether someone was working or retired, their life was pretty much the same, as Johann Lamont said. Nowadays, the situation is a bit less difficult, because people can change their lifestyle as they reach the silver-tide era. However, matters are different in our ethnic minority communities and we should pay attention to that.

The speech by Kenny Gibson of the tie was one of the most thoughtful that I have heard in four years and I pay tribute to him. My mother, too, often comments, "I don't want a free television licence; I want my cataracts done." She sat for months and months and had me phoning up to get an appointment. Here is a difficulty that members might want to think about in future: why do we not invest in technology to manage time and appointments? That could help many people. Our older people may be able to take up some of the cancellations.

Kenny Gibson also mentioned respect, career breaks, pensions and transport. Of course, there was Keith Harding's speech as well, much of which I have repeated. There is no doubt about it—means testing demeans the silver tide of voters.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Oh boy. In that case, I pay tribute to previous contributors Trish Godman, Kay



Ullrich, Bill Butler, Mary Scanlon and Donald Gorrie. When Ian Jenkins mentioned Tina I was truly nervous. I thought that he had heard about last night and Dr Sylvia Jackson and me. That was worrying. What a lovely speech Colin Campbell made. I will leave it to him to tell members what a CRAFT moment is. John Young should believe me when I say that we will communicate at some stage in the future.

I have one or two comments, for which I crave the Presiding Officer's indulgence.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are behind time already.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Indeed we are.

However unwillingly, I shall be making way for an older person. I leave it to others to make the comparisons. However, there is life in this old dog yet. They used to say that life begins at 40. When I got there, they had bloody raised it to 50. At this rate, I will never catch up.

It has been my privilege to serve in this first session of Parliament. I never sought a place in history, but it comes with the territory and is a humbling prospect. I have made many, many friends across the parties. I should tell members that Mike Russell did not send me a Valentine's card and I was disappointed.

**Alex Johnstone:** Did the member send him one?

**Mrs McIntosh:** No, I did not. He signalled his intention up to me.

Colleagues across the parties in Central Scotland were strangers who became friends. I am sure that there are many more friends that I have yet to make. No matter what the circumstances of our departures today—to pastures new or out to grass, and whether assured of success or disappointed by the outcome—I send all members every best wish.

12:12

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** All I can say is that I hope that I am not retiring—I hope that I will still have my job after 1 May.

I thought earlier that I should say something about colleagues across the parties who are retiring; they will all be sadly missed, but they will just have to take my word for it. I hope that my actions have shown how dearly I hold them all, because I feel that if I start to say anything I will just get upset and make a complete and utter fool of myself, so I will not do it.

One thing that Colin Campbell said really struck home; I will paraphrase him. He talked about age being a state of mind, which is absolutely true

because, until today, I had not thought of those colleagues as people who were older—I exclude from that Duncan Hamilton. Members have stood up and said that they are retiring, but they are colleagues I have thought of merely as my contemporaries—age has not come into it at any time until today, when they all stood up and stated how ancient they were, and that they were all going off into the sunset.

It struck me that I am getting on a bit as well. Much to my shock, I saw that there was an Executive document called "Are you over 50?", which is a guide to services for older people. I was thinking, "I'm nearly there myself", then Sarah Boyack talked about an institution for women who are over 45.

**Sarah Boyack:** I am deeply grateful that I have been allowed an intervention. I referred to the Pennell Initiative for Women's Health, which is a group that was set up to promote older women's health. I apologise for my earlier slip of the tongue, which I hope will be corrected in the *Official Report*.

**Linda Fabiani:** I thought that Sarah Boyack would appreciate that opportunity, but I still have a wee bit of difficulty with being elderly because I am over 45.

I do not know whether it is the same for other members, but I recently started getting *Saga Magazine* sent to me every month here in Parliament. Only when I heard Helen Eadie clarifying what *Saga* is did I think that I should perhaps have thrown the magazine in the bin. However, I thank Colin Campbell for kindly gifting me his *Saga* pen to remember him by.

To return to the reality of the debate—older people's place in Scotland—the minister rightly cited the developments that Parliament has implemented on behalf of older people. The minister also said that nobody should have to live on less than the state pension and the minimum income guarantee. However, Sandra White rightly said that the existence of the minimum income guarantee is proof that the pension is not enough to live on. Furthermore, there is a big problem with people not applying for the minimum income guarantee and not taking up their full benefits.

Another member—I cannot remember who—referred to the fact that there are local initiatives that involve giving people welfare benefits advice. For example, I think that the Eaga Partnership does that when its staff visit people for the central heating programme. We should consider giving such advice nationally. We should be able to tie all the different initiatives into the fundamental question of whether people have enough money to live on; it should not be difficult to include that in every initiative for older people.

The minister made it sound as if the land of milk and honey had arrived during the past four years, but I am sure that she would be the first to admit—Bill Butler referred to this—that we still have a long way to go. I agree that changes have been made, but it is a sad indictment of our society that we still have a long way to go.

Free personal care was referred to. I am extremely proud of the fact that it was the Parliament rather than the Executive that forced the issue on free personal care. Everyone in the Parliament has something to be proud of in that respect. However, there are problems with free personal care, which Mary Scanlon highlighted. She was right that we have all had constituency problems involving free personal care not working in the way that everyone thought that it would and, indeed, in the way that Parliament intended it to work.

Transport and travel were also referred to. Kenny Gibson and I were curious about why Lewis Macdonald rather than Des McNulty will close the debate for the minister, but we were not long into the debate when we realised why. Members started to let slip the fact there was to be a big announcement on national concessionary travel—I think that Dr Sylvia Jackson eventually blew the gaff and stole Lewis Macdonald's thunder. Again, I think that the provision of national concessionary travel is a triumph for a viable Opposition and the Parliament because the Executive has been forced to admit that the localised concessionary travel policy has not worked and that concessionary travel must be rolled out nationally. I look forward to hearing the proposal's being formally announced.

Keith Harding said something important when he said that what elderly people require is to be treated with dignity rather than to be patronised. I tried to imagine anyone trying to patronise my colleagues Kay Ullrich and Winnie Ewing; if someone did try that, I think that they would be quickly told something. Keith Harding also showed a bit of a nerve in saying much of what he said about what the Tories did in their years in Government, but there was also much truth in what he said; for example, about stealth taxes on pensioners and the raid on pension schemes. Those were valid points on matters that are storing up big problems for the future.

Mr Harding also went on about the how the right to buy was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to alleviate poverty, but he will not be surprised to hear that I do not agree. On the minister's intervention on the right to buy, I do not like the suggestion that someone who happened to buy their council house was too stupid to realise that doing so would have implications.

**Johann Lamont:** Does Linda Fabiani agree that one of the big issues around the right to buy was

that it made logical sense for people to buy their council house because rents were so high because they were not appropriately supported? Does she agree that people who bought their council houses did not think about how they would maintain and repair their houses after they had bought them? The problem was not that people were stupid, but that council housing and the right to buy operated against ordinary working class people. Linda Fabiani accepted that point in committee.

**Linda Fabiani:** I thank the member—I get the point.

That problem also exists in the private sector. If we consider all tenements, it is not only ex-council houses that have problems with repairs and maintenance. When I was a housing professional, I often came across a problem for elderly people in relation to the right to buy, which was that the families of elderly people would buy their parents' council house on their behalf, but the family situation would change. I have had in my office many times elderly people who were homeless because their families had disenfranchised them. The right to buy did not really protect the elderly.

I am running out of time, but I cannot leave the debate without saying firmly that the only thing that can really make a difference for the elderly of our country is to give us the powers that would truly make a difference. A viable independent sovereign state could make its own decisions about how we treat the elderly. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that the 21 most developed countries give 7.4 per cent of their GDP to their state pensions—this country gives only 4.3 per cent, so we have nothing to be proud of. Roll on independence and the opportunity to change that and many other things.

12:21

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** As we have heard today, people's priorities and interests might change as they grow older, but that does not mean that they stop being active, interested and involved. Today's debate has provided clear examples of that.

Older people are the backbone of families and communities. They give of their experience, knowledge and time as carers, volunteers, community activists, parents and grandparents. The term social capital is very relevant to what older people have to offer. Those who write off people once they reach a certain age are making a serious and significant mistake and the Scottish Executive has acknowledged the huge contribution that Scotland's older people want to make and the resource that they represent. Older

people want to be valued and they want access to opportunities, jobs and services.

The Scottish Parliament has rightly worked to ensure that older people have the health and care services that they need. I welcome the tribute that Alex Neil paid to Henry McLeish for his part in introducing free personal care for the elderly. However, sometimes the concentration on such matters can lead to the assumption that they are all that elderly people are interested in and that the entire age group is in need of care. That is patently not true and the key to a policy for successful aging in the decades to come is that we recognise the extent of the role of older people in our communities and society.

People of all ages have talent and ability to offer. For example, older people have an excellent record in business start-ups and often outdo their younger competitors. As has been mentioned in the debate, many employers in Scotland have come to recognise the benefits of having a diverse work force and the gains that can be made through the experience and maturity that is represented by older workers.

In the past four years, employment levels for older workers have risen faster than they have for the work force as a whole. From 2006, age discrimination in the workplace will be unlawful, which will build on the current code of practice on age diversity in employment. The age positive campaign aims to raise awareness among employers through a series of events that are planned throughout Scotland in May and June, and with an updated code of practice on age diversity, which Iain Gray has launched. The change in attitude that is required is a key challenge and the legal change that will ensure that the rights of older people have the same protection as the rights of other sections of society is important in that regard.

Being able to get out and about is key to making the most of everything that is available to people in their communities. As has been said by a number of members, public transport plays an important part in many older people's lives. In rural areas, especially, public transport can be a lifeline and that is why we are investing significant funds in our rural transport initiatives. I am sorry to have to disappoint Linda Fabiani, but I will not be making any new announcement today in that regard. However, it is well known—other than on the SNP benches—that Iain Gray announced some weeks ago that any future Administration in which Labour is involved will create a national concessionary fares scheme.

The rural transport fund and the rural community initiative offer real benefits to older people who are unable to access the bus services to which concessionary fare schemes apply. For example, I

recently visited Peebles in Ian Jenkins' constituency to launch the new community minibus that the Tweeddale Association of Voluntary Organisations is operating as part of that rural community transport initiative. The new minibus will enable many older people who would otherwise find it difficult to get out to access services and to visit friends and family.

**Alex Neil:** One issue that has been raised by many of the minister's colleagues is the Tory deregulation of buses. Will there be a commitment in Labour's manifesto to the re-regulation of buses?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I am delighted that Alex Neil has given me the opportunity to respond on that matter, because yesterday morning I shared a platform with Kenny MacAskill at an election hustings on transport matters. Kenny made it quite clear that the SNP's commitment to re-regulation is one that will give local authorities the power to regulate buses if they so wish.

I must tell Alex Neil, as I told Kenny MacAskill yesterday, that that is precisely what the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 has already created through the measures that allow quality contracts to be introduced. I am sure that the SNP will catch up with us in due course, and that it will become aware not only of what we intend to do, but what we have already done.

On September 30 last year, we introduced free off-peak bus travel for all elderly and disabled people in Scotland. One million retired people throughout Scotland have experienced the benefits of that scheme, which makes a key contribution to providing access for older people to services such as health care, education, welfare and jobs. It also contributes to the greater involvement of elderly people in the general life of the community.

We are committed to further enhancement of concessionary travel. This morning, I met the chairman of the Scottish Pensioners Association to draw attention to the equalisation of age eligibility for concessionary travel. From Tuesday 1 April, 125,000 men aged between 60 and 64 will be able to benefit from the same free concessionary travel that is currently available to men of pensionable age.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder:** No one doubts the minister's sincerity, but I would like an answer to my earlier question. What is the Executive's position on employing people who are over 60? Does it include a complete cut-off at age 60? Some literature seems to indicate that it has, while other literature says that the Executive is not age discriminatory in the least.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I will come back to the point that Dorothy-Grace Elder raises. It is certainly a

matter that I shall seek to address, but there are one or two other points that I want to respond to first.

The introduction of age equalisation is only one more step. As I said, we have already made it clear that those on the Executive benches intend, in the next Parliament, to create a single national free concessionary travel scheme for pensioners and people over 60 throughout Scotland. To make that possible, we have made available significant funds, which have already amounted to nearly £100 million a year.

Beyond that, we are also committed to working with the UK Government to improve access to transport for disabled people, including disabled elderly people, in Scotland. Last May, we established the mobility and access committee for Scotland to allow disabled people to feed in their views on transport issues and to suggest early practical improvements that could be made. Robert Brown mentioned the safe stations initiative in the Strathclyde area, and many other such initiatives are already under way. The mobility and access committee for Scotland will assist us in spreading that best practice.

Learning and lifelong learning are also areas of great interest to older people. In February, Iain Gray launched our strategy for lifelong learning to highlight those matters. Gaining new skills and new knowledge is a lifetime opportunity; it is not an opportunity only for young adults, as was once the view. That is why our strategy emphasises the lifelong approach—we want everyone to be able to access learning that is most relevant to their needs.

The internet is just one of the latest tools that people can use to gain new knowledge and access to the internet is clearly something that can be highly beneficial for older people. I was interested in Helen Eadie's comment about the 101-year-old who was learning those skills. We are committed to ensuring that by 2005 everyone will have access to the web through public internet access points within a mile of their homes in urban areas and within five miles of their homes in rural areas. That will create an additional 1,000 new internet access points, and 450 venues are already in place. We are working with Age Concern Scotland to identify and target venues that could be of particular benefit to older people.

As I said earlier, health care is not the only thing that matters to older people, although it does of course matter: many of us will need to be looked after at some time in the future, so we must ensure that when that time comes the necessary services are available to make that possible. That is why the Executive introduced free personal and nursing care, a decision that was welcomed by Help the Aged and many other organisations.

There are issues to be resolved in the implementation of free personal care, which is why we are assessing its progress rigorously and have committed £250 million over two years to achieving it. Through the monitoring group, we and our partners will ensure that those implementation issues are addressed effectively.

In the health service, delayed discharge is an issue that is of particular interest to older people. Last year's data clearly show that we are succeeding in reducing the figures for delayed discharge. I look forward to the latest figures being announced later this week, and to finding out whether we have continued to make an impact on them, as I suspect we have.

The matter of access to information has been raised by a number of members, including Paul Martin, Ian Jenkins and Sandra White. We are committed to ensuring that older people have access to information. The "Are you over 50?" booklet has been widely distributed through job centres, libraries, general practitioner surgeries, citizens advice bureaux and older people's organisations. It is a product of the Department for Work and Pensions and is aimed at ensuring that people have access to the information that they need.

The one-stop shop idea that has been mentioned is very positive, and it is something that can be built upon. Access to good and accurate information is vital and through the Executive's publications, its website and the work that we are continuing to do with elderly forums, we are addressing the best ways in which to make information available to people when and where they need it.

I am pleased to confirm Frank McAveety's success this week in resolving the problem of fees in the care home sector. We have delivered an additional £130 million of public funding to that sector since July 2001 and I am glad that the threat of blocking the access of elderly people to care homes has been withdrawn, and that care home operators will work in partnership with local authorities.

Community pharmacies have been mentioned. For those who missed it, Frank McAveety's recent announcement was that we will not accept the recommendations of the Office of Fair Trading; in Scotland, we will retain community pharmacies and will give them the protection that they need, because we acknowledge their importance in providing services to older people.

Dorothy-Grace Elder asked about the Scottish Executive's position as an employer. Sixty is the standard retirement age for the work force, but that position is under review and we expect a report on the subject to come out in the course of the next couple of months.

**Johann Lamont:** As somebody who comes from a profession in which people cannot wait to get a package and to get out early, I find the notion of people wanting to work beyond their retirement age a bit strange. Does the minister agree that some of the issues around employment beyond the age of 60 relate to the fact that people have poor pensions and do not necessarily have the resources to do the many interesting things that people wish to do in old age? That is why work might offer a better alternative for them. Although we should argue against age discrimination, we should also talk about people having the right not to work after 60.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I support the view that people should have the right to choose. If people choose to continue working for Scottish ministers longer than they must, then who are we to stand in their way? The ability of older people to choose whether to work will be important for all of us.

Scots of all ages want opportunities to be active and to participate. We in the Executive are determined to remove the barriers that prevent that, particularly in transport, lifelong learning, enterprise, housing, health and care. At the beginning of the Parliament, we said that things would get better for older people: they have, and there is a range of ways in which things have got very much got better, including free concessionary travel, free personal care and free central heating. They will continue to get better, but more must be done. That is why we need to work together with our partners in the voluntary and private sectors and throughout central Government and local government to ensure that we deliver services for older people. We want to make Scotland an even better place to live for people of all ages—that includes those who retire from the Parliament today.

## Great Northern Partnership

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Our final item of business this morning is the members' business debate on motion S1M-4020, in the name of Elaine Thomson, on the Great Northern Partnership and social inclusion partnerships.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament commends the work done by the Great Northern Partnership (GNP) in Aberdeen; notes that the GNP plays an important role in improving quality of life and extending opportunities for those living there, especially the community of Middlefield, and further commends social inclusion partnerships across Scotland for empowering local communities.

12:35

**Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab):** I am pleased to introduce the debate today, which is almost our last debate.

The Great Northern Partnership is one of 48 social inclusion partnerships that were formed to address social exclusion in Scotland. Social inclusion partnerships come in all shapes and sizes; some are based on geographical areas and some are thematic. The GNP is a geographic SIP and is unusual because it is in an archipelago that is made up of four islands that are all in the northern part of Aberdeen. The four areas comprise: Middlefield; Printfield; Alexander and Hayton; and Ferrier and Sandilands. However, all share the same problems of social exclusion and a combination of high unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, poor health and high rates of family breakdown. That combination of disadvantage not only causes deprivation but has an impact on the ability of communities to exercise their full citizenship rights and to participate fully in wider society.

Aberdeen is a city with almost the lowest unemployment rate in Scotland, and it has higher than average incomes. Compared to many areas of Scotland it also has better health. Therefore the situation of those communities that do not share that prosperity is made all the more difficult. In Middlefield, which is the largest of the areas and which is in my constituency, the health statistics are sharply different from those for the rest of the city. Those statistics put that area in the worst 10 per cent in Scotland.

Characteristics of the GNP areas are a high number of children and young people and a higher-than-average number of single parents. Some 53 per cent of children in Middlefield are living in households with benefit-dependent parents—that is double the percentage of families with children living on income support in the rest of Aberdeen.

However, over the past four years the GNP has begun to address many of those issues. It has very high levels of community involvement in each of the four areas that make up the partnership. The aims of the GNP are to work to improve the social, economic and physical environment of those areas and to bring together effectively all the different agencies and organisations that can help to change them. Crucial to everything is ensuring that those who live in the GNP areas are involved—that communities are consulted and listened to—so that people in those communities are empowered through participation and training to take on leadership roles. It is important to ensure that they play a central part in identifying priorities and developing strategies for the many different types of work that the GNP undertakes. The aim is to restore and promote people's sense of citizenship and pride in where they live.

A high proportion of community representatives are involved at all levels of the GNP. Sixteen out of 28 board members—55 per cent of the total membership—are community representatives, four from each area. All but one of the sub-groups of the GNP are chaired by community representatives. I acknowledge the immense amount of work that people from those communities have contributed to the GNP, and I acknowledge the work of others, including local councillors such as Councillor Gordon Graham, the current vice-chair of the GNP, who stood in as chair before the new chair, Dawn Galashin, was appointed.

When I asked what difference the GNP makes, Dawn said that it

"Makes it better for local folk to make decisions and the ability to challenge agencies providing services within the area. We also have the ability to make funding decisions at a local level".

There are many different areas in which the GNP and all the other agencies involved are beginning to make a difference—for example, in tackling drug misuse. The level of drug misuse is high throughout Aberdeen, but it is higher than average in the GNP areas. The GNP set up a people's jury to consider how the quality of life for individuals and families in communities that are affected by drugs can be improved, which led to a specific GNP drugs plan. The GNP is now a member of the Aberdeen drug action team, ensuring that projects and strategies reflect accurately the particular issues that GNP communities face. There are projects such as "Give Kids a Chance", a community referral scheme that aims to divert young people away from drug and alcohol misuse.

The GNP is also working with other organisations, such as Aberdeen Drugs Action, to provide an outreach service. This weekend, a

group will travel to Preston to see an innovative needle-exchange programme.

The activities of the GNP reach out into many different areas, such as health and providing support for parents and young children. Middlefield is well known for possessing a "healthy hoose", which is staffed by nurse practitioners who provide advice and help on a range of issues, from healthy eating to encouraging breast feeding and providing better local access to general practitioners. That is complemented by other projects such as Healthy Roots, which aims to turn disused allotment land into community gardens. The project has recently got its lease and it will move on to a new phase.

Early intervention is seen as vital; the GNP works to reduce teenage pregnancies and cases of low-birth-weight babies. The "baby, think it over" project uses realistic baby models with microchips to bring home the reality of the responsibilities of early parenthood. Addressing the needs of children with special needs is also important, as is working to close the opportunity gap that exists for so many children.

The important new community schools work with many of the GNP projects. Some exist at primary level and others, at primary and secondary level, will be rebuilt or refurbished over the next few years.

The disparity in opportunity between areas cannot be overemphasised. The rate of pupils moving on to higher and further education varies from just over 10 per cent in some areas to over 90 per cent in others. That makes the presence of the University of Aberdeen and of communities and children working to encourage higher rates of participation all the more important. Also in Middlefield is the learning house, run by Scottish Enterprise, which is complemented by learning projects elsewhere. It provides access to learning for families, and is building the confidence of people who have often had negative experiences of school.

I could mention many other aspects of the work of the GNP. However, the role of the great northern partnership and other SIPs is vital in promoting social inclusion. I am delighted that it will share in the £60 million that the Scottish Executive has committed to social inclusion partnerships this year. That will involve communities, ensure that all the different agencies in the public and voluntary sector work together in a holistic and cohesive way, improve life and widen opportunity in Scotland's less advantaged communities. I commend the contribution that the GNP has made and continues to make.

12:42

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I lodged an amendment to the motion and I am delighted that, in her speech, Elaine Thomson referred to the role of the community representatives within the GNP.

I am also delighted that she talked about the healthy roots project. As the former councillor for Middlefield, I had considerable involvement in setting up the project, during Middlefield's previous existence as a priority partnership area. I was the author of the scheme to turn a disused allotment area into what I hope will become a successful community business. Sometimes such projects take time to gestate and it has taken almost eight years for the project to get to the point that it has reached. Nevertheless, it is a welcome development.

I commend the work that the community representatives of the GNP have done. They undertake a huge amount of work for the areas that they represent. I know most of the people in Middlefield, having worked with them for quite some time. I pay tribute to Paula Mann, Paul Calder, Helen Holland and Ernest Chapman, who are the community representatives, and to Councillor Kevin Stewart—they all champion the Middlefield area. Their counterparts in Fersands, Printfield and Alexander/Hayton in Tillydrone also do sterling work for their communities.

However, their work is handicapped by the policies of the Executive. Some members might be disappointed by my saying that, particularly as this is to be the last debate in this parliamentary session. However, my experience of the SIPs and their predecessor organisations is that they are used as cash cows by councils and other agencies. Before the GNP starts work each year, it has to pay 2.5 per cent of its grant—a little more than £20,000—to Aberdeen City Council in support charges. Furthermore, this year it will have to spend in excess of £200,000 out of a total grant of less than £900,000 to pay for its support team. The moneys for the support team and the council payments, which swallow up almost a quarter of the grant, are not being used to deliver any services to the communities, and the worst is yet to come.

Earlier, I talked about the GNP being used as a cash cow. I would be happy if the money were being used to enhance services in Middlefield, Printfield, Fersands and Alexander/Hayton, but it is often the case that the GNP subsidises city-wide services, which should be funded from the mainstream budgets of the council or other agencies. I am happy to give some examples of that.

The safe and sound project aims to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged children. The

project is provided with £20,000 from the council, sure start Scotland and Grampian Primary Care NHS Trust, and £6,000 from the GNP. Representatives of the GNP assure me that, although it provides 23 per cent of the money, the GNP areas do not get 23 per cent of the services. Other areas that do not pay for those services get the bulk of the support from that money.

The children's services training and assessment centre receives about £140,000 from various sources and almost £28,000 from the GNP. As part of the Scotland-wide work of the Aberlour Child Care Trust, its aims are to provide opportunities for training and qualifications in working with children and families. Although that is admirable work, the funding for other areas of the city comes from mainstream funding, whereas the funding for the GNP work comes from the GNP's budget. Why is that?

The GNP is set to give £5,000 to the business support group, for which other funding will come from mainstream sources. The GNP is set to hand over £30,000 for early intervention schemes in education. In reality, that money should come from mainstream funding. I could give a whole series of examples.

SIPs are supposed to enhance services in socially excluded communities. Elaine Thomson highlighted exactly why the GNP is needed in Middlefield in her constituency. However, the money is being used to support services across the board within the city. Many of the activities that the GNP's resources are being used to supplement should receive mainstream funding.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please move to a close.

**Brian Adam:** I am just about to do so, Presiding Officer.

Rather than duplicate the administrative functions of other public and voluntary sector agencies, we could better empower communities such as Middlefield, Alexander/Hayton, Fersands and Printfield, and their representatives, by direct funding of local voluntary organisations.

12:48

**Mr Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab):** I welcome the motion and I congratulate Elaine Thomson on securing a debate on SIPs as the first session of our Scottish Parliament draws to a close. It is difficult to imagine a more important topic for discussion as we close the first, historic, four-year session.

Communities throughout Scotland have been inspired by the opportunities that SIPs have afforded them to influence and develop services. They have been amazed that, when given the opportunity, ordinary people can make real and substantial changes within their communities.

Solid examples of the work that has been done by the north Hamilton and Blantyre social inclusion partnership are emerging. I recently attended the opening of an information technology centre in Burnbank and a changing places community conference that highlighted the various initiatives undertaken by the SIP. When one witnesses at first hand the enthusiasm and the genuine achievements of that local partnership, it is impossible to doubt the contribution that it has made to my local community.

In recent weeks, the Scottish National Party has delivered a slap in the face to all those people who have worked so hard to establish the priorities of their communities and to make addressing them a reality. Only a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the willingness and enthusiasm that exists in deprived areas can lead to the production of the kind of policy nonsense that the SNP has produced in the past few weeks.

Alex Neil has spoken about social inclusion partnerships being stuffed with people in suits. The reality is that the partnerships are full of enthusiastic local people who know the shortcomings of their communities but are determined to grab the opportunities available to deal with those shortcomings.

We should be clear about what divides responsible politicians from the nationalists. We believe in social inclusion; they believe in slogans. We believe in independent communities; they believe only in independence. Social inclusion partnerships have empowered some of the most deprived communities across Scotland. People are grateful for that opportunity. I hope that that opportunity continues to be afforded to them over the next session of the Scottish Parliament.

12:50

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** What a joy it is to follow Tom McCabe's positive contribution. However, it is a pleasure to speak in today's debate. The first members' business debate in the Parliament was on the fish processing industry, which is an Aberdeen issue, and the last members' business debate is also on an Aberdeen issue. It is a pity that no Tories, Liberals or members of parties other than Labour and the SNP have turned up for the debate.

One reason why many of us are in the SNP is because we know that Scotland is a rich country, yet it has so much deprivation. That is the case in Aberdeen. It is a cruel irony that Europe's oil and gas capital has substantial pockets of deprivation. Clearly, it is a ridiculous situation that Aberdeen should have pockets of deprivation that are surrounded by such wealth.

One of the difficulties is that Aberdeen's wealth masks the deprivation that organisations such as

the GNP try to tackle with the help of the many people who assist them. It is probably harder to be on a low income in Aberdeen than just about anywhere else in Scotland because people have to live alongside some of the wealthiest areas in the whole of Scotland. The price of property in Aberdeen is way beyond the means of many people in the GNP areas.

We need to reduce the obstacles that prevent organisations such as the GNP from getting more public funding and Government assistance. One such obstacle is the way in which the Scottish Executive's public funding formulas do not recognise Aberdeen's deprivation, which is masked by the average wealth statistics for the area. There must be a further disaggregation of the statistics that the Scottish Executive uses in allocating public funding so that such areas of deprivation are identified. Aberdeen currently loses out on a lot of public funding because of the formulas that are used.

I was given some examples of that when I met representatives of the GNP a few months ago. The GNP cannot apply for the Executive's better neighbourhood funding because Aberdeen's level of deprivation is not recognised. The GNP was able to apply for only a tiny amount of the cash that sportscotland made available for sport and social inclusion because the formulas do not recognise Aberdeen's deprivation. The deprivation is hidden by the area's relative wealth, which comes from the oil and gas industry. I was also told about the pots of cash from Communities Scotland, for which the GNP cannot apply because Aberdeen does not qualify.

I mention those Government funding formulas, but I am not pleading a special case. There are genuine concerns about the impact of those formulas on our ability to tackle deprivation in north-east Scotland and Aberdeen. A few months ago, Margaret Curran announced that a slice of lottery funding would be put aside for deprived areas because many areas of Scotland were losing out on their fair share. Lo and behold, there was not one penny for north-east Scotland and Aberdeen. Once again, the formulas that were used did not recognise the deprivation that exists in Aberdeen.

As Elaine Thomson mentioned in her speech and as Brian Adam has explained, Aberdeen has a desperate need for that cash. Organisations such as the GNP must be allowed to apply for it.

**Mr McCabe:** The member seems to be making an argument for refining social inclusion partnership funding, yet the SNP's policy is to abolish such partnerships. Which is the SNP's policy?



**Richard Lochhead:** Brian Adam has outlined the SNP's position. My point is that organisations such as the GNP cannot even get access to the funding that is currently available for tackling deprivation. The successors to social inclusion partnerships will have the same problem unless we change the fundamental issues that prevent deprivation in Aberdeen from being tackled.

Elaine Thomson also mentioned the drugs problem in the GNP areas. There is a massive drugs problem in Aberdeen, yet we get the second lowest level of funding in the whole of Scotland because of the perceived wealth of the area. Today's press tells of people who have committed crimes so that they can go to jail and get treatment for drug abuse because they cannot get it by any other means. It all comes back to the same issue of the funding formulas denying cash to the projects that are trying to tackle deprivation and deal with massive social problems in areas of Aberdeen.

It is important that we have some clear measurement of the success or otherwise of the initiatives that are trying to tackle deprivation in Scotland. Where exactly are we after four years of the new Parliament? Do we know if we have moved forward or if Aberdeen is relatively better or worse off under the Executive's policies? I argue that we have not moved forward under the first four years of the Scottish Parliament.

I also argue that we have to get real powers so that the Parliament can make a real difference in tackling deprivation in Aberdeen and elsewhere and that we need a change of Government because we have had four years of wasted opportunities to tackle deprivation. Scotland has not moved forward. We know that the overall statistics show that poverty is increasing. We have to have a change in the Government and we need more powers for the Parliament so that we can change Aberdeen and elsewhere for the better.

12:56

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I am happy to congratulate Elaine Thomson on securing the debate. I think that I replied to the first members' business debate in the Parliament so it is probably appropriate that, as a back bencher, I speak in the final members' business debate of the session.

Elaine Thomson's motion should be supported. It makes two key points. It recognises the good work that has been done in Aberdeen by the GNP and it acknowledges the importance of SIPs throughout Scotland. Tom McCabe made the important point that SIPs are doing good work. Without SIPs, who would be focusing on and pulling together some of our most disadvantaged

communities in Scotland? SIPs are a vital way of helping local communities advocate for themselves the kind of changes and support that they want from local facilities.

I recognise the concept of a strong and economically powerful city with pockets of severe deprivation and social exclusion. The purpose of SIPs is to try to give those communities a voice so that they are not isolated and left apart in a sea of affluence.

**Brian Adam:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** I will when I get into my discussion.

Many communities in my constituency in Edinburgh, which is one of the most prosperous cities in the United Kingdom, experience such social exclusion.

SIPs give local people the chance to shape their communities themselves and to engage with local institutions of the state, whether council departments, the police or health organisations. Abolishing SIPs would take away that power of advocacy and the opportunity for social empowerment.

**Brian Adam:** We probably agree on the analysis of the source of the problem but we disagree about the solution. Will Sarah Boyack comment on the proportion of the funding made available through SIPs that is used up in duplicating administration? Is that the best way of empowering communities? Does she not agree that the best way is to encourage existing local organisations rather than to set up new ones?

**Sarah Boyack:** I think Brian Adam misunderstands the purpose of SIPs and the way in which they operate. I have yet to be lobbied on that issue, although voluntary organisations and charitable groups are speedy in beating a path to my door when they think they do not have enough money. The key issue is that SIPs add to local communities and give them a voice.

Elaine Thomson has talked about an area-based SIP, but I want to highlight the work of the Edinburgh youth social inclusion partnership, which is a thematic partnership. It cuts across some of our most disadvantaged communities and ensures that the voices of young people are heard by those who make policy and decide on local services. As a local MSP, I am keen to support the work of that SIP.

Part of that work is ensuring that there is a dialogue between young people and the people who provide facilities. I have recently been at discussions on leisure facilities and transport. It can be quite challenging to be approached, as I have been, by young people who have a list of

ideas about areas in which they want local services to improve. It is our job as politicians to see how we can improve the facilities that those young people depend on. Although that can be challenging, it is part of the overall approach to delivery of social justice throughout Scotland.

SIPs do not duplicate local services—they change them. They challenge local service providers and act as an advocate for local people and, particularly in my patch, for young people who would otherwise be totally excluded.

It is easy to label young people as troublemakers who create problems. However, we need to do a real job of work by examining the problems that they experience. They are vulnerable; in my area, they are often not allowed to use local sports facilities or cafes—indeed, they cannot afford to use them—because a very small number create problems. As a result, they are all labelled as troublemakers or as people who create hassle. That is not the case, and it is important that our local youth SIP challenges such views. Although young people are seen as threatening, they are the biggest group of victims of crime. Their voices must be heard by policy-makers, but that would not happen if it were not for the local youth SIP, which pulls together or changes the work that the police, social work and local communities carry out.

That is not duplication; instead it is an essential part of the armoury with which we can tackle social exclusion, give the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in our society a proper voice and ensure that local services do not ignore their needs. That is why I support Elaine Thomson's motion and the work of the youth SIP in my constituency. I want to see more rather than less of that kind of work. The SNP is making a big mistake with its commitment to abolish SIPs.

13:01

**The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Des McNulty):** One of the number of points that Brian Adam got wrong in his speech was his claim that this is the last debate. I understand that there will be a further debate later this afternoon.

**The Presiding Officer:** Modesty prevents me from commenting on that.

**Des McNulty:** I begin by pointing out that this is the final members' business debate. I know that the Presiding Officer and Tom McCabe were very much involved in setting up the system of members' business debates right at the start of the Parliament. The debates have been a very considerable success. They have promoted a series of worthy causes; indeed, speaking for myself, I am very pleased by our progress in getting speedy justice for asbestos sufferers.

Duncan McNeil and I have promoted their cause in various members' business debates.

Members have raised issues on behalf of interests in their communities or on behalf of people who had cases that needed to be highlighted. In many cases, the debates have drawn further responses from the Executive. As a result, they have proved to be an important vehicle for getting issues discussed and action brought forward. They are an adornment to this Parliament that we can be proud of.

I congratulate Elaine Thomson on securing this debate and on highlighting both the work of the GNP and the SIP programme itself. Evaluations clearly show that the GNP has progressed well, is operating strategically and has an excellent record of community involvement. Indeed, for the reasons that Elaine Thomson pointed out, it can claim to be community-led in many ways.

I shall address some of Richard Lochhead's points later, but when we consider how we can assist deprived communities, we should take a genuinely consultative approach to the matter. The Scottish Executive or local government should look for bottom-up solutions that suit a local community's particular circumstances, rather than adopt top-down policies for a city such as Aberdeen. People in a local area experience its problems at first hand, but are also in a good position to assess the area's relative advantages or any different opportunities that it might present. The great virtue of the SIP system is that it allows local people to influence what goes on and how resources are spent in their community to suit their best interests.

**Brian Adam:** I readily acknowledge that that is the intention. In as much as success has been achieved, the SIP programme has been a success. However, will the minister deal with the amount of SIPs' money that is spent not on services or duplicating services, but on duplicating administration? I made a point about that. What is the capacity of councils and other bodies to use that money beyond the areas covered by a SIP?

**Des McNulty:** I will deal later with that issue, which is important in considering the transition that lies ahead as SIPs move towards community planning.

It is important to highlight some of the GNP's successes. In identifying the strategic priorities of health, early years, youth, education and community learning, and employment and enterprise, not only did the partnership identify the key priorities but it adopted a strategic approach to improving services in the local community with the aim of achieving significant change.

Elaine Thomson and Brian Adam mentioned several projects that have achieved such change.

The youth advice and information project provides young people with advice, information and a referral service. The young film-makers initiative, which involved 156 participants during 2001-02, has engaged with young people. Projects such as the Fersands and Fountain mini family centre and the St Machar parents support project bring communities and agencies together to address early-years initiatives in the context of social inclusion. The healthy roots initiative involves local groups and voluntary and public sector agencies working together to transform a large unused site in the middle of Middlefield. It brings together worthwhile activities, such as growing healthy food, improving the environment for wildlife and promoting recycling.

SIPs must be about more than individual projects. The projects must work together toward the aim of improving the quality of life in their areas. A strong argument can be made that SIPs must not become islands in a city such as Aberdeen. Links with the way in which the city is governed must be closer. Linking SIPs into the community planning partnerships in the city, and saying that the city's government and all the agencies that are involved in governing and delivering services in the city must take on board how SIPs operate, are positive steps.

**Brian Adam:** Will the minister give way?

**Des McNulty:** I will finish my point.

**The Presiding Officer:** Technically, the minister is in his last minute.

**Des McNulty:** We are progressing links so that the experience and skills that have been gained through the way in which the SIP has worked can be shared. We want to develop better engagement between the SIP, Aberdeen City Council, Grampian NHS Board and other agencies that provide services.

Richard Lochhead has repeatedly focused on funding formulas not only in relation to SIPs, but in relation to a variety of issues. Honesty is required. Funding formulas deliver outcomes. Does Richard Lochhead argue that money should be taken from one area and delivered to another area? If so, he should say where that money should be taken from and give the criteria for delivering it to another area.

In Aberdeen, we have done the opposite of what Richard Lochhead says we have done. We have identified areas of disadvantage and put in resources. Through the GNP, we have sought to deliver significant improvements in those more deprived communities. We are achieving that and significant progress has been made.

SIPs perform a valuable role throughout Scotland. Last Saturday morning, I attended a SIP

event in my area that brought people together to consider the range of activities that voluntary agencies have provided in Clydebank. I know of many people who have SIPs in their area and who have had similar experiences.

SIPs are a way of bringing people together and of identifying what can be taken forward and what can be delivered. There are abundant examples of the good work that SIPs have done not only in Aberdeen but elsewhere in Scotland. SIPs are worth protecting and developing. We are moving forward to a point at which SIPs become a critical element in community planning and what we have learned up to now in the SIPs can be progressed in that context.

**The Presiding Officer:** I close the last members' business debate of this Parliament.

13:10

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Agriculture

**1. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of the agricultural industry and what issues were discussed. (S10-6711)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I met representatives of the agricultural industry on 17 March. The main topics for discussion at recent meetings have been implementation of the agriculture strategy and the European Commission's proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy.

**Tavish Scott:** Does the minister accept that environmentally sensitive area status is extremely important for those parts of Scotland that have such designations? Does he accept that the consultation being undertaken by his department gives an opportunity to review not only the three options outlined in the consultation paper but a fourth option, namely the rolling-on of ESAs to ensure that, in a smooth transition, land management contracts can be introduced while the benefits of the ESAs are not lost to those farmers and crofters who have them?

**Ross Finnie:** I certainly accept that the consultation includes three options. Clearly, the purpose of the consultation process is to get considered and detailed responses, particularly from those areas currently under ESA designation, and to allow members to put their point as to what might be a better and preferable course of action. It is perfectly legitimate for the people of Shetland to take that course.

**Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Did the minister's discussions cover the proposals of the Scottish Agricultural College to centralise its educational facilities in Edinburgh? Would he care to reflect on the folly of closing the most popular campus, at Auchincruive, with its most appropriate rural setting, in favour of an expensive city location?

**Ross Finnie:** I regret to say that the representatives who were present with me at the meeting found that the discussion on the agricultural strategy and, more important, on CAP reform, did not allow time for that important item to be discussed. I have made it clear—particularly in the evidence that I gave to the Rural Development Committee on Tuesday—that several very

important questions need to be asked about the report that the board of the SAC has adopted. In particular, we must question some of the underlying assumptions that have led to the conclusions. I made it clear to the committee that that was a legitimate and proper course of action, and that my department and I have been querying some of the bases on which those conclusions and recommendations have been made.

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** Last week, when answering a question from my colleague David Mundell, the minister was unable to assure the Parliament that a suitable scheme for the uplift of dead stock would be in place when it becomes illegal to bury such stock on farm. Following his discussions with industry representatives, is he able to update the chamber on any further progress that has been made on that issue? Can he guarantee that any farmer who buries dead stock on farm after April will not be prosecuted if no suitable scheme is in place?

**Ross Finnie:** I am unable to give the firm assurance that I might have wished to give following our discussions, but we continue to make much better progress than we have made in previous months. I remain confident that, following the discussions that are now taking place with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the other devolved Administrations, we will have a national scheme. As for prosecution after 1 May, I very much hope that that will not be necessary.

#### Police (Fife)

**2. Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it will next meet representatives of Fife police board. (S10-6712)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** The Executive is in contact with representatives of police authorities and joint police boards on a regular basis. However, no formal meetings are planned with representatives of the Fife police authority before the elections.

**Mr Harding:** The minister will be aware that the number of recorded crimes and offences in Fife has got much worse during the four years of this Administration. Can he explain why the Executive's justice policy is failing in Fife?

**Mr Wallace:** I do not accept the basis of Mr Harding's question. He will find that in Fife, as in other parts of Scotland, police numbers are at record levels. In Fife, there were 920 officers on 31 December 2002, compared with 835 in June 1999. By my reckoning, that is an increase of more than 10 per cent in the number of police officers over the parliamentary session.

We are also allowing more support staff to be engaged, which frees up officers for front-line duty. With regard to the funding that has gone into Fife, the level of grant-aided expenditure there will rise by more than the national average in each of the next three years. This year, there will be a rise of £44.4 million, which will rise to £57.8 million in 2005-06. Those are generous settlements by any stretch of the imagination, and they allow the chief constable of Fife constabulary to deploy additional officers to promote effective law and order policies in Fife.

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** The minister may have noticed the newspaper reports concerning the recent violent and vicious attack on the Rev David Adams, minister of Trinity parish church, as he was garaging his car late one evening. It was a particularly nasty attack, as the assailants used a Stanley knife on the minister. I have expressed my concern to the chief constable of Fife constabulary about staffing—

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** I am concerned that there must be a question.

**Helen Eadie:** I would be grateful if the minister would advise me whether he is aware that there are 400 fewer police officers in Fife than there are in Tayside, which has a population only 35,000 greater than Fife. I am very concerned about the level of policing in Fife.

**Mr Wallace:** I express my profound sympathies to that particular victim of crime. As I suspect that there may be outstanding legal issues and the matter may be sub judice, it would not be proper for me to make further comment. The Administration has a good record of putting victims of crime far more to the fore than has ever been the case previously.

On what Helen Eadie says on funding and on the number of police officers, I have indicated that the number has gone up. She will be aware that there has been a review of the GAE for all police authorities to take into account their levels of activity and arrive at a fair distribution of resources that takes account of changes. As a result of that, Fife will receive an increase greater than the national average over the next three years.

### Housing

**3. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to ensure decent standards of housing for all. (S10-6742)

**The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran):** The Executive is committed to eradicating poor-quality housing. Last week, I announced the recommendations made by the housing improvement task force to improve quality in the private sector. Today, I am launching a

consultation paper that sets out our proposals for a new quality standard for all social housing. I am determined to stamp out poor housing and to give people homes that are fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Karen Whitefield:** Does the minister agree that initiatives such as the regeneration of housing of Petersburn, in my constituency, and the introduction of improved rights for tenants in all social rented housing are making a significant, positive contribution to people throughout Scotland? Does she agree that we must ensure that those same rights are extended to people who rent in the private sector and that we should offer them the same level of protection and a guaranteed minimum standard of housing?

**Ms Curran:** I am not quite sure of the area to which the member referred—it is perhaps a surrounding village in her constituency. [MEMBERS: “No.”] Not quite, apparently. I am sure that if it is a surrounding village in Karen Whitefield’s constituency, its regeneration is in very good hands.

The member makes an important point about the rights of tenants in the private sector as well as in the social rented sector. The Executive has made great strides in the past four years to oversee the social rented sector. We have now completed the jigsaw by reviewing the situation in the private sector, and the recommendations of the housing improvement task force contain a package of measures to take us forward in that regard. That applies particularly to standards and a review of the tolerable standard will be going out to consultation. The members of the task force worked very hard to produce a robust package of measures.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** The minister will know that I have pursued the issue of the level of improvement grants before. There have been endless delays over introducing the new, increased improvement grant for private homes. Will she give an assurance that the delays will be stopped forthwith? Although there will be means testing, if the pot of money stays the same, we may end up with longer waiting lists of very needy people. Will an increase in funding be considered by the Scottish Executive?

**Ms Curran:** I recognise that there have been delays in implementation. That is because the test of resources has involved a detailed package of work. The matter is being examined at the moment, and the new grant should be ready for implementation as soon as the new parliamentary session begins. However, the member will know that we have changed the funding system for the private sector from borrowing consents to grants, as I announced in November. We estimate that that will lead to an increase in resources from £45

million to £60 million. Therefore we believe that that sector will be considerably boosted.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** I know that the minister shares my concern about the desperate shortage of decent, affordable rented housing in many parts of Scotland. I am particularly concerned about the 6,000 people who are stuck on the waiting list for council houses in East Lothian. Is she aware that East Lothian Council has already started to work out plans to borrow so that up to 2,000 houses for rent can be built under the proposals that she announced, I think last month? Is she further aware that we are looking forward to welcoming her in East Lothian shortly to discuss those plans further?

**Ms Curran:** My visit to East Lothian is outstanding. I recognise that I made a public commitment to making such a visit and I promise that I will do my best to get there in the next few days.

The announcement of the prudential regime is of particular benefit to councils such as East Lothian. Its announcement means that there is a real opportunity to increase investment in housing in Scotland and to deliver the supply of affordable housing. We now have a complete package that will address the fundamental issues of housing in Scotland. I look forward to my visit to East Lothian because I believe that people there are positive about my announcement, so I expect a warm welcome.

#### **European Maritime Safety Agency**

**4. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support the relocation of the European Maritime Safety Agency to Glasgow. (S10-6716)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray):** As this is a reserved matter, the Executive liaises closely with the UK Government about supporting this case.

**Ms White:** I presumed that the minister would have been aware of the letters between the Executive and Neil MacCormick MEP, who asked it to support the relocation of the agency in Glasgow. Is the minister aware that Greece, which is another contender for the siting of the agency, has set up a website to support its bid? Should the Executive not liaise with Westminster or the European Parliament to set up such a website to promote Glasgow's bid?

**Iain Gray:** The Executive has been involved in the preparation of materials to support the bid. We have also mobilised the Executive office in Brussels—an arm of the Scottish Executive—and I believe that officials there have been in contact with MEPs to promote the bid. We would certainly be happy to consider further materials or ways to support it.

Glasgow would provide an excellent base for EMSA. I understand that Genoa, Lisbon, Nantes, and Piraeus have made other bids. However, even an Edinburgh boy such as me knows that Glasgow can readily see off that opposition.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the minister's assurance that measures are in hand to present a case for Scotland and Glasgow on this issue. Does he agree that there is plenty of good material for that, especially because of the engineering experience in Scotland and the contribution that coastal communities have made to our merchant navy over many years? Will he drive home that point with his Westminster colleague, because there can be no finer setting for the new European Maritime Safety Agency than Scotland and Glasgow?

**Iain Gray:** I am happy to accept Mr Gallie's welcome for my first answer and to agree with the further points that he makes. I will take steps to ensure that cognisance is taken both of those points and of the point that was made about websites.

#### **Nursery Schools (Consultation)**

**5. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will consider extending the statutory consultation requirements for the closure or merger of primary schools to nursery schools. (S10-6704)

**The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen):** The Scottish Executive would consider extending the statutory consultation requirements for the closure or merger of primary schools to nursery schools, were it not for the fact that those statutory requirements already apply to nursery schools.

**Alex Neil:** I thank the minister for his reply. Will he ensure that all local authorities, including South Lanarkshire Council, abide by the statutory requirements? I remind him that he has only five weeks to do so before the Executive changes.

**Nicol Stephen:** I will.

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the Scottish Executive have plans to change the statutory consultation requirements for the merger or closure of primary schools, especially in rural areas? The present procedures do not take into account the impact on local communities of closures of the sort that Dumfries and Galloway Council is planning.

**Nicol Stephen:** We have no such proposals in this parliamentary session.

## Adoption

### 6. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to improve adoption levels. (S1O-6731)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson):** The Executive is committed to improving the life chances of looked-after children. Phase 1 of our adoption policy review recommended improvements in the recruitment of prospective adopters, post-adoption support and decision-making processes. Phase 2 of the review, which I announced last week, will examine the legal options to provide stability and security for children, whether through adoption or other forms of permanent placement.

**Janis Hughes:** Does the minister agree that one of the most difficult aspects of the adoption procedure is the length of time it takes? Will she assure me that the review will consider speeding up the procedure, to lessen the anxiety caused to prospective adoptive parents?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am aware, from correspondence from a number of colleagues and representations made by adoptive parents, that one of the difficulties is the length of time that the processes can take. I am therefore committed to ensuring that the review will examine that. It is also important to recognise that, from the child's point of view, we must ensure that the processes meet their needs, particularly where young children are involved.

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister agree, particularly in the light of this morning's debate, that older, more mature couples would be welcome to apply for adoption and that our chosen children deserve the opportunity of a better home?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I would certainly like us to ensure that the prospective adopters are matched with the needs of individual children. Many children who are currently looked after in the system and who could benefit from adoptive parents are slightly older than the children whom people would traditionally look to adopt. I would encourage anyone who thinks that they could offer a home to those children to make the inquiries and consider it seriously.

## Ferry (Ballycastle to Campbeltown)

**7. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry tendering process. (S1O-6737)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** A tendering process for subsidy to reinstate the service has not attracted any bids so we are now

seeking to identify alternative means of reinstating the service within the tender criteria.

**George Lyon:** I thank the minister for clarifying that matter. There is deep concern in Kintyre that despite the Scottish Executive offering £5 million in subsidy over the lifetime of the five-year contract for the route no ferry company has bid for it. I seek his assurance that every effort will continue to be made to talk to ferry companies, including Caledonian MacBrayne, to ascertain whether any interested parties are out there. I also seek an assurance that the contract on offer will be reconsidered if the current process fails, with a view to tendering again the future.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I share the concern that George Lyon has expressed to secure the service, to which we are committed. In that regard, because of the failure of bids coming forward, we have approached a number of shipping companies that we believe could conceivably run the service. We have inquired whether there are grounds on which we might be able to make that service happen with their support. It would not be appropriate to go into the names of those companies at this stage, but George Lyon should rest assured that every company that we believe is capable of running the service will be talked to about that matter.

Clearly, if the process fails, ministers would be required to look at what other process could be adopted in order to make the service happen. We want to explore every avenue and we will leave no stone unturned in the current tendering process and criteria to get that service in place.

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** On positive alternatives, is the minister aware of the success of Neil MacCormick MEP in convincing the European Commission to treat peninsulas in the same way as islands for the provision of additional public service obligations? If so, will he consider having additional routes from Campbeltown, not just to Ballycastle but to the central belt, using the same rationale that we have used in Cowal?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I confirm that we have talked to the European Commission and have won the case that mainland-to-mainland routes are acceptable for PSOs. That is something that my colleagues and I have been proud to carry forward. It has been important in allowing us to proceed with arrangements both on the Gourock to Dunoon and Tarbert to Portavadie routes. Our focus at this point has to be on the Campbeltown to Ballycastle service, as we have outlined. As I said to George Lyon, we will explore every option to deliver that service before we consider further alternative options.

### **Air Services (Glasgow to Barra)**

**8. Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the current position is on the future of the air service between Glasgow and Barra. (S1O-6703)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** In a parliamentary answer to Alasdair Morrison on 20 March, I announced that Loganair had been awarded the contract for the Barra to Glasgow air service for 2003-04 and that we would tender a new contract from April 2004 to March 2006.

**Mr Hamilton:** On behalf of the people of Barra, I ask the minister to confirm that the two-year extension to the review period is simply a stay of execution rather than a long-term commitment to the route. Will he take the opportunity of the additional two-year review to guarantee that the Scottish transport appraisal guidance will be met in full before any ultimate decision is taken? I asked him that yesterday and he refused to answer.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I would not want to talk down the Scottish transport appraisal guidance, as it is a very useful way of assessing transport and economic impacts. I expect that the appraisal criteria that STAG contains will be among the things that are considered in the next two or three years.

We want to take a wider look at the future of air services to Barra. For example, we want to consider social inclusion and access to health services. The local MSP, Alasdair Morrison, and the local council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, raised such issues with me—as did the community on Barra—when I visited the island in January. We want to examine those larger issues, so we will consider not only transport appraisal, but other relevant forms of appraisal.

### **Less Favoured Areas Support (Crofting)**

**9. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will work with the Scottish Crofting Foundation to undertake an investigation into the effectiveness of the current less favoured area support scheme in delivering support to crofting communities in less favoured areas. (S1O-6741)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** The less favoured area support scheme is kept under review to ensure that it is effective in delivering support across the whole of Scotland's less favoured areas. Officials will work with the industry working group, of which the Scottish Crofting Foundation is a member, to review the implementation of the 2003 scheme.

**John Farquhar Munro:** If the investigation determines that the current less favoured area support scheme is not delivering effective support, will the minister consider introducing a more appropriate funding structure?

**Ross Finnie:** The whole purpose of the review will be to determine whether the scheme has been effective. I expect that, as a result of the meetings of the working group, proposals to change the scheme will be produced, if necessary, and that such changes will be put forward to Europe, so that the scheme can be amended for the following year.

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** I thank the minister for meeting me earlier in the week to discuss the less favoured area support scheme. I seek an assurance from him that officials from Western Isles Council will be involved in the forthcoming discussions on the scheme. I know that the minister is well aware of the excellent work that the council's crofting committee has done in that important area of agricultural support.

**Ross Finnie:** I am happy to confirm to the member that it will be extremely helpful for the working group to have the advice of the Western Isles Council's crofting committee and its input into our review of the matter to which he and John Farquhar Munro have referred.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the minister tell me why the less favoured area support scheme is not benefiting crofters in the most severely disadvantaged areas of the Highlands and Islands as much as it is benefiting farmers in areas of Scotland with richer agricultural land? Is not the main point of the less favoured area scheme to help those who are in the less favoured areas?

**Ross Finnie:** That point is self-evident. The difficulty that Jamie McGrigor has is that 83 per cent of Scotland's agricultural land is defined as less favoured area land. I do not believe for a moment that he is suggesting that it would be beneficial for Scotland to have a reduced amount of less favoured area land, but that is the inference to be drawn from his question. The scheme has been designed to be hugely beneficial to Scotland's agriculture as a whole. It is an agricultural scheme that delivers support. As I have indicated in my responses to Alasdair Morrison and John Farquhar Munro, the review group will keep under review the issue of whether any adjustments are necessary.

### **Scottish Borders (Economy)**

**10. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it has taken to promote the economic well-being of the Scottish Borders. (S1O-6709)



**The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray):** A wide range of policies promotes economic well-being. Scottish Enterprise Borders is taking action in line with the direction and priorities that are set out in the Executive's "A Smart, Successful Scotland". The Borders local economic forum allows for the co-ordinated delivery of local economic development activities.

**Christine Grahame:** As the minister is aware, the draft bill for the Borders rail link was lodged this week. Given that the Borders has suffered a net loss of 500 jobs since Labour came to power and that the modest projection is that even a partial reinstatement of the line to Galashiels would result in the Borders gaining 900 jobs, does he accept that the business case for the railway is staring him in the face? The railway should simply now be built. At a stroke, that would secure the economic well-being of the Scottish Borders.

**Iain Gray:** As Christine Grahame knows well from previous exchanges, we are keen to see progress on the matter. However, the business case is not staring me in the face because it is not yet with the Executive. I was pleased to see from this week's press that the Waverley rail partnership is making progress—it is about to submit an interim case, which I believe will be with the Executive in the next few days. Next Monday, we enter the period during which it will not be possible to progress that case, but I assure Christine Grahame that the matter will be in my diary for 2 May.

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Does the minister agree that, although there are real problems in the Borders economy, there are also real grounds for optimism? The population of the Borders is increasing; the railway is on track; broadband is coming; the Scottish Public Pensions Agency has been established at Tweedbank; farming and tourism are in the process of recovery; there are positive developments in health service infrastructure—

**The Presiding Officer:** I am interested in the Borders, but I would like a question.

**Ian Jenkins:** Does the minister agree that none of those things—apart perhaps from the railway—seems to interest Ms Grahame, who prefers to launch lightning raids on the Borders, looking for trouble and fanning the flames before beetling back to Edinburgh to issue inflammatory press releases, which are peppered with half-truths and misinformation?

**Iain Gray:** I can only agree. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr Jenkins's far more constructive approach both to representing his constituents and the interests of the Borders and

to the proceedings of the Parliament. He will be sorely missed.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Margo MacDonald.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind) rose—**

**The Presiding Officer:** A case of mistaken identity. I call Margo MacDonald.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** And I was going to say something nice about you, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear from the right independent.

**Margo MacDonald:** On the regeneration of the Borders economy, will the minister explain why the Executive has chosen to transfer 270 Scottish Natural Heritage jobs to Inverness rather than to Galashiels? Inverness has a booming economy—this week, only 48 houses were for sale on the market in Inverness. Galashiels is on the opposite side of the economic coin. Further to that, will the minister assure me—I think that I speak for Angus MacKay, Susan Deacon and the other Edinburgh MSPs—[MEMBERS: "Oh!"] They do not mind. They are broad minded. Perhaps other members should try to be so as well.

**The Presiding Officer:** I know that it is the end of term, but let us have a question.

**Margo MacDonald:** The question is about the policy of moving 270 jobs. I am in agreement with those other MSPs that I mentioned. I do not agree with the transfer of those jobs in this way at this time. Will the minister assure me that, after I have seen his colleague Ross Finnie tomorrow, the policy will be put on ice?

**Iain Gray:** The connection between Margo MacDonald's question and the original question is the 200 civil service jobs at the Scottish Public Pensions Agency that were relocated from Edinburgh to Galashiels. I understand that the decision to which she refers is extremely difficult for those who work in SNH to accept. We must work hard to ensure that there is alternative employment for those who cannot move to Inverness. I understand from her question that Margo MacDonald is meeting my colleague Ross Finnie tomorrow, so I do not think that it would be proper for me to comment further.

### Schools (Class Sizes)

**11. Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what proposals it has to reduce class sizes. (S10-6701)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson):** In response to the national debate on education, we indicated that we would bring forward proposals to reduce class sizes and

to improve pupil-teacher ratios at critical stages such as primary 7, secondary 1 and secondary 2, particularly in maths and English.

**Michael Russell:** How? How much will it cost? Where will the Executive get the money from?

**Cathy Jamieson:** When this Administration comes back in May, we will introduce fully costed proposals. Those proposals will stand up to scrutiny, unlike the SNP's proposals, which crumbled at the first hard question.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** Does the minister acknowledge that the size of classes is not the sole factor in determining educational achievement in our schools? In my constituency, the schools with the biggest classes are often those that are highest achieving. Given the minister's commitment to addressing the central issue of inequality in education, will she support initiatives such as the nurture initiative in my constituency, which allows for intensive and close support for some of our most vulnerable children whose broader social needs have to be addressed so that they can access education?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I take on board the point that Johann Lamont has raised. Of course class sizes are important, but we also need to ensure that resources and support are provided so that we can close the opportunity gap. Many schools have used their resources creatively and have worked hard to overcome the barriers that exist for disadvantaged pupils. I always welcome examples of good practice and like to see it spreading throughout Scotland.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Three months ago, I asked the minister how much she estimated it would cost to lower class sizes to a maximum of 20 in the primary and secondary sectors. Three months ago, she said that she was working on it. Does she know yet how much that would cost?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I refer the member to the answer that I gave to Mr Russell. We will not make proposals that are not properly costed. We will make proposals that stand up to scrutiny and we will deliver in the same way as we have delivered on reducing class sizes for the first three years of primary education.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** If I may say so, Presiding Officer, you are wearing a rather fetching purple tie—rather like Hibernian Football Club's second colours.

Further to Tommy Sheridan's question, is the minister aware that, when class sizes were reduced to 20 in California, the results included many classrooms with 40 or more children and two teachers, patchy attainment and the hiring of teachers without proper qualifications to meet the

demand for additional teachers? Is that what the minister wants? Does she agree that what matters most is teaching quality in Scotland?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Teaching quality is very important and I am aware of the research to which Mr Monteith refers. It showed that, in some areas, there were advantages in reducing class sizes, particularly for the kind of pupils that Johann Lamont referred to. However, it also highlighted some of the dangers. We have to ensure that we do not fall into the trap of doing the wrong thing in an attempt to raise standards. That is why we will make proposals for those critical stages where we know that there are problems. We will focus on maths and English because we are committed to raising standards of literacy and numeracy. I am sure that Mr Monteith in his very fetching tie will agree with that.

## A82 (Tarbet to Inverarnan)

**12. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan is an urgent priority for improvement and should be included in the next round of trunk road improvements in 2003-04. (S10-6705)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** We recognise the traffic pressures on that length of road and have announced that a route action plan should be put in place as part of the £20 million investment in the rural trunk road network that we announced last week.

**Fergus Ewing:** That answer shows that fudge remains the Executive's favourite confection. Is the minister aware that temporary traffic lights have been in place on the A82 for more than a decade? Is that acceptable? Does he consider that a period in excess of a decade can properly be described as "temporary"? Does he agree that people and businesses in the west Highlands require a proper, normal trunk road if they are to realise their potential?

**Lewis Macdonald:** The people of the west Highlands require a proper and objective assessment of the correct way of dealing with precisely the kind of issues that Fergus Ewing has raised, which is why we will draw up a route action plan for the road in question. That is the right way of proceeding.

Mr Ewing will know that, in light of the last round of route action plans, a number of announcements were made last week that affect roads in his constituency, such as the A96 at Delnies and the A9 at Crubenmore and between Kincaig and Dalraddy. I conclude by pointing out that, if his party's spending commitment to invest £500 million in dualling the entire length of the A9 were

ever carried out, the consequences for deserving and important roads such as the A82 would be too serious to contemplate.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's announcement of a new route action plan for the A82 north of Tarbet. Indeed, I have been urging the Executive on behalf of constituents to undertake such work for some time now. Will the minister indicate the time scale for the study and when he expects work on its recommendations to begin? Moreover, when he returns on 2 May, will he consider additional improvements to the A82 from Dumbarton to Tarbet as a key route to Scotland's first national park at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs?

**Lewis Macdonald:** It is intended that work on the route action plan will start within the next few weeks and be concluded towards the end of next year, in good time for people to make submissions to the strategic roads spending review process that will begin in 2004-05. I very much look forward to discussing with Jackie Baillie proposals for improvements to the A82 in her constituency after 1 May.

### **Racial Prejudice**

**13. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it is combating racial prejudice among schoolchildren. (S10-6706)

**The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen):** The Scottish Executive is working with a number of relevant organisations such as the centre for education for racial equality in Scotland—CERES—and the Scottish Traveller education programme—STEP—to take forward our commitment to promoting race equality in schools. Moreover, in conjunction with others, we recently launched a CD-ROM resource that was issued to all schools in Scotland to support staff in the effective delivery of anti-racism education.

**Scott Barrie:** The minister will be aware that the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a general duty on public bodies, including education authorities and schools, to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality and good race relations. How is the Scottish Executive ensuring that schools and education authorities are carrying out their duties under that legislation?

**Nicol Stephen:** The general duty is also reinforced by a specific duty—with a compliance date of 30 November 2002—on education authorities to come forward with proposals for individual schools to implement a race equality policy. To ensure the act's smooth implementation, the education department set up a race relations act education delivery group,

which was made up of a range of key stakeholders, including CERES, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Commission for Racial Equality and STEP. That work is ongoing and we intend to ensure that all education authorities and schools take their responsibilities in that regard seriously.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Will the minister broaden his answer and tell us what the Executive is doing to counter prejudice against English families and prejudice that arises from sectarianism, much of which has a racial background?

**Nicol Stephen:** As Donald Gorrie knows, we seek to tackle all sorts of prejudice. Indeed, the initiative that I mentioned and other aspects of the Executive's work seek to tackle prejudice that arises from sectarianism or is directed at young people from any country. There was much more to our anti-racism campaign than posters and advertisements. We want the issues to be tackled in our schools and have set up websites with links to resources that teachers can use. During this time of increased international tension, it is especially important that the Scottish Executive does absolutely everything in its power to combat all forms of prejudice and to promote the safety and security of all Scotland's schoolchildren and communities.

## First Minister's Question Time

15:10

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

#### 1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to discuss. (S1F-2635)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I have no immediate plans to meet the Prime Minister, but I plan to speak regularly with him over the coming weeks. In particular, I intend to draw to his attention remarks that Scotland's aid agencies made yesterday. They stressed to me the importance of the United Nations not only in the provision of humanitarian aid in Iraq during and after the conflict, but in the reconstruction of Iraqi society. I am sure that those agencies and others strongly support the Prime Minister's efforts today to convince the American Government to take the same route.

**Mr Swinney:** I associate myself and my party with the First Minister's remarks about the work of the humanitarian agencies and the primacy of the United Nations in drawing the matter to a conclusion and putting in place the necessary humanitarian assistance.

In a recent keynote speech, Scotland was described as a country that suffers from low growth and population decline, that has the unhealthiest people in Europe, where the environment is spoiled, where we are reluctant to take a risk and quick to blame, and where communities are blighted by violence on Saturday nights. When he made those remarks on Friday, was the First Minister talking Scotland down, or was that just an assessment of the failure of his Government and successive London Governments?

**The First Minister:** It is a measure of my ambitions for Scotland that those are the issues that require to be addressed. I will be delighted to send Mr Swinney a copy of the whole speech, so that he can see the answers and solutions, as well as the challenges that Scotland faces.

The Parliament has several important functions. It is important that we pass the right legislation, and that we do that in the name of Scotland. It is important that we allocate our budgets and make decisions daily, weekly, monthly and annually in ways that befit the Scotland that we are trying to create. It is also important that we have wider ambitions and that we try to tackle the underlying problems over the years, such as maltreatment of our environment, the culture of violence on a Saturday night, the lack of entrepreneurial culture

and a host of other matters. If challenges such as racism and sectarianism are taken on, Scotland will be made a better place. That is exactly what I intend to do as a continuing First Minister.

**Mr Swinney:** If we have all those problems, that raises a question: who has been running the country for the past 40 or 50 years among the crowd on the other parties' benches?

The First Minister offered to send me a copy of his speech, but he will not be surprised to learn that he does not need to do that, because I have examined his speech closely. It contains a number of interesting ideas. The big idea was a promise to take action against

"dealers who sell drugs to ... children at the school gate".

That idea is admirable, but six years ago in "Labour's covenant with Scotland", the people were made an identical promise by Labour:

"We will ... introduce ... 'drugs cordons' round Scottish schools, whereby anyone caught dealing in drugs within a specified radius will be liable for tougher penalties."

Since that promise was made six years ago, how many drug cordons have been established around Scottish schools and where are they?

**The First Minister:** It might have escaped Mr Swinney's notice, but the Parliament has been in existence for only four years, not six years. In the past four years, the Parliament has seen serious action being taken on tackling Scotland's drug dealers and tackling drugs in Scotland, such as the establishment of the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency as promised, the staffing of that agency and the additional powers—on which SNP members were not keen—to take the proceeds of crime and put them back into communities to ensure that dealers pay the price for their actions.

Action has been taken throughout Scotland to pull together drug action teams that help those who require local rehabilitation and assistance. Those are the practical measures that the Parliament was meant to take and has taken. Other practical measures will be taken in the next session if we spend the next four years talking not about independence, but about problems in Scotland and how to address them.

**Mr Swinney:** The only thing that was missing from that answer was the word "none". The commitment that I cited has not been delivered; that is yet another broken promise. No wonder the First Minister read out that litany of failure; it is the failure of this Government.

The First Minister promised that he would cut waiting lists by 10,000. He has broken that promise. He promised that 80 per cent of primary school pupils would achieve appropriate standards in reading and writing. He has broken that

promise. He promised to set up drug cordons, but he has broken that promise, too. Given that he has broken so many promises, how can the people of Scotland take seriously any of the First Minister's promises at the forthcoming election? Is not it the case that patients, pupils and victims of crime cannot wait any longer for the Government to deliver? Is not it the case that the people of Scotland should move on and change the Government of Scotland?

**The First Minister:** It is a pleasure to note that one of only three examples that Mr Swinney quotes—the other two are inaccurate—is an example from six years ago. It was included in a document, which I believe was issued prior to the 1997 general election.

During the past 12 months, only one significant promise has been broken by a politician in Scotland: the promise to talk about independence, which the leader of the Scottish National Party made last May. We have not heard the word “independence” since—entire party-political broadcasts do not even mention the concept, never mind use the word. When we get to the election campaign, we will talk about independence, but we will also talk about education, health, transport, crime and job creation, which are the priorities for the people of Scotland. That is exactly why they will back us to return after 1 May.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S1F-2630)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Yesterday's Cabinet was the last scheduled meeting before the Scottish Parliament elections on 1 May. In the current situation, contingency arrangements have been made for the Cabinet to meet during April, should that be necessary.

**David McLetchie:** Although people's thoughts are at this time invariably focused on the international situation, we all reflect that the war in Iraq is, in part, about establishing a democratic society that has free elections like the one in which we will participate on 1 May.

I return to domestic concerns for my question to the First Minister. After four years of this Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive and no fewer than 53 tax increases, many people in Scotland will be disappointed that violent crime continues to rise, that 19,000 more patients wait for hospital treatment and that the number of new business start-ups has decreased. People will also have been disappointed to learn recently that more than half of the pupils in the second year of our

secondary schools do not meet national standards for reading. Does the First Minister share our disappointment and concern? How will more of the same make any difference at all?

**The First Minister:** Contrary to what Mr McLetchie says, our many achievements include the highest standards in reading and writing that we have seen in our secondary schools in my lifetime and substantial improvements in support for business, not only for business start-ups, but in support that allows existing businesses to grow. We have not only ensured that we have better paid staff and better equipment and facilities in our hospitals; we have brought down waiting times for Scotland's key killer diseases.

I assure Mr McLetchie that, not only have we made those achievements, we have many ambitions. There is much more still to do—that is the challenge for the Parliament in the next four years. We will build on that record and I am sure that it will educate us and lead us to meeting the challenge, and to meeting it successfully.

**David McLetchie:** The big problem is that the record completely contradicts all the First Minister's assertions. Is not it about time that he admitted that the centralising and top-down approach to running our public services that has been the feature of the Administration for the past four years has not worked and that it will not work?

Will he explain to people in Scotland why he did not cut his bloated Government down to size by halving the number of ministers who interfere in the running of our affairs? Why has he not cut the rates burden on Scottish businesses that puts them at such a competitive disadvantage compared with businesses south of the border? Why has he not given our doctors and nurses far more say in the running of the national health service in Scotland? I am thinking of foundation hospitals and general practitioner fundholding. Is not it about time that we had a Government in Scotland that does something about such problems rather than one that ignores them?

**The First Minister:** I am delighted to take up the member's challenge. On a top-down approach and not giving enough local power, not only has the partnership Administration devolved more powers to local authorities and bodies in Scotland than any other Administration in my lifetime, but it has done so successfully. It has worked in partnership with local authorities and many other bodies that deliver services at a local level. We are also devolving power to front-line managers of services who need such power in order to make the right priority decisions at local level.

Furthermore, we have cut the rates burden for Scottish businesses by freezing rates for next year and by giving a firm commitment that, in future

years, the rate of inflation will be the maximum by which they will increase. There have been similar achievements for the new Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive in a wide range of other areas.

In the next parliamentary session, it is important that we build on our achievements not only by maintaining smaller class sizes in primary schools, but by reducing class sizes in secondary schools. Not only did we build on the 20,000 modern apprenticeships that we promised to deliver, but 30,000 apprenticeships have been delivered for young people. We have put behind us the absolute hopelessness of the 1980s and 1990s and built a Scotland that is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Entitlement Cards

**3. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has any plans to introduce entitlement cards. (S1F-2640)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** As part of our commitment to providing people with better public services, we are supporting the development by Scottish local authorities of a citizen's smart card. The card will initially be used for bus travel, school meals and registration, access to some leisure services and as a library card, although other services can be added as required. We plan to make the card available on a voluntary basis.

**Pauline McNeill:** I appreciate that there can be benefits to such a card, which the First Minister has outlined, but he will be aware of the concerns of many Scots that such a scheme could violate civil rights to privacy if it is not presented properly. In the light of such concerns, will he assure me that the purpose of any entitlement card would be made clear and that there will be full consultation with Scottish communities about it? Will he assure me that all our citizens, including asylum seekers, will not be forced to carry any card that might be seen as an identity card and will not be harassed by police authorities for not carrying such a card?

**The First Minister:** I am not in favour of compulsion. It is important that such a card is voluntary, which is why we are piloting the card with local authorities that wish to pilot it. It is right that they should have such an opportunity.

I am not, however, in favour of our making it compulsory in Scotland for people to carry several cards in order to access different public services. In an age of modern technology and easy access to other services, it is absolute common sense that people should have easy access to public services and that information be held on one card that will allow people local and national access to public services. If that can be achieved, we will make Scotland a better place to live.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Will the First Minister say what the difference would be between the entitlement card that he suggests and the entitlement card that is being suggested for south of the border? Will he spell out in more detail exactly what information will go into the card?

**The First Minister:** The Home Secretary has begun a consultation on entitlement cards in the United Kingdom; we will obviously engage with him in that consultation. Such an entitlement card would impact on some devolved areas, so it is important that the Scottish Executive and the Parliament should make representations in due course. However, that is an entirely different concept to the idea that I have just described. A citizen's smart card in Scotland, which local authorities will pilot, can be successful in allowing people in Scotland to get rid of all the clutter of cards and other mechanisms that they use to access local services. There can be access to local and national services through one card, which is an important development. We have been willing to pilot and support such a card and I hope that we can bring it about.

### Forth Estuary Transport Authority

**4. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Executive has had with the Forth Estuary Transport Authority regarding transport options across the Firth of Forth. (S1F-2634)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Officials are in regular contact with the Forth Estuary Transport Authority concerning a range of cross-Forth transport issues and we have a seat on its management board.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I thank the First Minister for that answer. Does he agree that it will be important to run a sustainability slide rule over any proposed new crossing, and that every effort should be made both to maximise the rail capacity over the current rail bridge—for example, by using longer trains—and to consider using the planning framework to group together homes, leisure facilities and jobs in order to cut down commuting?

**The First Minister:** I have much sympathy for the points that Nora Radcliffe makes. It is important that we maximise the use of existing routes and that we have the rolling stock that allows us to do that. It is also important that, in our planning policies, we design homes and communities in such a way as to reduce the need to travel distances to work or for other purposes. I am happy to take up the points that Nora Radcliffe raises and pass them on to the Forth Estuary Transport Authority.

### Schools (British History)

**5. Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what commitment the Scottish Executive will give to ensure that British history is adequately covered in the curriculum in schools. (S1F-2627)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Guidance to education authorities and schools provides ample opportunities for teaching British history, including Scottish history, at every level of the school curriculum.

**Alex Johnstone:** The First Minister might be surprised to hear that I was present during the march that took place outside the chamber at half past 5 last Thursday. I assure him that although I did not take part, I felt that it was my duty as an elected member of Parliament to stand by to hear and see what was going on at that march. Does the First Minister agree—given this great country's history of sacrifice in opposing tyranny and oppression wherever it may occur—that it is high time that our young people were made fully aware of the sacrifice that has been made by the generations that preceded us and of the great and distinguished heritage of this country?

**The First Minister:** I announced towards the end of last year that I thought that it was important that we in Scotland acknowledge a variety of occasions in our history, including the union of the crowns in 1603. I think that it is important, not for party political reasons but for reasons of knowledge, history and understanding, that young people in this country understand all of their roots, where they come from and what our country has done—good and bad—in the past. I certainly hope that in every secondary school and primary school throughout Scotland we not only teach our young people their Scottish history as effectively as possible, but teach them about the time during which they have been part of Britain, which should constitute part of their knowledge and understanding of where they come from. That will also help to inform them of the benefits of democracy, tolerance and respect, which are part of our national character.

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Does the First Minister agree that anyone who studies British history should also recognise that Britain was first in the world in economic performance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but is today 19<sup>th</sup> and falling? We should recognise that many of the countries that became independent from Britain during the intervening period have prospered and that none of the countries that have become independent from Britain want to get back in.

**The First Minister:** Mr Wilson is full of contradictions; he has just made more. He has spent his four years in the Parliament—when the

eyes of business were not upon him—criticising private profit, criticising those who would manage public spending, advocating substantial increases in spending on every occasion and trying to ensure that a culture is created in the Parliament that is hostile to public-private partnerships and other engagements with the private sector. He cannot do that and go round Scotland's boardrooms telling people that he is a friend of business. Mr Wilson must be more consistent. I hope that he will be in the weeks to come.

**Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** Does the First Minister agree that one of the strands that goes through British history is the quest for justice? Four years ago, patients who had been infected with hepatitis C from blood products had been waiting many years for justice; they are still waiting for it today. Will the First Minister do all that he can to put pressure on the UK Government to allow the Scottish Executive ministers and the Scottish Parliament to do exactly what we want to do, which is to give fair payments to those who have been infected with hepatitis C?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry—that was possibly wide of the original question. Does the First Minister want to respond?

**The First Minister:** I confirm that Malcolm Chisholm will—as he has been doing over recent months—work extremely hard to ensure that we bring about a just conclusion to the matter.

### British Sign Language (Interpreters)

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** It is appropriate that the last question in this session of Parliament should be asked by the person who uttered the first words in the Parliament.

**6. Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister whether, in the light of Her Majesty's Government's decision to give official recognition to British Sign Language as a language in its own right, the Scottish Executive will fund a long-term training programme for more sign language interpreters. (S1F-2624)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** As a start, I believe that we should double the number of British Sign Language interpreters in Scotland and I have asked officials to prepare plans for how we might achieve that, which will be presented to whatever set of ministers occupies the Executive offices after the election.

**Dr Ewing:** That was an encouraging answer.

I am proud to be asking the last question in the Parliament. Since my members' business debate on the subject, during which the public galleries were packed with deaf people, the Executive has taken quite a lot of steps on the issue, such as the

type-talk scheme, interpretation for visitors, the BSL video, leaflets and the £10 million for audiological assistance. I am happy to congratulate the Executive on those developments, but is the First Minister aware that the core problems remain? Those problems are the need for formal recognition of BSL, which is an ancient, sophisticated and evolving language, and the emergency shortage of interpreters, which has been referred to.

There are now 39 interpreters; at the time of my members' business debate there were 32. However, Finland has 350 interpreters. There are fifteen BSL students on the go, but because they are part time, they receive no funding. I suggest the practical step of making the Heriot-Watt University course a degree course, which would attract more students and allow them funding as full-time students. That would speed up the process for the many people who would like to be interpreters. The deaf also wish a centre for deaf studies, which could perhaps be considered by whomever succeeds the First Minister—I am optimistic about that.

In yesterday's debate on children, Jackie Baillie said that we want a Scotland where every child matters; I ask that it should be a Scotland where every deaf child matters.

**The First Minister:** I share Winnie Ewing's commitment to British Sign Language. As a child, I learned basic BSL from my father. It is not only important that we have enough interpreters in Scotland, but that we encourage recognition of the language's importance to the deaf community, especially to deaf children. We can do a lot more and I am sure that we will do it. One of the marks of this young Parliament during the past four years has been its willingness to do the right thing for Scotland's children. I am sure that we will do that again on this issue in the years to come.

## Motion of Thanks

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-4063, in the name of the First Minister, on the Presiding Officer.

15:33

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** This is an important occasion. As the proceedings of this four-year session draw to a close, I am delighted to have the honour of moving a motion to pay tribute to our first Presiding Officer, Sir David Steel. Sir David's experience, commitment and the wider role that he has had in his new position have been fundamental to our success as a young Parliament.

The Presiding Officer has been in Scottish politics in many different capacities for nearly 40 years. When I became First Minister, I remember calculating that the average age of members of the Scottish Parliament was about 41 or 42. For those of us in that age range, that means that Sir David became a member of Parliament before we were at primary school and that we were still at secondary school when he became the leader of the Liberal party. He has had a career of distinction and has made a massive contribution to Scotland, the United Kingdom and the liberal movement worldwide.

Sir David's experience, which is not always remembered by those of us who are of a younger generation, has been fundamental to his success in his position and to the on-going success of the Parliament during the past four years. He represented his constituency for 32 years and was leader of the Liberal party for 12 years. Following his retirement as a member of Parliament, he became a life peer and, in 1999, he made the important and exciting choice to return to politics to serve in the Scottish Parliament.

Sir David had also been one of the active leaders of the Scottish constitutional convention, the body that drew up the blueprint from which the Scottish Parliament was to be created. That was highly appropriate for a Presiding Officer. He had been a lifelong campaigner for devolution, and that commitment has shown through over the past four years. Sir David has defended and promoted the founding principles of the Parliament. The informality, courtesy and respect that characterise our proceedings—at least, most of the time—are a tribute to his example to us all. His sure hand and light touch have been shown on many occasions, not least in Aberdeen last year, when he told the story of the white mice when Her Majesty the Queen was present in the chamber.

Despite illness and all that has changed around him, Sir David's presence has given us stability



and an opportunity for this young Parliament to grow. There has also been a wider importance to his role. We are fortunate, in this young Parliament, to have had a Presiding Officer with international experience and international interests. There was always a danger of the new Scottish Parliament being a parochial institution. However, a variety of speakers and visitors, such as Thabo Mbeki and others, have visited the Parliament and have engaged with us, and Sir David and other members have represented our new Parliament abroad, especially in the USA on tartan day. Those occasions have served Scotland well, and Sir David has served Scotland well. He has kept our proceedings in a wider perspective, and that has been very important.

That is partly because of the man that he is. In the excellent book by Tom Devine and Paddy Logue that was published last summer, entitled "Being Scottish", in a short essay on his Scottishness, Sir David quotes John Buchan, describing his constituents in the Borders as having

"realism coloured by poetry, a stalwart independence sweetened by courtesy, and a shrewd kindly wisdom".

I can think of no better summary of Sir David Steel, in his role in the Parliament. I commend that to the Parliament this afternoon. He has served us well and I wish Judy and him well in retirement. [Applause.]

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its gratitude to Sir David Steel for his service to the Parliament and recognises the important and historic role he has carried out as its first Presiding Officer.

15:38

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** It is my pleasure to support the motion that has been moved by the First Minister and to recognise the historic event that we are witnessing today. We are a young Parliament, but we are in the process every day of creating a new history and tradition for our Parliament. When the Parliament was constituted, four years ago, my dear colleague Winnie Ewing opened the Parliament with grace and style. Soon after, she was able to hand over to an individual of wise guidance and wise leadership, who has served the Parliament extremely well over the past four years.

It is no easy task to establish the foundations of a new Parliament—politically or in terms of the brickwork. However, the political foundations that have been laid for the Parliament have been characterised by the dignified way in which Sir David has undertaken his responsibilities. He has chaired our proceedings and, as the First Minister said, he has been an ambassador on our behalf

and a welcome host to the many international dignitaries who have come to see the emergence of this new institution. He has also established some important principles in the tradition of the Parliament. If I have heard him speaking more often about any one subject in the Parliament, it has been about his desire to see the Parliament's committee system thrive, develop and become ever more influential. Our committee system has distinguished the Parliament from other institutions with which people may be more familiar.

Sir David has been instrumental in defending and protecting Parliament and the rights of Parliament. On occasion, members on the Opposition benches might have liked him to give the Executive an even harder time, procedurally, than he has given it. However, at all times he has acted with fairness and dignity in his work. Sir David and I share a specific objective. He has had a duty, over the past four years, to keep the Parliament under control and to keep the Scottish National Party group within it under control. Occasionally, I have been challenged by the latter task during the past two and half years and I have sympathised with Sir David's challenge when he has occasionally wrestled with that task.

The First Minister referred to the long political career that Sir David has had in Scotland. He entered politics via the 1965 Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles by-election, which he won decisively. However, that by-election led to the expulsion from the SNP of an eccentric character called Anthony J C Kerr, who disobeyed the party leadership and decided to stand against Sir David, despite the fact—if memory serves me right—that we were establishing an anti-Tory pact at the time. Some traditions of Scottish politics have not changed much.

It is with the greatest of pleasure that I associate the Scottish National Party with the First Minister's remarks and with the motion. I am not confident that Sir David Steel will be retiring. I cannot imagine that that will be the case. He goes on from his responsibilities as Presiding Officer to act as the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He will occupy a different seat in this building from the one that he currently occupies, but in that and his future activities he has the good wishes of everyone on this side of the Parliament. [Applause.]

15:41

**David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** On occasions such as this there is the temptation to say, "Oh, for goodness' sake give him the watch and crack open the sherry." [Laughter.] However, that would not do justice to the distinguished service that the Presiding Officer has rendered to

Parliament in its first session. I am very pleased indeed to associate my colleagues and me with the First Minister's and Mr Swinney's generous tributes and with the terms of the motion.

When writing his memoirs, the Presiding Officer will no doubt reflect on some of the trials and tribulations of his job. On day one, of course, the Presiding Officer was handed the poisoned chalice of the Holyrood project, which is a responsibility that he has shouldered with commendable commitment but occasionally, some of us might think, with an unwise degree of enthusiasm. The Holyrood project has been a labour of Hercules—unfinished—of which the Presiding Officer will be delighted, no doubt, to be well shot.

Presiding Officers and Speakers in Parliaments are, of course, akin to football referees and it is a measure of Sir David's authority that, after four years, there have been few bookings for dissent and no red cards—yet. Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, I have to thank the Presiding Officer for preventing me on one occasion from asking questions in the Parliament, which probably did much more for my credibility than if I had actually asked them—such are the ironies and contradictions of politics.

As chair of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Presiding Officer has been responsible for the Parliament staff and in thanking him for his contribution over the past four years I would also like to express our thanks to the Parliament staff for the outstanding support and service that they have given to us all in every department and in every respect. *[Applause.]* I would also like to extend my best wishes to members who, like the Presiding Officer, will retire from Parliament before the election. I thank them for their contributions, particularly those of my colleagues John Young and Ben Wallace.

As the First Minister said, Presiding Officer, you have given outstanding service to public life in Scotland over many years and you will, as John Swinney noted, make an early return to the Assembly Hall in your capacity as Lord High Commissioner to the forthcoming General Assembly. That will be yet another eminent title to add to your burgeoning collection.

And so, Sir David, I say to you: go back to your constituency and prepare for retirement—although that is a prospect that we may all have to face on 1 May. It has been a pleasure to have worked with you over the four years of the Parliament, Sir David, and all of us wish you and Judy many happy and fulfilling years ahead. *[Applause.]*

15:45

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** Sir David Steel will be pleased and reassured to know that, following debate and discussion at our group meeting on Tuesday evening, the Liberal Democrat group agreed to support the motion.

Although, on taking office as Presiding Officer, Sir David donned the mantle of political neutrality—which we certainly believe that he has maintained—I make no apology for saying that, as a Liberal Democrat, I speak to the motion with warmth and particular personal pleasure.

David Steel led my party in the first three general elections in which I fought and was leader of my party when I entered the House of Commons in 1983. I was subsequently his chief whip—indeed, I was the last chief whip of the Liberal Party and the first chief whip of the newly merged party. We fought many election campaigns together and, as Jack McConnell has reminded us, in 1989, when we joined together in this building in the Scottish constitutional convention, David Steel and Harry Ewing became the honorary joint presidents of the convention. Further, we campaigned, along with many others here, in the successful campaign for a yes-yes vote in the historic 1997 referendum.

Reference has also been made to Judy Steel, and it is important to acknowledge the contribution that she has made, not only over the past few years, but over many years. I well recall the night when Nicol Stephen won the Kincardine and Deeside by-election. After the announcement of the result, a camera went outside the count in Stonehaven where there were a lot of rejoicing Liberal Democrats. David Dumbleby asked, "Who is that woman jumping up and down?" and David Steel replied, "That's no woman; that's my wife." Judy has been a stalwart support and we owe her a debt of gratitude as well.

My father recalls visiting one of his clients in the Borders, the late Andrew Haddon, a stalwart Liberal, who said that the local party had just selected a lad to fight the forthcoming election. He said that he thought that he was good and might go far—and indeed he has. Sir David represented his constituents in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles and, subsequently, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale with outstanding distinction. One of the great battles of the earliest part of his career was the attempt to save the Waverley line from the Beeching axe and I am sure that he will be among the first to receive an invitation to be present when the first stretch of new track is laid for the new Borders railway.

There have been some key themes to David Steel's political career during the past 40 years.

Those themes have brought consistency coupled with pragmatism and drive, allied to good humour and courage.

An integral characteristic of all great Scots is internationalism. That is a perspective that David Steel shares and has demonstrated throughout his political career. No doubt, that perspective was fostered during his upbringing in Africa, a continent to which he has devoted much time and commitment.

Sir David's commitment to fighting racism and his leading involvement in the anti-apartheid campaign were inspiring to many, and not without political risk. It took a great deal of courage to take that campaign to the Borders of Scotland—that great rugby-loving region—during the 1969-70 South African rugby team tour. However, the stance that Sir David and others took undoubtedly helped to pave the way for the dramatic events that took place in South Africa in the early 1990s.

Sir David's political philosophy has not prevented him from working with others across the narrow party divides—indeed, it may have encouraged him to do so. He has never been narrowly party-focused and has always had a liberal ability to see and value other people's points of view.

The final theme of Sir David's career that I will mention—and the most appropriate, given the context—is that, in keeping with many Liberal leaders, he has always been a staunch proponent of Scottish home rule. He rightly recognised the need for there to be a Scottish Parliament and the tremendous value that would derive from Scots taking greater control of the issues that affect our daily lives. Indeed, I think that Sir David drafted the Scottish Liberal Party's evidence to the Kilbrandon committee in the late 1960s. That commitment, allied to a willingness to work with others and an understanding of the international context within which a devolved Scotland must operate must make it all the more satisfying for him to have been the Presiding Officer of the first Scottish Parliament since 1707. Knowing how much Sir David cherishes this hard-fought-for Parliament has meant that we have had confidence that the rights of the Parliament—and the fundamental role of holding the Executive to account—have been well safeguarded over these past four years.

It would be misleading to suggest that we are gathered here to bid you a final farewell from this place. As David McLetchie and John Swinney have already pointed out, you go out one door but will return in a few weeks' time—six feet above contradiction, though we have never dared to contradict you much down here—as Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. As the motion indicates, the

role of our first Presiding Officer has indeed been an historic one. Presiding Officer, it is with gratitude and warmth that we congratulate you on the dignified and distinguished way in which you have discharged your duties. *[Applause.]*

15:51

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** I find it a great privilege to be speaking on behalf of the SPCB in this tribute to David Steel. He has been a giant in British politics; indeed, his influence and fame has spread far beyond these shores. He has been used by people overseas in a number of different ways, and that is a tremendous tribute to him. The First Minister covered David's political career in some detail—in fact I was tearing up pages of my speech as the other speakers went on ahead of me.

However, one thing that they did not touch on was an election that I am glad David Steel did not win. In the 1980s, he suddenly decided to stand for the European Parliament. He chose the unusual seat of the central region of Italy. The mind boggles to imagine where David would be today if he had won that election. He would probably eat spaghetti every lunch time, have a lovely villa in Tuscany, speak fluent Italian—and no doubt, end up as the speaker of the Italian Parliament in Rome. He may think that this is a tough mob here, but it ain't nothing compared with that! If he had become the speaker of the Italian Parliament in Rome, I suspect that he would have brought the members under control in the calm manner that he employs all the time.

David has often been criticised in his four years as Presiding Officer. He has seen it in the press and people have been after him about this, that and everything else. We in the corporate body were in a unique position from which to observe his reactions to that criticism. He was always calm and he never lost his temper. His blood pressure might have gone up slightly, but never once can I recall him losing his temper. In fact, he would be a great man to have in the United Nations. During his illness he obviously suffered a great deal, yet he insisted on coming to the corporate body to chair it. All of us greatly admired his bravery and courage during that time—it cannot have been easy.

Not all members will be aware that there has been an interim setting up of an association of former MSPs, of which I am the interim chairman—and I hasten to add the word interim. Sir David Steel has agreed to be the honorary president of that organisation and I am pleased to say that that outstanding politician for Scotland, Winnie Ewing, has agreed to be the honorary vice-president. With those calming influences, it will be a very effective body indeed once it is fully set up.

I wish David, Judy and the family well. I know that David has written at least 12 books on a variety of subjects, and I am quite sure that he will produce many more. The book that I will stand in a queue to buy, even if the price is 30 guineas a time, is the one that tells the inside story of the Scottish Parliament's first four years and the corporate body. I wish you the best of luck, David.

15:54

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Patricia Ferguson):** On behalf of the members of the Parliamentary Bureau, both past and present, I have great pleasure in taking the opportunity to say a few words before you go into your semi-retirement—like other members, I am sure that it will be no more than that.

As colleagues know, Sir David, for the first couple of years of this Parliament I had the honour of being one of those who assisted you in chairing meetings of the Parliament and in your other duties. I therefore have a unique vantage point from which to view your work and your contribution. I should probably say that a number of members have asked me if I am going to reveal at this point whether a certain conversation on the subject of whether the Presiding Officer should wear robes ever actually took place. I can assure you that my lips are sealed—on that question at least. We are politicians going into an election period, after all.

My office was keen to press-release my contribution in advance of the debate. I have to admit that I was a little unsure about that, and I decided to take some advice from my colleague, Angus MacKay. [*Laughter.*] Angus advised me in no uncertain terms that it was probably not very wise to issue such a press release today.

But seriously, I know that my fellow business managers, past and present, have very much appreciated your fairness and even-handedness in chairing the Parliamentary Bureau, a body that is often regarded by colleagues who have not had the privilege of serving on it as being some kind of secretive club—which we know is not the case. You have helped to make the bureau what it is today. This might come as a surprise to some colleagues, but it is usually a consensual body; more often than not we find ourselves in agreement.

The whole Parliament admires the way in which you have persisted, often in the face of criticism, steadfastly to maintain the integrity of the Enric Miralles design for the new Parliament building. The Parliament also admires the personal interest that you have taken in that project, as chair of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, over the past four years. As an ambassador for the

Parliament, you have worked tirelessly, visiting other Parliaments and organisations abroad and welcoming visitors from abroad to this new Parliament.

I believe that the Parliament has developed well in its short life, and that all its members have played a role in that development. The role of its Presiding Officer has been particularly important in shaping it. It seems absolutely no time at all since the day, almost four years ago, that you were elected to the office of Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. Most of us had very little idea at that time about what the job of the Presiding Officer would actually entail, or about how it would fit into the overall life of the Parliament. It is the mark of the way in which you have developed that post that anyone aspiring to the role in future will have absolutely no doubt as to what is required of them. The post requires a leader. It requires someone who is approachable, someone with dignity, someone who can act with fairness at all times, and whose commitment to the Parliament is unstinting.

We thank you, Sir David, as well as George Reid, Murray Tosh and all the staff who have assisted you in your role, for the dedication that you have shown to the role of Presiding Officer and to this new Parliament. I have great pleasure in supporting the motion before us.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is with real pleasure, Sir David, that I ask you to reply to the debate.

15:58

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** I see that I have less than two minutes in which to do so, Deputy Presiding Officer.

It is especially pleasing to listen to all those kind words when I reckon that I am probably the only one of the 129 MSPs who has inevitably, at some time or other over the past four years, disappointed, irritated, upset or offended every one of the other 128. Although I may have made 128 temporary enemies, I feel that I leave having made 128 permanent friends and I thank members for that.

I would like the thanks to me to be linked directly to thanks to the nearly 500 staff whom we employ in our seven buildings, both those whom we see and those whom we never see. From porters to policemen and from caterers to clerks, we have built a dedicated and highly professional parliamentary staff force, to whom not just I, but all of us, are genuinely and deeply grateful. In particular, I thank those who work in my private office and our chief executive, Paul Grice, who I think has given outstanding leadership to the team.

I also thank the Deputy Presiding Officers, George Reid, Patricia Ferguson and Murray Tosh, for the prodigious amount of work that they have undertaken on your behalf, and especially for their work during my illness. We worked as a team, especially in welcoming the unexpectedly large number of distinguished visitors who came to visit us from overseas.

I would like to thank the Parliamentary press corps. [MEMBERS: "Boo!"] No, I know that members will understand that it is one of the greatest sadnesses of my life that I have never been able to see them or know who is or is not in the press gallery.

We have had the odd grumble about press coverage, and I commend to you the MSP who recently decided to do something personally to obtain positive coverage. He invited the Lawnmarket gang to a trendy pub in Leith and produced his well-trained Labrador. He threw a stick into the sea for it to fetch. The dog walked across the water, picked up the stick and walked back across the water to the astonishment of the assembled hacks. The next morning, the member opened his newspaper to read the headline "MSP's dog can't swim".

In spite of the occasional negatives, we ought to record that unquestionably the scale of attention that the Parliament has received from press and broadcasting has turned us remarkably quickly into the focus of our national life. In fact, a recent poll found that only 13 per cent of the public would like to have us abolished and yearned for a return to total rule from inaccessible Westminster. Note that that is a much smaller percentage than those who voted no in the referendum.

The Parliament has had, on occasion, justified critics but, in the light of all that has been done in the past four years, few seriously argue that we should revert to being what Malcolm Rifkind accurately described as the only nation in the world with its own legal system but no legislature to adapt, modernise and improve it. In fact, we are all aware that the heavy legislative programme that we have experienced was partly the result of taking up several long-standing, overdue reforms that never made it into the Westminster queue. In the next session, I expect that still more time may be spent on committee inquiries and scrutiny. I am fully confident that the Parliament will grow in strength and effectiveness.

Now most of you are off to contest the election. As I explained to my daughter when she asked for my help in her forthcoming fight for a council seat, I can play no part in that. She gave me the ominous response, "But babysitting is not a party-political activity."

I tried hard to think of something impartial, but new and original, to say to all of you as you go out

hoping to come back with your party having won the election—for example: go back to your constituencies and prepare for government. However, that line has already been taken.

I want to end by thanking all of you for the privilege of having been your Presiding Officer. I use the word privilege deliberately. When I was a student, I used to make speeches frequently on two topics: anti-apartheid and pro-Scottish self-government. If someone had then tapped me on the shoulder and said, "One day, my boy, you will preside over a Scottish Parliament and introduce to it someone with whom you will have worked over several years—the President of a democratic South Africa," I would not have believed them.

That is just one among many reasons that I end simply by wishing you all well and saying thank you, thank you, thank you. [Applause.]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S1M-4063, in the name of the First Minister, on the Presiding Officer, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament expresses its gratitude to Sir David Steel for his service to the Parliament and recognises the important and historic role he has carried out as its first Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The motion is agreed to unanimously. For the last time, I hand back the chair to Sir David Steel.

## Decision Time

16:04

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** There are three questions that I must put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S1M-4064.2, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, which seeks to amend motion S1M-4064, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap for older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

### ABSTENTIONS

Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)  
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 28, Against 85, Abstentions 3.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S1M-4064.1, in the name of Keith Harding, which seeks to amend Margaret Curran's motion on the opportunity gap for older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Ben (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 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)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (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, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 46, Against 69, Abstentions 3.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S1M-4064, in the name of Margaret Curran, on closing the opportunity gap for older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Gm)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)



**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 86, Against 0, Abstentions 32.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to close the opportunity gap for Scotland's older people by building first-class public services and developing initiatives in health, transport and other priority areas, which will support older people in living healthy, active and independent lives.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time. I now close the final meeting of the first session of the Scottish Parliament 1999 to 2003.

*Meeting closed at 16:08.*



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