

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 24 March 2005

Session 2

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CONTENTS

Thursday 24 March 2005

Debates

Col.

FIREARMS LEGISLATION	15663
<i>Motion moved—[Mr Kenny MacAskill].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Cathy Jamieson].</i>	
Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP)	15663
The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson)	15666
Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con)	15668
Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)	15670
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	15673
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)	15674
Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)	15675
Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)	15677
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	15678
Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)	15680
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)	15681
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	15682
Cathy Jamieson	15683
Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP)	15685
NUCLEAR WEAPONS	15689
<i>Motion moved—[Roseanna Cunningham].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Scott Barrie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Robert Brown].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Chris Ballance].</i>	
Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP)	15689
Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab)	15692
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)	15694
Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green)	15697
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	15699
Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP)	15700
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	15702
Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP)	15704
Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)	15705
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	15707
Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	15708
Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)	15710
Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)	15711
Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)	15713
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	15715
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	15718
QUESTION TIME	15730
LIFE SCIENCES	15754
<i>Motion moved—[Mr Jim Wallace].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Neil].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace)	15754
Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)	15759
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	15761
Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab)	15765
Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)	15767
Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD)	15769
Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)	15771
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	15772
Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)	15774
Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)	15776

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)	15778
Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)	15780
Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)	15782
Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)	15783
Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	15786
The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson)	15789
BUSINESS MOTIONS	15794
<i>Motions moved—[Ms Margaret Curran]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	15797
<i>Motions moved—[Ms Margaret Curran].</i>	
POINT OF ORDER	15798
DECISION TIME	15799
CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION	15814
<i>Motion debated—[Bill Butler].</i>	
Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)	15814
Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)	15817
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)	15817
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)	15819
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	15820
The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson)	15822

Oral Answers

Col.

FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	15718
Cabinet (Meetings)	15720
Faith-based Schools (Teachers)	15728
Justice System (Victims of Crime)	15725
Mordechai Vanunu	15723
Prime Minister (Meetings)	15718
Schools (Healthy Eating)	15727
QUESTION TIME	
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE	15730
ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT	15730
European Beavers (Trial Reintroduction)	15732
Freshwater Fishing	15736
Less Favoured Area Support Scheme	15735
Livestock (Transportation Costs)	15730
Marine Legislation	15734
Rural Development (Land Availability)	15736
Single Farm Payment Scheme	15733
Waste (Reduction and Recycling)	15731
HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE	15737
Alcohol Use	15744
Dental Services (Remote and Rural Areas)	15744
Diabetes (Complications)	15739
National Health Service	
(Nursing Staff Retention)	15742
NHS Lothian (MRI Scans)	15740
NHS Tayside (G8 Summit)	15737
Organ Donation	15738
Specialist Nurses (Parkinson's Disease)	15741
GENERAL QUESTIONS	15746
Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (Dungavel)	15749
Commonwealth Games 2014	15746
Disabled People (Employment)	15746
Higher Education (Research Funding)	15747
International Development Strategy	15748
Moray Air Bases (Job Losses)	15752
Public Demonstrations (Management)	15753
Women's Football	15751
Written Questions	15750

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 24 March 2005

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

Firearms Legislation

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2622, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on firearms legislation.

09:30

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): Nine years on from Dunblane but only a few days on from the funeral of a young boy who was tragically killed in Glasgow by an air weapon, when will we learn that guns are lethal weapons? When will we take action against firearms in our society? That is why we are having today's debate.

We can act responsibly or we can abdicate responsibility. Both the Tory amendment, which denies the extent of the problem, and the Executive amendment, which fails to provide a solution, are unacceptable. The Scottish National Party's position is clear: this Parliament must legislate on firearms and it must do so forthwith.

There can be no greater duty for a Government than to protect its citizens. We struggle to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but we find weapons of a lethal nature on open sale in high street shops throughout Scotland.

The Dunblane massacre shook Scotland to its very soul. We thought that such things happened only in movies or in the United States of America, but it happened in a small town in our native land. Scotland vowed collectively that such an event would never happen again and that action would be taken. An inquiry took place and legislation was amended, but that action did not go far enough: a weapon capable of killing a child was on public sale, was lawfully available and was freely used, with fatal consequences.

Firearms remain a major problem in our communities. Air rifles have captured the public attention, but they are not the only weapons that cause problems for police and communities alike. Since 1999, the number of police operations involving firearms has increased by 154 per cent in Scotland and by a staggering 670 per cent in Glasgow. Scotland has a significant problem with the sale, possession and use of real and replica weapons.

The problem is not just the illegal weapons that are traded by underworld figures. Air rifles are

openly on display and can be bought freely without a licence. Replica weapons might not kill—although they are capable of being modified to do so—but they certainly frighten and intimidate. Armed response officers can no more tell the difference between a real weapon and a replica one than can the frightened shop assistant or intimidated bank teller, yet such weapons are widely advertised and openly available on the high streets of towns throughout Scotland.

Moreover, the police face difficulties in revoking firearms certificates when they have cause for concern about an individual's behaviour or actions. The law's hands might be tied, but the potential killer's trigger is not. The current law is outdated and flawed. Senior officers are required to go through far too many hoops and hurdles to revoke a licence. The current law is far too complicated and is not easily understood.

Current firearms legislation is made up of a combination of various acts and amendments. The main acts are the Firearms Act 1968 and the Firearms Act 1982, which have been amended on numerous occasions since they were passed. The pieces of legislation are far too many and far too complicated for the new Scotland in the 21st century.

The difficulty is not just that the First Minister thinks that action might need to be taken while the Prime Minister and Michael Howard disagree, but that the decision lies with Westminster rather than with Holyrood. In the most recent Queen's speech, which set out the Labour Government's priorities in that jurisdiction, firearms were not mentioned. If Westminster will not act, we must. However, although the Scottish Parliament is in charge of criminal justice, firearms are reserved to London. That must change.

The Executive drive for a surrender of air weapons is commendable. However, a system that allows some citizens still to buy new weapons while others hand in their old ones is illogical and inadequate. We need to address supply as well as demand. Only those who have a legitimate reason, such as pest and vermin control or registered gun club use, should be able to buy and hold firearms of whatever sort. The teenager's desire for an air weapon and the adult's desire to have a shotgun for fun are unhealthy obsessions that, in the eyes of the law, it must become unacceptable to act upon.

Scottish society is different from that south of the border. It needs different solutions to deal with a firearms problem that is significantly different. Tragically, in many English communities, the major gun problem is not air weapons or replica weapons but real weapons that are imported from the Balkans and used by yardie gangs or in senseless drive-by shootings.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On the issues of supply and policing, does the member agree that England and Scotland face issues of common concern? How would he address those issues?

Mr MacAskill: From my discussions with major police figures and members of shooting organisations, I understand that a European Union directive will seek to address many of those matters. It is correct that that should be so, because many weapons in Scotland and the United Kingdom are supplied from the Balkans or the Republic of Ireland as well as from Northern Ireland. Of course we have a commonality of interest within the United Kingdom, but we must also clearly accept some uniformity on the matter within the European Union.

As I said, we have a fundamentally different society. That is why Scotland has different legislation on swords and knives. We in Scotland recognised that swords and knives posed a significant problem—the SNP supported the Executive on that issue—but it is now incumbent on us to recognise that Scotland also has a significant and distinct problem with air weapons, replica weapons and real weapons, on which we must legislate. If it was correct for the Scottish Parliament to legislate on knives and swords, it is certainly correct for it to do so on other weapons.

What is needed in Brixton or Handsworth is not necessarily the same as what is needed in Bathgate or Haghill. Air weapons and replica weapons are a major problem in Scotland and action is needed now. That means that the power to legislate must be devolved. As I said, the legislation on knives and swords that applies in Gretna is different from that which applies in Carlisle, because we know that we have a distinct problem and need a unique solution. The same applies to firearms. Devolution was about addressing Scotland's distinct needs. This is a need that is crying out for action.

The issue is not just who should legislate but what the legislation should do. A consolidated firearms act is a prerequisite. Let us start with a clean sheet of paper that specifies what constitutes a firearm, replica weapon or air weapon. We need to define how such weapons are sold and specify who may have them and how they acquire and store them. Just as important, we need to specify how we revoke a licence when our police have fears over a weapon's retention and possible use.

Nine years ago, there was no Scottish Parliament and action was limited. Now we have a Scottish Parliament and it is time to act on the scourge of firearms in our society. Let there be no more tragedies in the days or even years to come. It is time for this Parliament to legislate on firearms.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern recent tragedies involving firearms and the continuing dangers in our communities posed by both real and replica guns; recognises that, notwithstanding action taken after the Dunblane tragedy in 1996, there are ongoing difficulties and gaps in the current legislation; calls, therefore, for powers over firearms to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament in view of the distinctive nature of our society, the distinct nature of the gun problem in Scotland and the urgent needs in our communities, and further calls for a new and all-encompassing Firearms Act to clarify what constitutes a firearm, who may possess a firearm, the circumstances under which people may acquire, keep and use firearms and all other aspects relating to firearms, including authorisation, monitoring and revocation.

09:38

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Although I cannot disagree with some of Kenny MacAskill's comments this morning, I am concerned that the SNP, once again, wants to focus more on the constitutional aspects of where legislation is introduced rather than on the need to consider tighter controls and how we can work in partnership with the UK Government. If we followed the apparent logic of the SNP by having different systems across the UK, that would arguably create potential loopholes—

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Cathy Jamieson: No, I want to make this point.

Having different systems across the UK could create loopholes that would be exploited by those with criminal intent. I take that issue seriously.

We have some of the toughest firearms laws in the world. We will continue to ensure that those laws remain effective and up to date in controlling firearms and in reducing firearms crimes. We worked with the UK Government to address the concerns of communities about air weapons and imitation weapons. I remind the SNP that new measures were introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. That legislation created new offences and restricted the sale of such weapons, raising the age at which a person can own air weapons from 14 to 17 and creating a new offence of possessing an air weapon or an imitation weapon in a public place without reasonable excuse.

Mr MacAskill: Will the minister give way?

Cathy Jamieson: I will not give way; I am very short of time.

We also banned the import and sale of a certain group of air weapons that use self-contained air cartridge systems and we introduced licensing for such weapons. However, we have said that those measures might not go far enough—the First Minister has said that, I have said that, and the

Prime Minister has recognised that we need to continue to work with the UK Government to examine what more needs to be done. We are actively engaged with the UK Government in the current review of firearms law and I shall certainly ensure that specific Scottish interests and concerns inform any decisions that are taken. I reiterate the words of the First Minister, who stressed that nothing has been ruled in and nothing has been ruled out at this stage. However, decisions must be taken in a measured and informed way, and I do not think that, at this point in time, there is a good case to be made for focusing on the constitutional issue rather than on the issue at hand and on ensuring that we have appropriate legislation that meets the needs of our communities.

Mr MacAskill: Is not it the case that swords are a distinctive problem in English society? Within the past few days, a young man—apparently a charity worker—has been shot dead by police officers in Humberside for carrying a sword. Why is it that we have legislated separately north of the border on knives and swords but have not done so on other weapons? Is there a different problem? If so, what is it? Why are ministers prepared to act on knives and swords but unprepared to act on real and replica firearms?

Cathy Jamieson: Let me make it clear that I take the issue of knife crime and gun crime in communities extremely seriously. To suggest that the Executive is not prepared to act is simply wrong. We will act.

Mr MacAskill: Well, do so.

Cathy Jamieson: We are acting—we are acting in partnership with our colleagues in the Home Office. That has already led to a tightening up of the legislation.

It is important that we remember the context in which we are talking. We know that gun crime has declined over the past 10 years. Part of that is due to the tightening up of the legislation, but we also know that we cannot be complacent. Guns still cause far too much damage and suffering, and one tragic shooting remains one too many. Recent tragic events have shown just how lethal any gun—even if it is not illegal—can be if it is in the wrong hands. We must do all that we can to act so that no other parent has to endure the loss experienced by the family in Glasgow. We must act to make our communities safer.

Although we are examining the legislation and considering whether and where we need to tighten it up, we should not simply sit back and do nothing. That is why, yesterday, I followed up the First Minister's plea to people to hand in weapons with a campaign to urge those—particularly parents—who have, without good reason, such air

weapons in their homes to hand them in. I know that people may be concerned that that campaign has not gone far enough, but 55 weapons have already been handed in—

Mr MacAskill: Out of half a million.

Cathy Jamieson: That is 55 weapons off the street since yesterday, without any real publicity. I think that that, on the back of the First Minister's comments, will give some comfort to communities, because it shows that people are taking responsibility and are tackling the problems of air-guns, which are linked to antisocial behaviour in our communities. That is where I intend to focus our work with the police over the next few weeks.

I end with a plea. I urge parents and others to think again and to think really carefully about whether they need an air weapon in their home. I urge people to ask themselves three questions: "Do I need an air-gun? Can I be sure it won't fall into the wrong hands? Do I know enough about the law to be able to keep within the law?" If the answer to even one of those questions is no, I urge people to consider very seriously getting rid of their air weapon. If people do not need air weapons, they should hand them in.

That campaign is not the only thing that we will do. The right approach is to consider the 4,000 responses that came in to the Home Office consultation and to look in a measured and informed way at tightening up the legislation. I intend to work with my Home Office colleagues on protecting communities, not picking at the constitution.

I move amendment S2M-2622.2, to leave out from "notes with concern" to end and insert:

"extends its sympathies to those affected by recent tragedies involving firearms; acknowledges that following the Dunblane tragedy in 1996 UK governments have considerably tightened firearms legislation so that the UK now has some of the toughest firearms laws in the world; welcomes additional action taken by the Scottish Executive to encourage people to hand in air weapons to the police; reaffirms the benefits of a UK-wide legal framework and system of gun control, and supports the Executive in its continuing engagement with the UK Government on the current wide-ranging and comprehensive review of firearms provisions."

09:44

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): It is inevitable that, in a debate of this nature, attention is focused on the recent tragedy of the death of two-year-old Andrew Morton. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family. Any loss of life is a terrible waste, but it is particularly poignant when the victim is so young, as that little boy was.

Unlike the Scottish nationalists, I firmly believe that it is important that firearms legislation remains

the responsibility of Westminster, and the minister has eloquently articulated the reasons why there is much to commend in that approach. Gun control is a serious issue and I believe that it is best served by there being a uniform approach throughout the United Kingdom, although I concede that there are practical differences to be found between Scotland and England.

Thankfully, we have not seen the surge in gun crime and gang warfare that has been witnessed in England. In the past week alone, we have seen four men convicted of the shootings of Letisha Shakespeare and Charlene Ellis, which occurred last new year, as well as the conviction of Peter Williams for the murder of the jeweller Marian Bates. Gun crime, involving both banned and legal guns, has doubled in England since 1997. I am pleased to note that that trend has not been replicated in Scotland, and I think that we should be prepared to speak about that, as it highlights the fact that firearms legislation, which applies equally north and south of the border, cannot guarantee a consistent response. Although Scotland has not seen the surge in gun crime that has taken place south of the border, that is not to say that there is room for complacency. On the contrary, despite the introduction of the handgun legislation at Westminster, there continues to be handgun-related crime in Scotland. I draw members' attention to the fact that, tragically, since 1998 there have been 259 murders, attempted murders and robberies involving pistols and revolvers, the vast majority of that category of weaponry being banned. Sadly, banning those guns did not prevent those crimes from occurring. Indeed, there have been more crimes of that type involving pistols and revolvers, which are largely banned, than crimes of that type involving air-guns.

What it is vital to remember, and what those statistics demonstrate, is that bans and legislation do not on their own prevent tragedies and crimes from occurring. In Scotland today, drink-driving is banned, but in 2003 more than 11,000 drink-driving offences were recorded. Drugs are outlawed, yet we have a growing drugs problem. Last year, almost 1 million crimes and offences were committed in Scotland—all incidents in which the perpetrator broke the law. Legislation alone will not prevent individuals who are intent on breaking the law from breaking the law.

In tandem with the law, we also need a robust enforcement regime. That means that we must have police out and about in our communities deterring and detecting crime. I know that the minister is now persuaded of the wisdom of what has been happening in New York, where crime fell dramatically when a zero-tolerance approach to crime was adopted, along with an increase in the police presence on the streets. Low-level crime

and antisocial behaviour cannot be tolerated. Whether they involve broken windows or attacks on firemen carrying out their lawful duty, such offences are simply not acceptable. However, if they go unchecked, they create a breeding ground for more serious crime. What we need at the moment is not so much more law as more police officers on our streets. I know that the Executive disputes the statistics, but how can the 140 police officers who are on our streets at any one time possibly achieve the required community coverage? Mr Henry disputed those statistics, but I refer ministers to their own document, "Narrowing the Gap".

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will Annabel Goldie give way?

Miss Goldie: I am very short of time. Do I have enough time, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: It is your call, Miss Goldie. You have about a minute and a half.

Miss Goldie: I think that I would rather expand on my point than take an intervention from Mr McFee.

It is important that we also have a wider justice system to back up our police and communities. I have taken issue with the Executive on the recent announcement about potential criminals being allowed to pay fiscal penalties. I think that that is wiping the slate clean, so that the offenders have no record and no conviction, and even if they are prosecuted and sent to jail they may be released after as little as a quarter of their sentence. Such policies do not assist in deterring crime; they merely reinforce the fear of crime among the law abiding and they strike at the credibility of the criminal justice system. That is why my party is pledged to ending automatic early release and to ensuring that we have the necessary prison capacity to protect our communities from continual law breakers.

However, Presiding Officer, I have listened to the minister's speech and have had the opportunity to study the text of her amendment, which, in the circumstances, I am prepared to support. Therefore, I will not move the amendment in my name.

09:50

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I have to say that my heart sank when I read the motion, which effectively seeks to make a constitutional issue out of a tragedy.

I cannot honestly state how I would react to a son of mine being killed, nor could I offer any words of consolation to any family that loses a loved one who is killed following shots from an air-

gun—such words would be wholly insufficient. However, I understand that the family wants to ensure that no one else goes through such a horror. Therefore, the issue for this Parliament as well as for the UK Parliament is how we react.

It might be of little consolation to victims of crime, although I hope that it is a consolation to society, that the number of crimes involving firearms fell by almost 10 per cent in 2003. However, air-guns accounted for 43 per cent of all offences involving a firearm. That is a rise of 25 per cent since 2002, from 331 incidents to 415. However, that figure should be seen against a decline over the period since 1989, from 1006 offences with an air-gun in 1989 to 415 in 2003. The fall in the number of air-gun offences is more marked than that for all firearms offences.

Is it the prevalence of the air-gun or the behaviour of the owner that should concern us most? In the UK in 2003, there were 1.3 million shotguns and 671 recorded crimes that involved a shotgun. Air-gun offences in 2003 were nearly 20 times that of shotgun offences: there were four shotgun offences in 2003, in comparison with more than 100 that related to air-guns.

Why are air-guns so prevalent in urban areas in Scotland and why has it been so acceptable for people to have air-guns when they have little need to control vermin? Air-guns are not toys, although I would be hypocritical if I said that I had not used one almost as a toy when I was younger. My dad had two air-guns, which we used for target practice out in the country. He looked after them and never gave any thought to the possibility that they could be used to attack other people. The use of air-guns routinely to fire at the emergency services, at people walking down the street or at people's animals or pets is disgusting and is rightly illegal.

The increase in the use of air-guns in that way is matched by the increase in the number of people who carry knives or use glass bottles as weapons. Why some sections of our society are more inclined to violence or conflict is a serious issue that the Parliament needs to address urgently because the age profile of such offenders is getting younger. In 2003, 195 air-weapon offences were cleared up by the police. Of those 195, the age of the main accused in 76 cases was 15 or under. In a further 74 cases, the main accused were aged 16 to 20, and in only 45 cases were the main accused aged 21 or over.

Mr McFee: Does the member accept that when someone applies for a shotgun or firearm licence they are required to demonstrate that they can securely store their rifle? If that same certification was required for air rifles they would not fall into the hands of 10, 12 and 15-year olds in the way that he alluded to.

Jeremy Purvis: I am sure that the member has read the consultation paper by the Home Office, which asks that exact question. The issue is being considered by a Parliament—just not the Scottish Parliament. That does not negate the fact that the Scottish Parliament is being consulted with regard to changing the law.

The consultation also considers the definitions, ownership, certification and potential banning of some other types of guns and addresses codifying in law lethal weapons, which are not currently defined. As has been said, any death that relates to air-guns is unacceptable and is one too many. Thankfully, there have been only two such incidents since 1989 in Scotland.

Liberal Democrats have supported moves to set up a national firearms register and have also supported the UK Government's moves last year to create the new offence of carrying a replica firearm or an air-gun in public and to ban gas cartridge weapons.

Although we are concerned about the use of replica weapons by criminals, we share the Government's view that a total ban of some of those would be unworkable. Nevertheless, we would support steps to restrict availability by licensing outlets and banning internet sales. We support the recommendations by the all-party parliamentary group at Westminster, which found a strong case for more restrictions on replica weapons.

I have difficulty in accepting that there would not be very considerable problems with having separate firearms regulations and penalties in England and Scotland.

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

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

Jeremy Purvis: The member will forgive me.

SNP members sincerely argue for independence, but I hope that they can see the argument that, until their dream is realised, there are strong arguments for a common approach to be taken to some issues within the United Kingdom—as, indeed, Mr MacAskill indicated. Better co-ordination within the UK among police forces, local authorities and others is needed.

We are not complacent. When a schoolchild in the USA murders his grandparents, goes to school and murders his classmates and then turns the gun on himself, the impact is felt not only in the USA but around the world; that is also the case when a young child is killed in Scotland. We have serious questions to ask, not of the constitution but of the law, our society and, increasingly, ourselves.

09:55

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I add my own words of condolence and concern for the family of the victim, Andrew Morton, in Craigend.

As Jeremy Purvis alluded to, we must consider the global context of the use of weapons. The tragic incident in Minnesota involving Jeff Weise has reminded us of the even more disturbing Columbine incident a few years ago. In Scotland, it puts us in mind of the massacre that took place in Dunblane. Time after time we express our grief and our shock after such incidents, yet guns remain on display and on sale across Scotland.

As the Executive has announced in respect of sporting knives, guns are not all used for legitimate purposes. Even those that are used for innocent target practice—as Jeremy Purvis told us—can end up falling into the wrong hands or their use can result in tragic accidents.

I share some of Cathy Jamieson's reaction to the SNP motion. It is sad that a clearer motion has not been lodged. The motion does not call for tighter regulation; it calls for devolved regulation. Members know very well that I support the bringing of those powers to Scotland, but I wish that we were debating a call for tighter regulation rather than one for devolved regulation.

I am also unclear about what the motion means when it refers to

“the distinct nature of the gun problem in Scotland”.

We should look at not only the types of weapons but the number of recorded offences. The proportion of incidents in which different types of weapons are used may vary between Scotland and England, but the number of recorded firearms offences in Scotland has been coming down, while in England and Wales the figure for many of those offences has been going up. Air weapons are not a new phenomenon and they are not distinctively Scottish. Figures from the Gun Control Network show that in the past four months alone, 47 incidents involving the use of air weapons have been recorded. Four of those were in Scotland; the rest were all in England or Wales.

There is a case for saying that the problem in Scotland is not distinct, but I would not move on from that to say that we should therefore leave the powers to deal with it at Westminster. I want those powers to be brought to Scotland, but I am not sure that the motion clearly states what we would do with them once we got them.

There is much to support in the Executive amendment, but I hope that what I perceive to be a contradiction at the end of the amendment can be explained. The amendment mentions the benefits of having tighter regulation than neighbouring countries have, but states that

shared arrangements between Scotland and the rest of the UK are an advantage. If loopholes can be exploited, why would differences in regulation between Scotland and England be more open to exploitation or abuse than differences in regulation between the UK and France or France and Germany? I say to the Executive that I am open to persuasion on its argument, which I will listen to in the minister's closing speech, but the issue should be addressed.

As for the Conservative amendment, I have to say that words fail me when I consider the behaviour of the Conservative party since the events at Craigend. There seems to have been a calculated insult from Michael Howard to the Morton family, to their community and to the people who were touched by the Dunblane massacre. To tell a grieving family that the problem is one of too much gun control beggars belief.

The Justice Department is not the only department that should do something about the matter. We need young people to grow up in a society that gives them hope and a sense of purpose and which fosters their ability to resolve conflicts without violence. It may be that the Education Department and the Development Department, which has responsibility for communities, have more to say on the subject that does the Justice Department alone.

10:00

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I declare an interest, as my husband is a partner in a pest control firm and as such is subject to legislation on the control of firearms.

I extend my sympathies to the parents and relatives of Andrew Morton and to all who have suffered from the indiscriminate use of firearms. I agree that there must not be a knee-jerk reaction to this tragic case, but it is difficult not to be emotional when the life of a two-year-old child has been lost. I completely understand the anger and frustration of Andrew Morton's family.

I welcome the amnesty that has been introduced by the Minister for Justice, which has already seen a number of air-guns handed in. However, 55 out of an estimated 0.5 million is only 0.1 per cent. We must do much more to prevent another tragedy from happening. That is why we need to consider introducing an all-encompassing registration system, which would deal with what some see as an unfortunate macho culture in Scotland.

On the Tory and Labour amendments, I recognise that there has been a tightening of legislation at Westminster, but one-size-fits-all legislation cannot possibly work for the type of firearms that can be obtained in Scotland. Recent

legislation has raised the age at which people can acquire firearms, but let us not forget that the age of the alleged perpetrator of the crime against Andrew Morton was well above any limit that has been set. The minister and Jeremy Purvis mentioned the dangers of Scotland having different legislation from England but if Scotland needs separate and different legislation, surely it is our duty as a Parliament to realise that and introduce it.

We must realise that as air-guns get older, they become much more dangerous. Their springs become worn and the guns become more dangerous and powerful. In fact, some are as powerful as 0.22 rifles. We must get it across to people that air-guns are not toys but lethal weapons. Perhaps an educational campaign would make people aware of that.

The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland believes that there are 500,000 air-guns in Scotland, but we need to know exactly how many are in circulation. We also need to know about the weapons that are involved in incidents. At the moment, we are working on 2003 figures, but that is not good enough. We need updated figures.

Other issues have to be examined. We have to look at current legislation and stop the indiscriminate sale of air-guns, as Kenny MacAskill said. Members have only to walk through the streets of Glasgow and up to the Barras, as I do most Sundays, and they will see big, powerful air-guns—huge things that look like rifles—for sale in shop windows. Legislation must be introduced to ensure that such weapons cannot be bought over the counter. Firearms should be kept under lock and key and be open to inspection by officers at any time, so the legislation should also ensure that the main key holders are registered with the police, as Bruce McFee said.

In conclusion, our motion calls for powers over firearms to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament in view of tragic happenings, not just recently, but in the past. The Parliament should agree on that. We have to get the police, community groups, the Parliament and other interested parties round the table to discuss the way forward on regulating the use of these lethal and dangerous weapons, which, in the wrong hands, can have grave consequences.

10:03

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): The tragedy in the east end of Glasgow happened in Margaret Curran's constituency, and in an area that I served as a councillor for many years, as I stated in a parliamentary question to the First Minister. The shock and concern of that

community is testimony to how horrified its members are by the events of a few weeks ago. That horror is felt by many other people in Scotland and across the UK. This tragedy follows on from the events in Dunblane nine years ago, and the need to respond to concerns about access to firearms and their misuse by individuals.

The key issue is not the location or the nature of firearms; it is the capacity of individuals to use them, and the fact that we cannot track how people access them. This morning's debate should not be about the constitution. Ultimately, it should be about what we as informed representatives in Scotland can do to minimise the occurrence of events such as those that have taken place in the past few weeks.

Mr MacAskill: Precisely.

Mr McAveety: I hear the word "precisely", and I agree with it, because our debate should be precisely about those issues, not about whether we have full powers or the fact that only certain aspects of the law on the misuse of weapons are devolved to Scotland. The fact that right across the chamber concerns have been raised about the motion will, I hope, lead the SNP to reflect upon it after the debate.

Only two or three months ago I encountered a terrible situation of the potential use of a firearm within the Bridgeton and Gorbals areas, which resulted in the individual concerned being convicted last week. That incident caused substantial fear and alarm in the community. We need to address what it is about our culture that leads to the misuse of firearms, particularly air-guns. For the life of me, I do not know why people need to have air-gun rifles, particularly in urban Scotland. My experience of air-gun rifles is fairly negative. It is argued that the use of such weapons is a harmless bit of fun that perhaps leads to an exhilarating buzz with no consequences, but in some cases their use can be extremely dangerous, or even lethal. That is the reality. Until that reality is acknowledged, we cannot have the debate that we need to have.

Mr MacAskill: The member is correct to point out that there is a problem with the culture. Does he acknowledge that all parties accepted that there is a knife culture in Scotland, that we needed to legislate and that we correctly did so? Why is it correct to legislate against a knife culture, but not against the prevalent gun culture and the use of air weapons, replica weapons and real weapons?

Mr McAveety: No one is arguing that there is no need for legislation. The SNP's claim is that only the Scottish Parliament can legislate, but I disagree profoundly. We can exercise powers here on some aspects of weapon use, but we can also exercise powers through consultation,

discussion and agreement with the Home Office. That is the debate that we need to have. I hope that the debate is about encouraging changes to legislation to address the issues. The Gun Control Network has produced a series of publications on the misuse of air-guns. The funny thing is that they cover Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England, and show that events have occurred throughout the country. It is reasonable to think about ways to address those events.

I am not interested in the country of origin of legislation. That is not the central point. At issue is the legislative framework. What is the legal definition? What is the regulatory framework? Can we move forward? The minister has identified that she wishes to do that. I hope that we can do so, for the sake of future generations. If we do, we will be responding not just to the recent tragedy, but to other events, and hopefully we will put in place a much stronger framework.

10:08

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): I will speak on behalf of my constituents in Strathkelvin and Bearsden, which comprises urban and rural areas. Not long after I was elected, one of the first things that I was involved with was the problem that a farmer was having with people going through his fields when his horses were in foal. I was horrified to find that a foal had been shot and that its terrible injury had become infected. A great deal of care and attention and £1,000 of vet bills later the foal was able to walk, but with a limp.

Recently, we had a tragic accident—if it can be called an accident. The person who shot the little boy, Andrew Morton, happened to be shooting at firemen, who are well protected. Depending on where high velocity projectiles land, they can kill.

When I worked in Springburn, our health centre windows had pellets shot through them, but we never caught the people responsible. Following the incident with the farmer in my constituency, the police were involved and the people responsible were caught. I encouraged the police to do something in schools to help children understand that animals hurt like human beings hurt. Wildlife officers are going a long way towards achieving that.

Windows in a hall in Bishopbriggs are constantly being put in by air-rifle pellets. One of my constituents has installed toughened glass in their windows because they have been put in so many times. However, nobody is caught. My constituents want tight rules and regulations and they want the people who are involved to be caught. We all understand that, no matter what the legislation is and how tight the rules are, people

will get guns. People who shoot guns illegally must be put in custody and taught a lesson. We should consider why people find it funny to pop shots at firemen. This may be cynical, but I wonder whether, in the recent exceedingly tragic incident, the chap would have been caught if he had shot just at firemen and the little boy had not been killed.

We need to catch the wrongdoers. If we do not have enough police to catch them, we are in serious trouble. I have listened to the debate—the most serious point is that we need to tighten up the legislation and make people in our communities feel that it is worth reporting crime, rather than that they have to install toughened glass. People are constantly worried about such incidents, which may not be the most common type of crime, but they happened when I was a child and they still happen, so we are not getting on top of the situation. Windows are being put in and, one day, somebody's eye may be put out—a young child has already been killed.

When I was a child, a young man had an accident when playing with a bow and arrow—one of those canes that people used to play with. He was shooting the cane into the sky for fun to see how far it would go, but it came down and landed in his eye. I have never forgotten that tragedy. That accident affected the person who caused it, but we are talking about people who use guns for some kind of fun. I do not care where it is done, but we must tighten up the legislation and do something about the matter.

10:12

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I remind members of an important point: people outside the Parliament will judge us not by our actions today, nor by what we say, but by what we achieve in delivering a safer Scotland. We should put aside what are, frankly, semantic debates about the SNP motion and the amendments and focus on the core issue of how to deliver improvements in public safety.

A paradox that has intrigued me for a considerable time is that, 30 years ago, the two countries in which I felt safest were the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union—two countries in which the police were not armed. Of course, in one country, the situation was an indication of a submissive, highly controlled population that lived in fear of a draconian Government; in the other, it was the result of a society that had many common purposes and goals.

When my father died some years ago, it came as a great surprise to me to find that he had a blunderbuss in the house. My father was a GP and a patient had apparently given it to him as a

present for a service that he had rendered. The weapon was likely to be more lethal to the user than to anyone at the other end of it, but, as many people who are faced with that circumstance do, I took it to the police at once and told them that I wanted nothing whatever to do with it. That illustrates and builds on Jeremy Purvis's point that the issue is not only the prevalence of air-guns, but the behaviour of those who have weapons of one sort or another.

I welcome the increased attention that is being given to the subject in the Parliament, at Westminster and in Europe. I do not entirely agree with what is going on at Westminster. For example, in the "Control on Firearms" consultation paper, David Blunkett stated:

"We do not believe that licensing of low-powered air guns and imitations, or restrictions on their sale, is proportionate or enforceable."

I disagree—we must do something about that. I say that as someone who used to have the 10-bob licence that people bought at the post office if they wanted to carry an air-gun in public places.

Jeremy Purvis rose—

Stewart Stevenson: Sorry, I do not have time, because the debate is short.

The House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee has stated:

"We recommend that the purchase or sale of any imitation firearm by or to persons under eighteen via telephone, mail order or Internet should be prohibited".

Maybe, but the real issue is that when people buy a weapon, a face-to-face transaction should take place that is predicated on the requirement that the person who receives the weapon must show that they are authorised to have it. We need a debate about how we can achieve that. There is room for further debate on the recommended age limit of 18, given that we give kids access to the lethal weapon with four wheels and a steering wheel at age 17. Similarly, the committee suggested that the

appropriate minimum age for the legal possession of a lethal firearm ... is eighteen".

We need to find a solution that is consistent and immediately understandable.

I welcome the fact that high-energy air-guns are now treated differently from other air-guns. However, with some air-guns it is possible to create a high-energy charge without the projectile containing the charge. Although there are other substantial loopholes in the legislation, the danger comes not from the energy that propels the bullet—be it explosive or compressed air—from the person who holds the gun. Therefore, we must license people, register weapons and inspect their storage. Like other members, SNP members

will welcome legislation and enforcement wherever it comes from, be that the EU, Westminster, the Scottish Parliament or through the actions of local authorities and police forces. However, we will stand condemned if we stand aside and do not take every opportunity to improve safety in Scotland.

10:17

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde (Lab): As members have said, the motion is not entirely without merit. In fact, in places, it approaches a measured attempt at a contribution to what is an important debate. That image is only slightly tarnished by the fact that the SNP chose to publish the motion via the press rather than the *Business Bulletin*.

If, as the motion alleges, the existing legislation is fragmented and unclear, a proper consolidation and clarification exercise must be undertaken. Whether the law needs to be revisited and, if so, how it should be improved are important topics that merit examination. The need for the effective control of firearms is plain. To look ahead to the next debate, it could be argued that, given the global death toll from firearms, they are the real weapon of mass destruction in the world. The issue is too serious to be used as a political football. I find it slightly distasteful that the SNP has chosen the subject as an excuse for its latest synthetic constitutional crisis. I will not say too much about that, because the subject is not fit for party-political knockabout. I merely invite the SNP to reflect on whether citing recent tragedies and implying that one constitutional arrangement rather than another could prevent them might be seen as crass.

The nationalists have not made a case for the claim in the motion that we have a

"distinct ... gun problem in Scotland",

or even that we have a distinct problem in the UK. Given the SNP's fondness for league tables and referring to other countries, I am surprised that it did not come across the fact in the Home Office consultation that firearm homicide rates are worse in Lithuania, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden—the list goes on. Firearms regulation is not like other devolved issues such as health, in relation to which our geography and public health profile mean that we need specific Scottish solutions to particular Scottish problems. The issue is not like education or justice, in which Scotland has distinct systems—guns are just as deadly in Glasgow as they are in Gateshead.

In any event, the important question is not who makes the laws, but their substantive content. Much has been said about tightening the

regulations on air-guns. The Executive is right to work with the Home Office to make them harder to acquire. I also welcome the First Minister's determination to close any loopholes and get air-guns out of circulation. In the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, Westminster rightly increased the minimum age for the possession of an air weapon from 14 to 17 and introduced a new offence of having an unloaded air weapon in a public place without a reasonable excuse.

Of course, we might conclude that we need to go further, but I am sure that any reforms will be something on which the Home Office and the Scottish Executive will work closely in the interests of nothing other than public safety.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): We now come to the closing speeches. John Farquhar Munro, you have four minutes to close for the Liberal Democrats.

10:20

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): As we have heard, people who own and use any type or calibre of firearm have a duty and a personal responsibility to ensure the secure custody and safe use of that weapon. Current firearms legislation has incorporated adequate regulations and control in relation to all legally registered weapons. That legislation is further enhanced by a thoroughly strict vetting of the licence holder's personal character and suitability to hold firearms. I suggest that we already have the appropriate regulations and the appropriate police powers to ensure that those regulations are rigorously enforced by the justice system.

Of course, the problem concerns not legal but illegal weapons and their indiscriminate use. Many of those weapons, as we have heard, seem to have been easily acquired on the internet or through catalogue sales that circumvent the best efforts of the law enforcement agencies in their attempts to curb and control this escalating malaise in our modern society.

Like many others, I was disgusted and shocked to hear of the callous shooting of Andrew Morton and of his death. I am sure that the heart of the Scottish nation was saddened by that cruel event and that our sympathies still rest with the bereaved family.

That particular incident, I understand, was due to the reckless use of an air-gun in a public place. Under existing legislation, that is clearly an unlawful act. Like many others, I am not aware of any information that would indicate whether the incident was the result of a deliberate attempt to harm or of a misdirected pellet. Whatever the intention, however, the result has been devastating for us all.

Air-guns in the wrong hands and in the wrong location are dangerous. There is no doubt that we must review the existing controls on their ownership and, if the law requires, introduce more rigid controls. However, I suggest that we must do that in a way that is fair and is easily enforced and acceptable to all law-abiding firearm users.

In simple terms, I suggest that we attempt to establish a record of all air-gun and air-pistol owners. Those details could be held on a national database and a simple certificate of approval could be given to each approved, registered owner. Like many others, I have no wish to restrict the pleasure of the many legitimate and sensible owners of air-guns and air-pistols because of the mindless actions of a few irresponsible people. Stricter controls would prove difficult, if not impossible, to enforce effectively.

The current firearms legislation contains sufficient powers to ensure that we can control the ownership and use of firearms. I suggest that we should ensure that those controls are effectively applied so that we can rid our streets and communities of the illegally owned firearms.

10:25

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The spirit of this debate has been one of sympathy for the parents of Andrew Morton, the child who was unfortunately killed as the result of the use of an air-gun. It is important that we also put on record the sympathy of the Conservative party for those parents. It is, perhaps, slightly concerning that that spirit was broken by Patrick Harvie, who I believe tried to make some political capital out of the events of last week.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, I will not.

Within almost every party in this chamber, there are members who have experience of the legal culture of firearms that exists in Scotland today, involving people who legitimately hold firearm and shotgun certificates and go about their business properly and responsibly.

The mistake that too many people make—and which, to an extent, the SNP has made today—is to confuse those legally held firearms with the illegally held firearms that are too often used to commit acts of violence or armed robbery. Those are the weapons that we ought to concentrate on primarily. The motion before us is confused and somewhat naive in how it lumps all firearms together.

Earlier, Cathy Jamieson made clear a point that the Conservatives can agree with. She said that legislation is robust, should be dealt with on a UK

basis and that actions taken in this Parliament and recently in the Westminster Parliament cover many of the issues that have spurred the SNP to lodge this motion. Specifically, the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, which has been mentioned by a number of people, created a new offence of possessing an air weapon or imitation weapon in a public place without reasonable excuse. In itself, that should be enough to manage the problem of air-guns and replica weapons. However, we need to ensure that the police are able to implement that law. I believe that the legislation is already suitably robust to enable us to regulate what we describe as legally held firearms and to enable us to begin to take action on the type of weapon that inspired the SNP to lodge the motion that we are debating.

We have heard a number of people, not least Annabel Goldie, talk about the importance of recognising that the situation in Scotland is different from and better than that south of the border. There is no argument that says that legislation based on UK-wide or English experience is likely to be unhelpful or inappropriate in Scotland. In fact, the evidence is that such legislation is likely to be valuable in Scotland and that Scotland's legislative requirements in that regard are no different from those south of the border.

It is my conclusion, therefore, that firearms legislation should continue to be set and administered on a UK-wide basis. That will ensure that we have a consistent understanding of how legally held firearms can be regulated. In the early part of last year, the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 delivered regulations that allow us to pursue the issue of air-guns and replica weapons. That means that we can now proceed against those weapons in such a way as to make those tragedies less common and, hopefully, end them altogether.

As Annabel Goldie said, the points in the Conservative party's amendment are covered adequately by the Executive's amendment, which we will support in the vote later today.

10:29

Cathy Jamieson: If one thing has been clearly shown by this morning's debate it is that the Home Office was right to consult on what is an extremely serious issue. This morning, we have heard a range of opinions and suggestions, which is exactly why the Home Office embarked on a consultation exercise that asked some extremely specific questions. Indeed, the fact that there is such a range of opinions explains why more than 4,000 responses to that consultation have been received. I am not aware that any MSP has sent me a copy of their response to that consultation

exercise, but I would be grateful to receive them and will ensure that, when I am in discussion with my Home Office colleagues, I highlight the particularly Scottish responses and the views of members.

We have heard some thoughtful contributions this morning. Although I criticised the SNP, and Kenny MacAskill in particular, for what I took to be an attempt to deal with the constitution rather than with communities, I have to say that some of the speeches from other members, particularly Stewart Stevenson and Sandra White, highlighted some of the issues that we need to discuss in response to the Home Office consultation.

Annabel Goldie also made a thoughtful contribution. As always, she could not resist the temptation to discuss police numbers, and again I cannot resist the temptation to remind her that we currently have about 1,000 more police officers throughout Scotland. She also mentioned early release, and I remind her again that we are dealing with that and with prison places. However, I welcome some of the comments that she and Alex Johnstone made this morning, which were perhaps, if I may say so, in contrast to those of some of the other members of their political party.

A number of members identified the link between the illegal actions of people who own legal weapons and antisocial behaviour, particularly in urban areas, and several members discussed the need to consider the matter not just from a legislative point of view but in relation to enforcement and education. Jeremy Purvis, Frank McAveety, John Farquhar Munro, Stewart Stevenson, Patrick Harvie and Jean Turner all spoke of the difficulties that communities face and the need to tackle the problem from a number of angles.

I understood the nuance of Patrick Harvie's contribution differently from Alex Johnstone. I may have missed something as I was scribbling my notes, but I thought that his contribution was constructive. He asked a particular question about why we need legislation across the UK, and I thought that Duncan McNeil dealt with that effectively in his contribution. I could not agree more with Patrick Harvie's comment that the education ministers and the communities ministers also need to be involved in the process. It is important for them to be involved as we develop our work.

As I indicated in my opening speech, I will continue to work with the UK Government in the best interests of the Scottish people. We heard a number of comments this morning about the fact that our work has borne fruit when we have been involved in efforts to toughen the law. When we look at the statistics, we can perhaps take no comfort for those who have been involved in

serious incidents involving air weapons, but we have to ensure that we continue the trend of reducing the level of gun crime.

I will comment briefly on the range of options that we heard this morning. Members in all parts of the chamber talked about whether we should ban weapons, whether we should license them, whether we should introduce tougher enforcement measures and how we should deal with the problem. The debate has shown that it would be wrong to take an immediate decision on legislation so soon after a particular tragedy without fully considering all the implications. We owe it to anyone who has lost a loved one or been injured in such circumstances to consider all the circumstances and get the legislation right, as we did after the events in Dunblane. It is my responsibility as Minister for Justice to ensure that I continue to work with the Home Office on that. As I said earlier, if the outcome of the review shows that tighter controls are necessary, I have every confidence that action will be taken in a measured and reasonable way. All options will be looked at; nothing will be ruled in and nothing will be ruled out.

I do not have time to focus on all the contributions that members made to the debate, there was recognition that most people who use weapons, particularly for sporting purposes, do so responsibly. I argue that those people would also back our campaign to ensure that no air weapons fall into the wrong hands. I hope that those people—and indeed everyone in the chamber—will lend their weight to our efforts to stop those who use air weapons to terrorise communities and cause unnecessary fear, damage and injury. We want to ensure that people know and obey the law and that those who do not obey it are caught and punished.

10:34

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):

This is a particularly pertinent debate as it comes in the aftermath of the tragic death of Andrew Morton and in a week in which we have seen in the United States of America the harm that guns can do in a society. I begin by expressing my personal condolences to Andrew Morton's family and the families of the victims of the gun culture that has a grip on the USA.

Unfortunately, the victims in northern Minnesota are not alone, as such incidents seem to be a regular occurrence in America and deaths from guns there run at a rate of more than 30,000 per year. The National Rifle Association and the pro-gun lunatics there have truly taken over the asylum. Fortunately for us, that is not the kind of culture that we have here in Scotland. Indeed, we do not have the gun problems that the south and

midlands of England have. However, we do have gun crime. In addition, we have an increasing problem with the use of replica weapons in crime and, tragically, we have witnessed the fact that air weapons are out there and can kill.

Replica weapons and air weapons can be bought with ease and their use is spreading. The question that we must answer is what we intend to do about the twin problems of replica weapons and air-guns, because having fewer guns means having less gun crime and I believe that that should be our goal. On replica weapons, we have to ask ourselves a number of questions. What is the purpose of owning such an item? What would it be used for? To what innocent purpose could a replica weapon be put? The answer to those questions is that replica weapons serve no purpose and are used more and more often in the committing of crime. Criminals choose them because they are easy to get and when they are pointed at people they have the same effect as real weapons. The problem is that it is impossible for people—even highly trained police officers—to determine whether a gun is real or a replica, except on close inspection. Even if there was an innocent use for replica guns, it makes more sense for our society to stop them being so freely available.

There are indeed legitimate reasons why certain people should have access to certain guns, and a number of speakers mentioned them. Such people include certain highly trained police officers in the course of their duties, farmers for the control of vermin, gamekeepers and stalkers for use in their employment and members of properly licensed clubs. Any guns that are used legitimately need to be tightly controlled, properly secured and used by people who are licensed by the police to do so.

However, there is no reason on earth why members of the public should have access to automatic weapons or handguns and I can see no reason for us to continue to allow unlicensed access to air weapons and replica weapons.

Jeremy Purvis: There was a question on that in the Home Office consultation paper. Did the SNP submit a comment to the consultation, which ran from May until the end of August last year? If so, will it make that available in the Scottish Parliament information centre?

Mr Maxwell: I have to say to Jeremy Purvis—

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): The answer is no.

Mr Maxwell: If Karen Gillon waits a minute, I will give her an answer.

We are debating the issue in the Scottish Parliament. We lodged the motion so that Scotland's representatives could discuss the

matter and agree what action we should take—not to discuss what discussion documents or consultations with the Home Office we get involved in, or what pleading to London we do.

We have heard arguments that we should neither ban nor license air weapons as that is simply too difficult to achieve. If we are to take that defeatist attitude, we might as well pack up and go home. If we are determined as a society to do something, it can be achieved. I believe that the vast majority of the population of Scotland is convinced that we must keep a tight rein on guns and ensure that we have the toughest gun control laws that it is possible to have.

We are lucky in Scotland in that we do not have the madness of the gun lobby, which claims that it is a civil or even a human right to own or even to carry weapons. It is not an infringement of someone's human rights that we deny them the right to own an Uzi submachine-gun, nor is it someone's civil right to carry a handgun. Some people claim that guns do not kill people and that it is people who kill people. Of course, that is true as far as it goes, but the reality is that it is people with guns who kill people. People with guns kill more people per incident and they kill more efficiently, effectively and quickly.

The owning and carrying of weapons must be strictly controlled irrespective of the type of weapon, and of course we must stop the carrying of knives—as discussed by a number of members, including the Minister for Justice—but equally we must deal with the twin problems of replica weapons and air weapons. The difficulty is that we do not have the power to deal with firearms. Instead of dealing with the problem, we must plead with London and hope that it will do us the favour of legislating for us.

Cathy Jamieson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Maxwell: No. While we wait, the problem grows and nothing is done to stop it. I say for Duncan McNeil's benefit that it is not us who are hiding behind the constitution or using the constitution; it is the Labour-led Executive that is hiding behind the constitution in order to do nothing.

Mr McAveety: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Maxwell: No, sorry. I do not have time.

The USA, the south of England and Scotland all have their own differing problems, each of which needs its own solution. However, Scotland's Parliament cannot act in defence of Scotland's people. If we had the powers to do so, we would not hesitate to consolidate legislation on firearms and, at the same time, deal with the problems of

replica and air weapons, but our hands are tied and we are at the mercy of the UK Government.

I have no doubt that if this Parliament had power over all offensive weapons, not just knives and swords, the overwhelming majority of people would welcome the introduction of an all-encompassing firearms bill. I do not remember members of the Executive parties or the Tory party arguing that we should not legislate on knives because doing so would create differences, loopholes or problems. What is wrong with strengthening the law in Scotland on firearms, as we did with the law on knives and other blades? It is perfectly correct that we should do so, because our primary duty is to protect the people of Scotland. If we introduced an all-encompassing firearms bill, it would bring together in one piece of legislation the plethora of laws and regulations that relate to firearms and would allow us simultaneously to tackle the problems of replica and air weapons.

We should unite in stating clearly that we want to tackle the issue. The only way that we can ensure that it is tackled is for the Parliament to have the necessary powers to do it and for us to act. We cannot ensure that London will do so; we wait and hope. I urge members to support the motion in Kenny MacAskill's name.

Nuclear Weapons

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2640, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on nuclear weapons.

10:42

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): We should be clear that this debate is about Britain's very own weapons of mass destruction, which are paid for by you and me, Presiding Officer, and indeed by the taxes of everyone in the chamber. How do they differ from other WMDs? For a start, they are easily verifiable and they are not difficult to locate. A team of United Nations inspectors would have little difficulty in tracking them down and, at the end of their search, the world would know what it already knows: that Britain, unlike some other countries, has WMDs. Let us not pretend that we are talking about anything other than WMDs.

We have moved on from the days of the arms race and the madness of mutually assured destruction, but the facts about nuclear weapons have not changed. Every single Trident warhead has seven times the destructive power of the bomb that devastated Hiroshima in 1945, killing 140,000 and leaving a legacy that continued to kill for generations.

The moral argument against nuclear weapons remains as strong as ever—indeed, I believe that it has been strengthened. We are no longer in a situation where two power blocs strive to cancel each other out while fingers are poised twitchily over the nuclear trigger. Instead, a group of countries in the nuclear club are insisting that they and only they are responsible enough to have nuclear weapons. The door has been locked and nobody else is to join the club. Anyone who attempts to do so is slapped down and told not to be a naughty boy, unless of course they are a friend of the United States, in which case their actions are overlooked. That is international arrogance of the highest order and a case of “do as I say, not as I do”.

The country that tried most recently to join the nuclear club is North Korea. The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, stated clearly that North Korea is risking further world isolation. She said:

“there needs to be no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula in order to maintain stability in that region.”

That somewhat begs the question why, if nuclear weapons are not okay for the Korean peninsula, they are okay for the Cowal peninsula. I do not accept the argument.

There are safety issues with our current system. We know that there have been eight incidents on

the jetty at Coulport, where nuclear warheads are loaded on to Trident submarines, which have resulted in the emergency services being called. We know that Scottish local authorities and the Scottish Executive are not included in risk assessment exercises on the transportation of nuclear materials through places such as Glasgow. The Ministry of Defence will not tell us what the most recent risk assessment exercise, which was carried out in January 2005, had to say. That is unacceptable. It is clear that there are safety issues that we should be addressing in the Parliament.

On the legal side of things, our possession of weapons of mass destruction is in flagrant disregard of international law. In 1996, the International Court of Justice ruled:

“the threat of use of nuclear weapons would be generally contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law”—

but hey, why should that apply to the United Kingdom?

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I take Roseanna Cunningham back to what she said about North Korea and ask her one simple question: does she believe in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons?

Roseanna Cunningham: I believe that no country should have nuclear weapons and that those that do should be setting an example to ensure that others do not decide to take that road.

If the moral and legal arguments will not sway members, they should consider the finances involved. Apart from being objectionable because of the evil that it has the potential to do, Trident has been a costly white elephant and I have no reason to believe that any replacement system would be any different. Over the 10 to 12 years of its operational life, Trident will have cost the UK taxpayer £15 billion, the cost of replacing the system will be upwards of £20 billion and it costs something in the region of £1 billion a year to run. If we do not ditch it now, Scotland's share of the money blown on a replacement for it would be in the region of £3 billion over 10 years, at an annual cost of £300 million. I do not believe that Scotland can afford to spend its money on that.

Compare all that to the cost of retaining Scotland's historic infantry regiments—the MOD expects to save only a few million pounds by disbanding them—not to mention what those vast sums could have meant for schools or hospitals.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The member says that she wants to keep the Scottish regiments and yet at the same time she wants to disband the British Army. How can she square that?

Roseanna Cunningham: Like most modern west European states, an independent Scotland would have its own defence forces—we have never said any different—which would include the continued existence of the historic regiments of Scotland.

I turn to the three amendments. The Green amendment would be a useful addition to the motion and we are happy to accept it. I have to characterise the amendment in Robert Brown's name as typical Liberal Democrat weaselspeak. I am trying to work out from it whether the Liberal Democrats are for or against Trident, but it is impossible to do so—I look forward to an explanation. Scott Barrie's amendment is profoundly confused. He was obviously never on any of the anti-nuclear marches that I was on, which is a pity, because I had thought that more members had been on such marches. If he is so keen to debate the reserved matter of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, I suggest that he persuade his ministers to introduce a debate on it in Executive time. The Scottish National Party will be well up for such a debate.

I make no apology for debating nuclear weapons in the Scottish Parliament. I do not deny that the subject matter is outwith the Parliament's current competence, but we have debated such issues before and we will do so again. It is an issue of huge importance to Scotland and we are Scotland's voice. We must be heard. There is a UK general election in the offing and voters will have the opportunity to vote for a party that is committed to delivering an independent, nuclear-free Scotland. I hope that they take that option. Until then, the debate must go on and must influence that decision. I doubt that Scots want the son-of-Trident programme any more than they wanted Trident in the first place—a fact that tends to be glossed over by members of the Executive parties.

Only three months ago, the Parliament passed a motion that condemned the amalgamation of Scotland's infantry regiments. The money that Trident costs Scotland every year could save the Black Watch and the rest of the Scottish regiments. I want Labour and Liberal Democrat members individually to look to their consciences as they consider how to vote this afternoon. This is not an issue on which the partnership agreement takes a stand and the Parliament is not going to pass legislation on it. I know that many members have a long-standing commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament, and some of us have been on the same demonstrations together down the years. Today, the Parliament has the opportunity to keep faith with those principles by supporting the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament is opposed to the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Scotland; believes that the existing Trident nuclear system which costs almost £1 billion annually to keep in operation should be scrapped; recognises that a decision on the replacement of Trident will require to be taken within the next UK Parliament; further recognises that the cost of replacing Trident would be over £20 billion, and wishes to register strong opposition to any proposal by Her Majesty's Government to procure a replacement for the Trident nuclear system.

10:51

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): There are few people—none in the chamber, I hope—who would support a proliferation of nuclear weapons, although the issue of nuclear deterrence remains controversial and complex. Ms Cunningham said that she never saw me on any marches, but I never saw her on any marches either; perhaps we were on different marches. I assure her that I was on marches in the early 1980s.

Many people argue that the conditions for complete nuclear disarmament do not yet exist; others claim that a lead must be taken. However, most people agree that the goal should be non-proliferation, arms control and a path to the reduction in number of nuclear weapons. Deterrence, arms control and non-proliferation are critically important to Britain's security in an increasingly interdependent world, and the ultimate goal must be the global elimination of nuclear weapons, as my amendment acknowledges.

Ms Cunningham's motion, on behalf of the SNP, says nothing of the sort. It opposes weapons of mass destruction in Scotland but says nothing about such weapons elsewhere. It gives the impression that we do not want them here but we do not care about anyone else. The motion criticises Trident but says nothing about whether the money that would be saved should be spent on alternative defence projects or—as is more likely—no defence projects at all. It is on the issue of defence projects that I wish to concentrate.

Roseanna Cunningham: I am astonished at Mr Barrie's comments. He does not want us to debate the reserved matter of UK weapons, yet he somehow thinks that we should debate matters that pertain to entirely different countries. He needs to question his logic on the issue.

Scott Barrie: If Roseanna Cunningham and her colleagues listen carefully to what I am going to say about SNP logic regarding defence jobs in Fife, they will agree that that is what we should be talking about.

From previous questions and debates, we know that the SNP holds a self-contradictory position on

defence and says some things differently in some parts of Scotland from what it says nationally. Some may say that its position is not just self-contradictory but hypocritical. Only last week, Margaret Ewing questioned the First Minister about the economic impact of Ministry of Defence cuts at RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Kinloss in her constituency. She was right to do so, and I would have expected nothing less from such an assiduous constituency member. However, where would those bases—and RAF Leuchars, in Fife—be in an independent Scotland? The critical mass would not exist to secure those bases and an independent Scottish air squadron. The SNP should be big enough or honest enough to admit that.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I thank Scott Barrie for his kind comment about my work for Moray. Does he believe that the Ministry of Defence should increase its defence procurement budget in Scotland beyond the 6 per cent that is currently allocated, which is way below the level that it should be at?

Scott Barrie: Defence procurement and defence jobs are the very issues on which I will concentrate the rest of my speech.

On the subject of MOD spending, I turn to our navy. I am sure that, later in the debate, Jackie Baillie, the local member for Faslane, will highlight the contribution that the base there makes. However, I want to talk about Rosyth dockyard, in my constituency. On Monday, the leader of the SNP called for a cross-party campaign to save jobs at Rosyth. Although I suppose that his belated concern for the situation at Rosyth should be welcomed, let us get a few facts straight. Where was Alex Salmond, in his first incarnation as the SNP leader, when the dockyard trade unions, local Labour MPs Gordon Brown and Rachel Squire, and Labour councillors on Dunfermline District Council and Fife Regional Council were fighting to secure the Trident refitting contract in the early 1990s? He was nowhere to be seen, and not just because there were no votes to be won on the issue in Banff and Buchan. Much as the SNP is now trying to make political capital out of the job difficulties at Babcock Rosyth Defence, the main—indeed, the only—cause of the run-down of employment at the dockyard, was the cynical award of the refitting contract to Devonport Royal Dockyard by the previous Tory Government, not on the basis of best value or economic grounds, but purely in a failed attempt to hold on to Tory seats in south-west England.

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

Scott Barrie: No. I have taken enough interventions.

As we knew then, and as we see from today's motion, the SNP does not believe in Trident. Even if we had won the campaign to have the refitting take place at Rosyth, the SNP would have cut the jobs there anyway. The Tories took our jobs away, but the SNP would also have taken our jobs away. It would have made no difference to the people of Fife which of them was in government. Let us have no crocodile tears, feigned sympathy or members' motions; the SNP would have betrayed Rosyth exactly as the Tories did.

Often, in parliamentary debates, SNP members claim to be internationalist yet, when it comes to defence, they display the worst aspects of any little Englander approach. They want us out of NATO; they want to deny our international defence commitments; and they would hide behind the skirts of the rest of the western world but promise nothing in return. SNP members should not complain—as they will in today's debate—about the UK Government's defence policy without at least giving us a glimpse of theirs. What would happen to the 7,000 jobs that are connected with Faslane? What would be the future work at Rosyth? Refitting a couple of fisheries protection vessels is not going to hold on to the jobs there. Those are questions to which my constituents want answers. Rather than discuss a hypothetical decision that might be taken by some Government at some point in the future, perhaps SNP members could answer those questions.

I move amendment S2M-2640.4, to leave out from "is opposed" to end and insert:

"acknowledges that defence and national security are matters reserved to the UK Parliament and acknowledges, in the words of the Government's Strategic Defence Review, "the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons"; welcomes the many moves taken to reduce the number of weapons in the world including UK support for the convention to ban anti-personnel landmines, end-user certificates and other restrictions on the arms trade and the significant reductions in the UK's nuclear weapons stockpile; notes the position of the Scottish National Party, in favour of withdrawal from the United Kingdom and NATO; recognises that withdrawal from the United Kingdom and from NATO would put at risk 25,000 direct MoD jobs in Scotland, 6,000 more dependent on MoD contracts and 12,000 more jobs supported by the military presence, and notes that between 2000 and 2004 the MoD placed 2,500 contracts in Scotland worth around £2 billion, all of which would be at risk under the SNP."

10:57

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I am grateful to the SNP for raising this issue for debate. However, it is a strange motion to put before the Scottish Parliament at this time. As Scots and as citizens of the United Kingdom, we all have an interest in the United Kingdom's defence and foreign policy actions. The security of the realm and its people is, after all, the first duty of any Government. Nevertheless, defence is a matter that is reserved

to Westminster and the Scottish Parliament therefore has no functional responsibility for defence.

More important, no decision is currently being made by Westminster about Trident, nor is one imminent. It is not the subject of current debate and there is no specific international opportunity at present to push the cause of disarmament. Indeed, the world is probably as dangerous a place as it has ever been, partly because of the short-sighted decision of the United States and the United Kingdom to wage war in Iraq without UN sanction or a sustainable *casus belli*.

Above all, there are issues about the proliferation of nuclear weapons that affect Israel, India, Pakistan and the unpredictable rogue state of North Korea. The unilateral scrapping of the United Kingdom's remaining nuclear weapons—the four Trident submarines—would not make the world one iota safer and might well make it more dangerous. Liberal Democrats yield nothing to others in wanting a nuclear-free world in which the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent, among others, is scrapped. However, that must be done as part of an international agreement that contains an effective mechanism to discipline rogue states. That is something that the SNP must address.

The United Kingdom's Trident force is not a threat to world peace, nor is it an urgent issue today. The situation in North Korea and Iran is an urgent issue; the presence of two nuclear states on the Indian subcontinent is an urgent issue; and the nuclear arms that are possessed by Israel, the focus of the middle east cauldron, are an urgent issue. When it is boiled down—Scott Barrie touched on this—the SNP's proposition seems to amount to the idea that we cannot do anything about those places, so everybody else should give up their nuclear weapons. That is not a sustainable, practical policy in the current state of the world.

The reason why the SNP is raising the issue today has nothing to do with Trident but has to do with two things, both arising from the forthcoming general election. The first is the need to secure the party's left flank against the Scottish Socialist Party and the black-and-white mirror world that the socialists inhabit. The other is the need to secure the party's right flank against the problem that its manifesto costings do not add up. It will be disappointed because scrapping Trident would save the UK £687 million per year, which represents about £60 million in Scotland. That would hardly fund the cost of replacing the investment in the local economy of West Dunbartonshire that the Faslane base that employs 5,000 people provides, far less the yawning funding gap in the rest of the SNP's policy. That is the valid point.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Robert Brown will be aware that the Secretary of State for Defence said recently that after the UK elections, a decision will be taken on a successor to Trident. Is it Robert Brown's view that the UK Government should commission a successor to Trident?

Robert Brown: I will deal with that question in a moment because I was going to move on to that subject.

Up to 40 countries across the globe have the capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons. Fortunately, most have taken a positive decision not to do so. Some take the opposite view and others have manufactured nuclear weapons in secret. Thanks to Mordechai Vanunu, the rector of the University of Glasgow, and others like him, we know that Israel is one of those nations.

The key to progress is the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which requires sustained international efforts to maintain and progress, and which is the subject of an important review conference in May. No doubt the subject at issue will include those states that have not signed up to the non-proliferation treaty.

Let there be no doubt in the chamber that those countries will not be influenced in the slightest by a unilateral decision by Britain. However, it is important that the nuclear non-proliferation treaty exists against a background of commitment by the established nuclear powers to disarmament. That is why the Liberal Democrat amendment, unlike that of Labour, is committed to a multilateral nuclear disarmament process and not just a general futuristic objective. That process should involve building on the comprehensive test ban treaty, the non-proliferation treaty and supporting a nuclear weapons convention.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Does the member acknowledge that the UK Government has not delivered on the non-proliferation treaty and that that is why rogue states such as Korea want to arm? Because we have not made reductions, we have not made the argument for the NPT.

Robert Brown: That is a bizarre argument, which seems to be saying that because other states have not signed up or agreed to the non-proliferation treaty, we should get rid of Britain's nuclear weapons.

Trident has been designed for a 30-year deployment. HMS Vengeance was ordered in 1992 at a cost of £550 million and the other submarines incurred similar costs. Rightly or wrongly, that money has been spent, as has the £13 billion for the Trident system. That argument is over for the time being and a decision on a replacement will not have to be made until the end

of the decade or possibly later if they are kept in service for as long as the prefab houses of old were.

Liberal Democrat instincts on issues of defence and foreign policy are usually sound. They are certainly sounder than those of the Labour Government on Iraq and a good deal sounder than those of the dithering and opportunistic Conservatives. We take the view that no effective case for a successor has been made, but the decision is one for another place and another time.

I do not doubt the sincerity of individuals' beliefs on this very difficult subject. However, I question the SNP's role in the chamber. It is the main Opposition party. Its primary role is to hold the Executive to account and it does not do that very well. Every time it brings to the chamber a debate on a reserved issue, as it does all the time, it demonstrates its irrelevance here, and we already know that it is irrelevant at Westminster.

On Trident and nuclear disarmament, I commend the Liberal Democrat amendment to the chamber. I move amendment S2M-2640.2, to leave out from "is opposed" to end and insert:

"believes that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is central to nuclear weapons control; supports the universal ratification of, and adherence to, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; regrets that technology in the production of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, continues to advance and to proliferate around the globe; supports the retention, against this background, of Britain's nuclear deterrent until real progress can be made on the multilateral elimination of nuclear weapons; believes that for nuclear non-proliferation and weapons reduction to be achieved, nuclear-armed countries such as Britain must be willing to participate in any disarmament process; believes that a decision to commit any research or other funding for the preparation of any successor to Trident must be first approved by the Westminster Parliament and that no effective case for a successor to Trident has yet been made, and calls on the UK Government to press for a nuclear weapons convention to formalise the commitment of all nuclear weapon states to nuclear disarmament."

11:04

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): There are two groups in this Parliament. There is the Lib-Lab-Con party, which is in favour of Trident, and there is everyone else, who represent the 85 per cent of Scots who say that they oppose nuclear weapons on our soil.

In 1996, the International Court of Justice advised that

"the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law".

In other words, it would be contrary to the Geneva convention, the declaration of St Petersburg and the Hague convention. Trident was useless in the Falklands fiasco, in Bosnia and in our attack on Iraq. Indeed, the high cost of Trident has damaged

our conventional capabilities. It does not provide security; it simply gives terrorists a target.

Remember the hundreds of thousands of pounds-worth of damage that was caused by three elderly ladies with a pair of bolt cutters a few years ago. How safe would Coulport be against a well-equipped terrorist? Nuclear convoys that supply Trident suffer accidents in most years and are vulnerable to terrorist attack. There were five accidents on the Firth of Clyde alone in the years between 1973 and 1987. That risk is not worth continuing with.

The United Nations has ruled that the use of depleted uranium coated weapons breaches the Geneva convention and the genocide convention. Two thousand tonnes of depleted uranium were dropped on Iraq in the recent attacks; that is 2,000 tonnes of radioactive dust. However, there are not just moral and legal imperatives against using depleted uranium. The MOD has fired more than 6,000 DU rounds into the Solway firth. We are told that that is safe, but this week, phosphorous shells were found washed up on the beaches of the Solway. The shells are almost certainly from the arms dumps in the Solway or Beaufort's Dyke where, we were told by the MOD 50 years ago, they would lie safely for the rest of time. Children play on those beaches, which are some of the best sandy beaches in Scotland. We must stop viewing the sea as a military dump. The weapons that were washed up on the beaches this week are proof positive that the haphazard firing of depleted uranium shells into the sea is not safe.

Article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which has been mentioned before, imposes on us an obligation to take

"effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament".

We need urgently to give the world a lead. Under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the non-nuclear powers promise not to obtain nuclear weapons as long as the nuclear powers take steps to disarm. India, Pakistan and Israel have refused to sign because they see no evidence of the nuclear powers disarming. Two years ago, North Korea withdrew from the NPT for the same reason. How can we argue with those countries that they should stay non-nuclear when we are taking no steps to disarm and, indeed, are considering a new generation of weapons? As we have heard, the Government has announced that it is doing that and it will make a decision in the next two or three years.

The treaty is floundering. We need urgent action from the Westminster Government and the Executive to help to ensure that the ratification meeting in May is a success. Trident has not persuaded one single country to reduce its nuclear

arsenal. Scotland should take the lead in this—we must do it for economic reasons and we should do it for our safety and for moral reasons. Most of all, we should take a lead for the sake of the entire world.

I move amendment S2M-2640.3, to insert after “£20 billion”

“; notes that communities and the environment across Scotland are endangered by nuclear convoys, by the dismantling of nuclear submarines at Rosyth and the testing of depleted uranium shells at Dundrennan; furthermore calls on Her Majesty’s Government to honour its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,”

11:08

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Once again, the SNP has chosen not to use its time to debate health, housing, council tax, pensions, the deprivation in parts of Scotland’s cities or the difficulties that are faced by those in remote rural areas. Instead, it has decided to debate nuclear weapons, an issue on which this Parliament cannot make a decision. I am disappointed that my amendment concerning navy and civilian workers at Faslane was not accepted.

With the greatest respect to Roseanna Cunningham, I am baffled that the SNP wants to debate the future of Trident when, by doing so, it only draws attention to its muddled and irrational defence policy. Fortunately, the SNP’s wish to scrap Trident could not be implemented unless it won a majority at Westminster, which is unlikely. Trident has been the cornerstone of Britain’s worldwide defence policy, and it has played an enormous part in keeping the peace and providing security for this country. Trident has been a very successful deterrent against invaders or would-be conquerors.

We cannot talk about this subject in a Scotland-only context. I cannot see the UK scrapping Trident, but if Scotland were to become independent and the SNP did scrap it, there would be serious consequences for Scotland and many other nations.

Richard Lochhead: The member attacks the SNP for choosing a reserved issue for debate. If his party does not believe in debating reserved issues, why did it choose to debate nuclear energy during its debating time a couple of weeks ago?

Mr McGrigor: Last week we debated education, which is slightly more relevant to Scotland.

The SNP has admitted that Scotland would have to withdraw from NATO. Imagine the vulnerability of Scotland’s position—and, for that matter, the vulnerability of the rest of the UK—were that to happen. I do not accept that the SNP’s Scottish army would be able to guard Scotland’s vast coastlines.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McGrigor: No.

If the SNP got its way, there would be no British Army, no Royal Navy and no Royal Air Force. The withdrawal of Trident is part of a greater SNP policy that would leave Scotland defenceless. Its idea for creating Scottish defence forces is to take over all serving Scottish military personnel and to move them to such forces. For the Army, that would mean that there would be six infantry regiments, with minimal logistical back-up and support. Our Scottish regiments have done more than punch their weight. Scottish soldiers are feared as fighters and respected as peacekeepers. However, the SNP’s policy would condemn those highly trained men from the best army in the world to a career providing a guard outside Alex Salmond’s presidential palace, like some low-grade Ruritanian flunkys. The Scottish defence forces would be unlikely to take part in peacekeeping or to join other forces in missions across the world, because the SNP’s policy is to leave NATO.

The economic effects of scrapping Trident would be devastating. Between Faslane and Babcock, some 7,000 jobs would be lost. Thousands of people in Helensburgh and Garelochhead would lose their jobs at Faslane, and many other communities would suffer. What would the SNP do about those job losses and the resulting devastation of local economies? A reasonably prosperous area of Scotland would become a wasteland. On the one hand, we hear that the SNP wants to encourage a vibrant economy. On the other, it is willing to throw away 7,000 jobs at the drop of a hat to increase its appeal to SSP voters.

The SNP would like to get rid of our nuclear deterrent, but I believe that it is fundamentally wrong. It is good for our democracy to have the deterrent to counter the threat of dictatorships with nuclear weapons. Unilateral disarmament by the UK will never bring about disarmament by aggressive dictatorships or rogue states. The best way in which to keep the peace is to promote the spread of democracy from a position of strength. That is what Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan did so successfully when they ended the cold war.

11:12

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): For most of members’ lifetimes, ever since the first nuclear bombs were dropped nearly 60 years ago at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear cloud has been hanging over us. It is clear that, as long as countries maintain nuclear arsenals, there will continue to be the threat that a nuclear holocaust will take place one day on the planet.

As Roseanna Cunningham rightly said, there is no need for Bush and Blair to go halfway round the world looking for weapons of mass destruction, because such weapons are right here on our doorstep. As Roseanna Cunningham said, one Trident warhead is seven times more powerful than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, where 140,000 people lost their lives. A couple of weeks ago, Chris Mullin, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said in the UK Parliament that one submarine with 48 warheads is currently at sea acting as a deterrent. That one submarine—there are four in total—has the power equivalent to 336 Hiroshimas.

We must bear in mind that, although the UK has only 200 warheads, the US, Russia and other countries have thousands between them. The Scottish Parliament has now been in existence for six years, and we must ask ourselves why on earth Scotland, a small country of 5 million people on the north-western periphery of Europe, is home to one of the world's deadliest nuclear arsenals.

Robert Brown: I am interested in the process that the SNP suggests. It is proposed that we get rid of the American, British and, presumably, the French nuclear deterrents. How would getting rid of Britain's nuclear deterrent advance the cause of removing the nuclear weapons that North Korea, Israel, Pakistan and India have? I am sure that the member would agree that nuclear weapons are much more dangerous in those countries than they are here.

Richard Lochhead: We in Scotland cannot call on other countries to get rid of their nuclear weapons when we have one of the world's deadliest arsenals on our doorstep. When I last considered the geopolitical situation, other countries round the world were not queuing up to attack Scotland. If they are, that may be because we have Trident missiles here.

I want to consider Scotland and its role in the world. At the moment, we waste a colossal amount of resources on maintaining the nuclear deterrent, or whatever we want to call it. One billion pounds a year—3 per cent of the UK defence budget—is spent on nuclear weapons. If the son of Trident comes about, it will cost a further £20 billion, which is the equivalent of £2 billion a year, to maintain it. We believe that the people of Scotland do not want that cash to be spent on nuclear weapons. They would rather it were diverted to dealing with social and economic issues here in their country. Over the next 10 years, the UK will pay £400 million to help the former Soviet Union to deal with its nuclear legacy. We all support that, but it gives an indication of the global cost of nuclear weapons.

I turn to the wider debate. Nuclear weapons are a legacy of the cold war, which finished a long time ago. Children who will leave school after the summer were not even born when there was a cold war—that is how long ago it was. Nuclear weapons are no longer relevant in our national security strategies. No matter how many submarines go round our seas loaded with nuclear weapons, they will not stop Osama bin Laden or other terrorists. They do not have a role to play in the 21st century.

Scotland has an opportunity to become a nuclear weapon-free country and to play a role in making the whole world nuclear weapon free. In 1998, the new agenda coalition, which was led by the Irish and launched in Dublin, began a campaign to achieve nuclear disarmament. Small countries can play a role in making the whole world nuclear weapon free.

There is a growing trend towards establishing nuclear weapon-free zones around the world. At the end of April—just a week or two before the UK elections—all the countries that are involved in establishing such zones will get together in Mexico. Would it not be great if Scotland were independent and we could be represented at that meeting, to allow us to play our role in getting this part of the world to become a nuclear weapon-free zone?

In his recent book "A Short History of Nearly Everything", which was a big success, Bill Bryson said that, if we were to translate the history of the world into 24 hours, the human race would appear on the planet only one minute and 17 seconds before midnight. Would it not be an appalling tragedy if the human race abused its technical knowledge to wipe out not only itself, but the planet? That is something that we must avoid. The Scottish Parliament, which represents the people of Scotland, must play its part in ensuring that it does not happen.

11:17

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): This is slightly reminiscent of groundhog day—another SNP debate, another reserved issue. The people of Scotland will soon begin to wonder whether there is any point in having SNP MPs at Westminster, as today's debate demonstrates that they are incapable of making the case there.

I turn to the substance of the debate. It is fair to say that many activists in the Labour movement, including me, have campaigned over the years for nuclear disarmament. World peace and a nuclear-free world are aspirations that we all share. We may differ on how to achieve those aims, but I know of no sane person, inside or outside the chamber, who wants to see nuclear weapons used anywhere in the world.

The Labour Government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to Britain's obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Together with France, Britain was one of the first two nations to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Practical action has also been taken. There has been a reduction in the number of warheads, which is down by a third. All air-launched nuclear weapons have been removed. That is action, not rhetoric, and the SNP would do well to learn from it.

I make it clear that there are no plans for Trident to be replaced and that no decision has been made on any possible successor system. I quote from the recent defence review white paper, "Delivering Security in a Changing World", which states:

"The Government's policy on nuclear weapons remains as set out in the SDR"—

the strategic defence review. The paper continues:

"We are committed to working towards a safer world in which there is no requirement for nuclear weapons".

I stress the word "no".

It pains me to have to make this point yet again, but if the SNP is a serious, grown-up party, it needs to recognise that responsible politicians must think through the consequences of their actions. In that context, I want to talk about Faslane.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

Specifically, I want to talk about an EKOS Consulting report that was commissioned a few years ago. The report showed that 7,000 people are employed at the base, 4,000 of whom are civilians. However, there is more. Some 3,700 indirect jobs result from supplier linkages and income multipliers. The base is one of the largest single-site employers in Scotland, and by far the largest source of jobs in the local economy. If we consider that West Dunbartonshire is among the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland, and that Faslane provides a quarter of the employment in the area, the SNP's attitude is nothing short of scandalous. Have the nationalists thought about what will happen to the workers and their families, or are they, too, destined for the scrap heap?

A couple of years ago, I found that the SNP's policy website was blank on this matter. It had nothing to say, except that the matter was under review. I confess that I am not sure whether today's offering is any better. Perhaps, as Ronan Keating would say, the SNP says it best when it says nothing at all.

We remain in the dark about the SNP's policy on these matters. Does it want to be in or out of

NATO? Do we need to wait for the vagaries of an SNP conference for such a decision? In any case, we need not worry: apparently, when Trident is scrapped, the Scottish navy and customs and excise will be based at Faslane. At least, that is what the former SNP MSP Lloyd Quinan said. What a relief that news was to the workers. However, geography is not one of the SNP's strong points—Faslane is, of course, on the west coast—and Mr Quinan had obviously not checked with the boss before he made his statement. At the same time, Alex Salmond was on his feet, telling people in Rosyth—which is on the east coast—not to worry, because the self-same navy would be based there.

Do members want to know how big that navy will be? I will tell them: it will consist of seven frigates and the workforce involved will number 100. Is my maths wrong? If not, the SNP needs to tell us what it will do for the other 10,600 people who work at Faslane. Until the SNP can properly answer that question, it should not waste my time and the chamber's time. I urge Parliament to reject the motion.

11:21

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): We have just heard an example of a pathetic lack of ambition from someone who says that she believes in nuclear disarmament and world peace, but who speaks an entirely different game. Jackie Baillie mentioned the income multiplier. Three years ago, I wrote to Glasgow City Council to ask how many people it employed, directly or indirectly, with the £1 billion of grant-aided expenditure that it had at its disposal. The chief executive at the time replied that, with that £1 billion, the council employed 30,000 directly and another 20,000 to 30,000 indirectly. In short, for £1 billion, Glasgow City Council directly and indirectly employed 60,000 people. Jackie Baillie tells us that we cannot get rid of Trident because it will lead to the loss of up to 8,000—perhaps 10,000—jobs.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Tommy Sheridan: No. The member did not take any interventions.

As I said, Jackie Baillie told us that 8,000 to 10,000 jobs would be lost. What poverty of ambition. The very same people who are currently employed in highly skilled refitting, engineering and technical jobs could be just as well employed on new ferries, new trains, new buses, magnetic resonance imaging or kidney machines and so on. The skills would not disappear, because the workers would be redeployed. The only difference is that 20,000 more people would be employed as a result of that approach than are currently

employed as a result of the money that is wasted on nuclear weapons. From the outset, we need to get rid of the nonsense that says that somehow or other we must stick with nuclear weapons because they create jobs. In fact, they create even fewer jobs than would be created with socially useful production.

When I listened to the Tories' arguments, it felt like groundhog day. They never change. Jamie McGrigor did not take an intervention as he told us that getting rid of nuclear weapons would leave us defenceless. He wanted to know who would guard our borders. The question that I wanted to ask him was: from whom are we going to be defenceless? After 1945, people like Jamie McGrigor tried to tell us that we needed nuclear weapons because the Russians were just over the hill and would invade us if we did not have them. I do not know what they were going to invade us for; after all, they have enough rain in their own country. Moreover, throughout the 1980s, they certainly had nothing like the level of unemployment that we had under the Tories.

This is about the politics of fear. We want nuclear weapons because we want to frighten everyone. I have seen no reports that say that the good people of Ireland, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Iceland cannot get a good sleep at night, and yet they do not have any nuclear weapons. They are—to come back to Jamie McGrigor's point—defenceless. It is time that we had the guts and courage to stand up in the world and say that we will take action on nuclear disarmament and that we want to be a country that promotes peace, not nuclear proliferation, throughout the world. At the moment, we cannot say that we are a country of peace when every one of the UK's nuclear weapons is on our shores.

We must fight for disarmament; try to promote ourselves as a country of peace; and encourage the people of Scotland to go to Faslane on 4 July to protest for nuclear disarmament. If the Tories think that they are popular enough, we should put it to a referendum. That would show clearly that the people of Scotland would rather have investment in schools, hospitals and pensions than in nuclear weapons.

11:26

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): One of the great philosophers of the 20th century, Will Durant, once wrote:

"In my youth I stressed freedom, and in my old age I stress order. I have made the great discovery that liberty is the product of order."

In my youth, I was a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament because I realised the horrible potential of weapons of mass destruction

and wanted to stress the need to be free from that threat, which, during a time of cold war aggression in the 1970s and 1980s, was growing ever greater.

I still acknowledge that threat, but I am a little bit older now and, like Will Durant, I have matured. I now appreciate that this is an incredibly complex geopolitical issue that raises many different concerns. I still believe in nuclear disarmament but, in discussing it, we need to have order as we strive towards that aspiration.

Tricia Marwick: In the member's youth, the cold war posed a threat. At that time, he was a member of CND and did not believe in nuclear weapons. However, the member is older and there is no longer a cold war. Why does he believe in nuclear weapons now that no threat exists?

Michael McMahon: If the member had listened, she would have heard me say that I still do not believe in nuclear weapons. If she paid attention, she might not waste parliamentary time with such stupid interventions.

Because of our Labour Government, there have been major reductions in nuclear forces. I am proud of that record. Indeed, despite what the Green party said, the UK has relinquished all air-launched weapons; Royal Navy surface ships are no longer able to carry or to deploy nuclear weapons; and the nuclear missile and artillery roles that were previously held with US nuclear weapons under dual-key arrangements have been resigned. That represents real progress towards nuclear disarmament.

Trident is the only nuclear system left and I hope that it will be the last. However, getting rid of it will require an ordered defence policy, not disarray, and gaining freedom from the threat of nuclear destruction will require orderly negotiation. In today's post-cold war nuclear politics, the issue is not as simple as the SNP would have us believe.

However, why should we be surprised that the SNP has a chaotic defence policy? It does not have an impressive record on issues relating to Scotland's defence; indeed, its approach to defence policy is careless and contradictory. For example, it advocates withdrawal from NATO and has repeatedly opposed NATO action, despite the fact that such action has saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Moreover, the SNP advocates Scottish independence while arguing for the retention of Scottish regiments in the British Army. As I have said before, at least when the Indians and the Irish gained independence, they had the decency to tell Britain to take its army with it. The SNP wants us to believe that Scotland would be the only country in the world to gain independence—its so-called freedom—and still keep the army of its oppressors.

The most disingenuous aspect is that the SNP would put independence before Scotland's national security and the benefit that we gain from defence jobs. This week, the SNP accused Labour of causing unemployment at Rosyth while advocating shutting down the very defence industry that provides thousands of Scots with employment.

As the election looms, we will see much more of the political opportunism for which the SNP is famous. I am glad that the SNP has again given us the opportunity to expose that opportunism. The money that is currently spent on Trident has been pledged variously by the SNP to the national health service, to increasing the number of nursery places, to improving the lot of pensioners and even to a Scottish Nobel prize. The SNP asks only that we should wait until Scotland is independent to address the critical issue of defence.

I am an optimist and I expect to live to see Scotland free of nuclear capabilities, but I do not expect ever to see Scotland becoming independent. If I ever stop being an optimist, I will become a nationalist.

11:30

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): It is always interesting to hear the straw men that are put up by the other parties to represent the SNP's position. Much of the debate has been characterised by members constructing an edifice and then shooting at it rather than addressing the real issues, but I think that there is consensus in the chamber that we wish to see nuclear weapons removed.

Michael McMahon: I would like to make a frivolous intervention, as there have been frivolous interventions by SNP members. Did the member's dad happen to have a nuclear weapon given to him, which he shoved in his cupboard?

Stewart Stevenson: Michael McMahon welcomed the end of air-launched nuclear weapons. So be it. However, it does not matter whether weapons are launched from the air, land or water—what matters is where they land. Weapons cause damage when they land rather than when they are launched, and nuclear weapons in the UK are designed to damage civilians rather than military targets—that is the morality behind the debate.

Troops from our islands—from Scotland in particular—are deployed in conflicts here, there and everywhere throughout the world. They are stretched thin and worked hard—perhaps they are overworked—because we choose to divert our resources to weapons that we hope we will never use and for which we cannot envisage the circumstances in which we would use them.

In 1985, in the fictional “Yes, Prime Minister” television series, James Hacker visited defence chiefs and discussed the nuclear deterrent. Afterwards, in a review of what was happening, he was asked what the deterrent was for and who it deterred, but he could not say. In the modern world, we certainly cannot say what the deterrent is for and who it deters. Hacker was asked how the deterrent deterred, but he could not say. He said that he would use it, but certainly not if the East Germans crossed into west Berlin or if the Russians went in to support civil unrest in west Berlin. All the scenarios developed. As he came up Whitehall, he still could not say when he would use nuclear weapons. We remain in the same position today.

Jackie Baillie asked why there are SNP members in the House of Commons. Perhaps she should consult the House of Commons library. All the SNP members in the House of Commons are in the top 10 for activity, but the feeble 50 Scottish Labour members languish at the bottom of that table. In an independent Scotland, Scotland's defence forces would be active and engaged to meet Scotland's priorities just as we now have defence forces—a wonderful five members—defending Scotland in Westminster.

Jackie Baillie, properly, mentioned jobs in her constituency and she favours the elimination of nuclear weapons, of course. What preparation is she making for the elimination of jobs that depend on nuclear weapons? Service personnel should have no fears. Again, I remind members that we are committed to ensuring that every person who is employed in the services in Scotland will have the opportunity to work in the Scottish independent defence forces when there is independence.

We are clinging grimly to immorality, twitching in fear of the advance of rationality and failing actively to support a world order. Eliminating nuclear weapons from the world is a long and difficult job, so we must start to do so now. Where better to start than with ourselves? There is no time to waste.

11:35

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The debate has provided a significant opportunity to voice our opposition to nuclear weapons. I join a long line of politicians who have taken a stance against such weapons, which includes the First Minister, Jack McConnell, who was active on the streets of Stirling during the 1980s in opposing nuclear weapons. He argued about their illegality, the technology's political redundancy, the economic waste of the billions of pounds that are spent on nuclear weapons and the complete moral outrage of having nuclear weapons systems.

Nuclear weapons are illegal. The International Court of Justice has ruled that they are illegal, and they are illegal under the Geneva convention, the declaration of St Petersburg, the Hague convention and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many members have said that they are politically irrelevant because we live in an age in which wielding a craft knife on a jumbo jet does more to change global politics in the space of a couple of hours than nuclear weapons ever have.

There is an economic case against nuclear weapons. Over the entire lifetime of the Trident system, a sum of money equivalent to 116 times the amount of money that has been spent on the Holyrood building project will be spent. That money could have been spent on tackling antisocial behaviour, putting more police on the streets or creating jobs in our communities, which Tommy Sheridan mentioned.

There is a moral case against nuclear weapons. I wonder whether Jackie Baillie believes that Labour ministers have acted responsibly. A Labour minister, Geoff Hoon, ruled in the potential use of nuclear weapons in Iraq—he did not rule out using them; he ruled in using them. I say to Jackie Baillie that that was not responsible. If the Labour Party at Westminster had any guts, it would implement the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Chris Patten, who is a Tory, has said that, in the past year,

“we have been applying double standards”.

He has stated:

“It is very difficult for us to argue that there is something morally wrong with other countries developing their nuclear capacity when we don't ... live up to all our commitments under the NPT”.

He is right. Of course, it is easy to say those words when one is not in Government or in charge of the US aircraft carrier that is the UK.

Robert Brown fails to understand that the west's nuclear arsenal is built on a house of cards. If the UK changed the terms of the mutual defence agreement between the US and the UK, of course that would lead to disarmament through the non-proliferation treaty. If we moved to reduce the nuclear arsenal in the UK, the whole edifice would come down and countries such as North Korea would be brought into a position in which they could disarm.

Robert Brown: Given the state of North Korea, how on earth would getting rid of the nuclear deterrent in Scotland or the UK encourage the North Koreans to do likewise?

Mr Ruskell: Countries have lost faith in the non-proliferation treaty, and we must move and show

leadership. Countries must be brought back into the moral consensus.

The issue is not only an international issue; it also affects communities in Scotland. Nuclear convoys run through Stirling throughout the night, and there is an increased risk of those convoys breaking down and having accidents. People will be concerned about such issues in the forthcoming election. There is the legacy of nuclear submarines rusting in the dock at Rosyth. The interim storage of laid-up submarines—ISOLUS—consultation recommended that nuclear submarines should not be cut up at Rosyth. Will the Executive take a firm position on that when the MOD submits its plans?

Chris Ballance mentioned the use of depleted uranium weapons at Dundrennan, which is perhaps the biggest environmental scandal in Scotland at the moment. The First Minister, Jack McConnell, should hold true to his Labour movement principles. He should join his colleague Ken Livingstone in New York in May at the discussions on the non-proliferation treaty and give voice to the 85 per cent of Scots who do not want nuclear weapons in Scotland. He should try to force movement on the non-proliferation treaty to get international consensus on getting rid of nuclear weapons.

11:40

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The debate has been good and worth while. It was fair enough for Roseanna Cunningham to set out the SNP's unilateral position, but I question the worth of having just 75 minutes to debate such an important issue.

Chris Ballance, who was representing the extremist Green Party rather than the cuddly Green Party, supported the SNP's unilateral position; that is fair enough. However, he was completely wrong to maintain that the UK has done nothing in this area. I have news for the Greens. As Mike McMahon pointed out, all the UK's tactical nuclear weapon systems have been taken out of service.

As usual, Tommy Sheridan called for direct action. I am not sure what else he called for. The UK's nuclear force is now limited to its strategic deterrent, Trident. I am not noted for coming to the defence of the UK Government, but Stewart Stevenson—who has left the chamber—failed to acknowledge that we have got rid of the tactical, battlefield nuclear weapons, which are the most dangerous form of nuclear weapons. Those are the weapons that could have been used in a real scenario.

Tommy Sheridan: Mike Rumbles mentioned the nuclear weapons that could have been used.

Is he saying that the nuclear weapons that we have cannot be used?

Mike Rumbles: That is correct—that is my personal belief.

We have spent huge resources on procuring the Trident system and we now spend about 3 per cent of the UK's annual defence budget on it. The point that I am making is that there is a legitimate argument about whether any UK Government would ever use our nuclear deterrent. I have said that I cannot envisage any scenario in which the Trident missile system could be used. However, members such as Jamie McGrigor believe that the fact that we have such a system means that we have an effective deterrent. Following on from Tommy Sheridan's question, I ask Jamie McGrigor under what circumstances a Tory Prime Minister would order the commander of the one nuclear submarine that we have on patrol to launch his Trident nuclear missiles. I cannot envisage such a situation.

The Liberal Democrats believe that unilateral nuclear disarmament is not the best way forward. We believe that the key to a safer world is to make progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament. We must be willing to take part in the disarmament process. We want the UK Government to press for a nuclear weapons convention at which the commitment of all nuclear weapon states to disarmament could be formalised.

As far as the future of Trident is concerned, it is clear that no effective case for a successor system has been made. In any event, it must be right that the UK Parliament remains the proper body to take any decision on whether to replace Trident.

As the motion represents a unilateralist approach to nuclear disarmament, the Liberal Democrats cannot support it. In my view, the Labour amendment is concerned simply with scoring points off the SNP. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Order.

Mike Rumbles: The Liberal Democrats are in favour of real nuclear disarmament to make the world a safer place. We can achieve that by engaging with other countries in discussions on multilateral nuclear disarmament.

I urge members to support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

11:44

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): When I read the SNP motion, my mind drifted back to a time to which Scott Barrie referred, when the Tory Government decided—mistakenly, in my view—to take away nuclear submarine maintenance from

Rosyth. Scott Barrie asked where the SNP was at that time. I can tell him where it was. Margaret Ewing and Alex Salmond were at Westminster with the same shop stewards as Scott Barrie was with to protest against the Government about the removal of the nuclear submarines from Rosyth. Now the SNP wants to remove them from Faslane. Given the importance of the Faslane base to the local economy and its wider importance, what on earth would the SNP replace the nuclear submarines at Faslane with?

Tommy Sheridan said that we should use the resources that we spend on nuclear weapons for more industrial purposes, but I remind him that the skills and training that are available at Faslane are vital to the future of Scotland in other ways. There are no private facilities that offer the skills and training that are obtainable with the Royal Navy or the civil organisations at Faslane.

Tommy Sheridan: Does the member agree that the skills to which he refers could just as well be deployed on the refitting and building of passenger ferries, train carriages and new buses?

Phil Gallie: Regrettably, we are not building boats. The member might not have noticed, but that is not happening. Shipyards on the Clyde are shutting. I repeat that the skills that are available at Faslane have been taught and developed at Faslane; without them, Scotland would be a poorer place.

I want to consider wider aspects of nuclear weapons. Roseanna Cunningham said that she never saw Scott Barrie on CND protest marches, and Scott Barrie said that he never saw Roseanna Cunningham on the marches that he went on. Neither of them saw me because I was not there. I was not there because I believed that the deterrence policy was right for the United Kingdom and the wider world. In my view, that policy has been proved to have been correct.

Before Chris Ballance was out of his diapers, I had experienced the effects of the cold war. I can remember back to the time of the 1939-45 war, when 50 million people lost their lives as a result of the use of conventional weapons, not nuclear weapons. In my view, all war is wrong, but in many instances it is inevitable, because of human nature and jealousies between nations. It is something that must be guarded against.

I believe that the nuclear deterrent has kept the major powers apart over the past 50 or 60 years. It would be a very ill-advised leader of the UK or, indeed, an independent Scotland who would wish to move out of the umbrella protection that nuclear weapons provide.

Stewart Stevenson rose—

Phil Gallie: I give way quickly to Stewart Stevenson.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but Mr Gallie is in his final minute.

Phil Gallie: I will support the Labour amendment. I am tempted to support that of the Liberals, although I wonder why they felt it necessary to break their links with their partners in the Parliament. Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that a general election is looming.

I am delighted that the UK can control its own nuclear weapons. As always, I will make a point about the European constitution. If we were to pass over responsibilities for defence to others, I would be a bit more worried.

11:49

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Anyone who has been watching First Minister's question time for the past two weeks could be forgiven for thinking that there is a crisis in the Scottish health service.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): There is.

Karen Gillon: If such a crisis existed, it would be fair to assume that the SNP would put that crisis on the table, put forward a solution and try to effect change at the first political opportunity that presented itself. After all, health is an issue on which we can vote, take action and express differences of opinion. However, the SNP has not taken that opportunity. On the occasion of its first opportunity to choose a debate after Nicola Sturgeon's most recent performance at First Minister's questions, the SNP has chosen to have a debate not on the health service—the issue that matters most to the people of Scotland, according to Nicola Sturgeon—but on nuclear weapons, a matter for which we have no responsibility and on which we have no choice and no veto. But there goes the SNP, once again.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: Nicola Sturgeon could not be bothered to turn up for the debate. She cannot come into the chamber now and think that she can nip into the debate in the middle of my speech. If the subject was important to her, she would have been sitting in the chamber for the whole debate, just like everybody else did. We will see what subject she raises at FMQT today.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: No, I think I will just carry on. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Karen Gillon: Oh well, on you go, Stewart.

Stewart Stevenson: I thank the member for giving way. Will she acknowledge that the SNP's last debating day, which was only two weeks ago, was spent on health, which is a matter of importance to the people of Scotland?

Karen Gillon: Absolutely, but how many minutes did that debate take up? It was not as many minutes as Nicola Sturgeon has taken up at FMQT on the subject.

Since that debate, another two weeks of Nicola Sturgeon telling us about the crisis in the health service have elapsed and yet, once again, we come to the chamber for an SNP debate and there is no debate on the issue. The truth is that, when the issues are difficult and the chips are down, it is not Nicola Sturgeon who runs the SNP but the Notting Hill nats and Alex Salmond—Nicola dances to Alex Salmond's tune. Issues on which the Scottish Parliament has responsibility and on which we can change things are sidelined. Once again, the SNP ducks the real challenge, which is to grasp their role as MSPs. It seems that they would rather act as a support band to their London bosses. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Karen Gillon: The SNP sees a note of truth in what I have said.

All of us are committed to achieving world peace and nuclear disarmament. We may differ on how best to do that, but all of us are committed to doing so.

My colleagues Scott Barrie, Jackie Baillie and Michael McMahon exposed the difficulties of a party having a policy that is built on a slogan. I expected that from Tommy Sheridan—the Trots have been doing that for 30 years, and never have they had the aspiration of Government. However, the SNP tells everyone that it is a serious party of Government. Therefore, we could be forgiven for expecting from it today a slightly more thought-through policy and a bit more detail on how jobs would be redeployed.

Stewart Stevenson said that he guarantees that every single job at Faslane would be transferred to the Scottish defence force. How many people is he talking about? How many people are in the marines, the air force, the navy, the army and all the special operations forces? How would all of them be transferred and how would they be employed? How many people are employed on Ministry of Defence contracts?

Tricia Marwick: The number of jobs in the defence industry has been reduced because of the jobs that have been lost since Labour came to power in 1997.

Karen Gillon: That response gives me a very useful in to an example that exposes the

contradiction on the issue. The SNP's parliamentary candidate for the Rosyth area has claimed that the awarding of the contract to refit the Ark Royal to Rosyth was a pre-election sweetener and that it was not awarded on merit; yet, this week, the same person said that more jobs should be given to Rosyth. The SNP cannot have it both ways. Either Rosyth deserved the Ark Royal contract or it did not, and Rosyth should either get the jobs or it should not. Perhaps Tricia Marwick should have a wee chat with the SNP's man in Rosyth and put him straight on what SNP policy is.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member take an intervention?

Karen Gillon: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

Tommy Sheridan talked about a referendum. There will be a referendum and I imagine that 5 May will be the day when the people of Scotland and the people of the United Kingdom elect a new Government. People will give their verdict on many different issues, one of which will be defence policy.

Perhaps the real reason why we are having this debate is because the SNP has finally realised what the Labour Party already knew—that, if or when decisions come to be made on these issues at the UK level, there will be no SNP MPs to debate them at the House of Commons.

11:54

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The SNP motion concentrates on ensuring that there will be no replacement for Trident and that the £20 billion plus is spent on peaceful uses in our country, such as the creation of jobs of a peaceful nature.

All our opponents attempted to talk about everything except Trident and I turn first to Scott Barrie, who seemed to have to hide behind a smokescreen by diverting the debate on to other reserved matters. For Labour, Trident is about Britain having a seat at the top table in the Security Council. Without Trident and without our nuclear weapons, Labour's aspirations for Britain would fail—we would be removed from the top table. Whenever the subject of nuclear weapons is debated, Labour members become extremely concerned; they feel that they have to disguise the issue. The SNP will not disguise the subject. It is clear that Scotland has a different perspective on the issue from the Labour Party's.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: Not at the moment.

The global elimination of nuclear weapons is something that many of us believe must happen. I

say to Scott Barrie that thinking globally is one thing, but what the SNP suggests we should be doing is acting locally.

The Liberal Democrats' amendment shows them to be the masters of irrelevance and obfuscation. The party was set up on the principle of having a policy in favour of nuclear weapons—that was Charles Kennedy's stance at the joint Social Democratic Party and Liberal Party discussions. One wonders why, after all those years, the Liberal Democrats have not moved on and why Scotland is not yet in the position of having a voice at the tables in the world at which non-proliferation and the like are discussed. One also asks why the Liberal Democrats continue to lodge amendments of the sort that we see today and refuse to debate a motion on the stopping of the replacement for Trident. Why did its members who spoke in the debate not concentrate on the specifics of the motion?

The Greens told us—as the SNP believes—that 85 per cent of Scots want rid of nuclear weapons. The SNP has provided the chamber with the opportunity to debate the issue today. We hope the debate will show the people of Scotland that as many members of the Parliament believe that we should get rid of nuclear weapons and that the first and best way in which to do that is to refuse to replace Trident.

Robert Brown: Will the member answer the question that I asked earlier? How will Scotland or the UK ridding the country of nuclear weapons help to deal with the North Korea situation?

Rob Gibson: The fact is that the UK's Trident submarines are centre-stage. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is dealt with by the sovereign nations of the world and Scotland, as a nation, would have a role in that. As a successor nation to the existing UK, we would have a seat at the tables at which the discussions are held. The point of the exercise is to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons in this country. Replacing Trident is the first opportunity to do so.

It was interesting to hear that the Tories will support the Labour Party's amendment at decision time. Indeed, it was interesting to hear how close the arguments made by Jamie McGrigor and Jackie Baillie were. It is clear that the Tories accept Labour's argument.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: Not at the moment.

It seems that Jackie Baillie is incapable of using the internet. If she had looked up the SNP's website, she would have found the answer to the question she posed on the SNP policy on defence, which states:

"the SNP will pursue a non-nuclear defence policy. Our armed forces will initially be equipped with Scotland's share of UK defence resources. The Scottish Defence Force will be all professional, supported by part time volunteers. Defence policy will be made in Scotland's national parliament."

At present, defence policy is made in the UK Parliament. By lodging the motion, the SNP is trying to influence that process.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member explain how seven frigates and 100 jobs will take care of the 10,600 people who currently work at Faslane?

Rob Gibson: The member will have noted that I said that our armed forces will initially be equipped with Scotland's share of the UK defence resources. That means that the work will continue.

Attitudes in Scotland to nuclear weapons have long been one of opposition; from the most middle-class areas to the most working-class areas of the country, 85 per cent of Scots are opposed to nuclear weapons. At the SNP conference, the loudest cheer is always for the speech on the motion that says that we will get rid of nuclear weapons from our soil.

Phil Gallie: Will Rob Gibson give way on that point?

Rob Gibson: No, thank you.

The motion before us puts the SNP in a position to ask members to consider the moral argument and to set an example by arguing that no replacement to Trident in Scotland is the best way forward for the Parliament, and is the best way forward for all Scots. Trident is a relic of the UK's past. It has no part in Scotland's future, and the SNP's motion makes that perfectly clear. I am glad to support it, and I ask others to do so too.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Before questions to the First Minister, members will wish to welcome Bojan Kostreš, President of the Assembly of Vojvodina, in Serbia, and an accompanying parliamentary delegation. [Applause.]

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1547)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no immediate plans for a formal meeting with the Prime Minister.

I take this opportunity to thank publicly the Clydesdale Bank for being the first private sector company in Scotland to make a donation to Scotland's Commonwealth games team's preparations for Melbourne next year. Its donation, which was announced this morning, is very welcome, and I hope that it will be the first of many. [Applause.]

Nicola Sturgeon: I echo those remarks.

The First Minister's usual excuse for not cutting overall hospital waiting times is his focus on the three big killer diseases, including cancer. Is he aware that that excuse has been undermined by the news this week that the target for breast cancer treatment has not been met and that, according to Audit Scotland, the target for bowel cancer treatment will not be met? On the subject of bowel cancer, the Executive has said that one requirement of meeting its target is "sufficient numbers of beds". Has the number of specialist cancer beds in Scotland gone up or down since 1999?

The First Minister: We have established some challenging targets on cancer in Scotland, many of which have already been met—others are still to be met. The targets are challenging because cancer is one of Scotland's key killer diseases. We were absolutely right in making our priority tackling cancer waiting times and improving cancer treatments and diagnosis the length and breadth of the country. We do that in ways that use the best equipment and the best of our skills in the health service and we do it in ways that use not only hospital beds, but services in the community.

Nicola Sturgeon: The missing ingredient from that reply was an answer to the question that I asked. Let me give the First Minister the answer. The total number of acute in-patient beds in

Scotland has fallen by 5 per cent since 1999 and the number of specialist-staffed cancer beds has gone down by 11 per cent. That might be one reason why the treatment target is not being met. Is he aware that, as well as treatment delays, Audit Scotland found delays in first out-patient appointments for bowel cancer patients, of whom only 45 per cent see a consultant within two weeks of their referral? What is the corresponding figure in England?

The First Minister: As members will be aware, I do not think that we should automatically compare what happens here with what happens south of the border. In this case, however, I am very happy to do so, because, in relation to beds, in-patient waiting times and the treatment of killer diseases, we in Scotland compare favourably with the health service south of the border. We need to ensure that we have the facts in front of us when debating such issues. Ms Sturgeon might be willing to try to distort the picture in relation to hospital beds, but the decline in the number of specialist beds is a result of our hospitals and our health service making better use of hospital beds—they are using them in more flexible ways and it is right and proper that hospital staff should do that.

It is also the case that acute hospital beds are not required for individual treatments for as long as they used to be. For example, the average hospital stay for a gall bladder operation has dropped from 10 days to three days. A four-day stay was once required for cataracts, but now patients are treated with no overnight stay at all. With changes in the birth rate, the need for obstetric beds has also reduced. Our hospitals do not need rows and rows of empty beds; they need more staff, more treatments and more equipment. The needs of the health service must be properly reflected in our expenditure priorities, which is precisely what we have ensured is happening.

Nicola Sturgeon: I remind the First Minister that I asked about specialist cancer beds, the numbers of which are going down precisely because of a lack of specialist staff. Yet again, the answer to my question was missing in his rather long-winded response.

Is the First Minister aware that the most recent figures show that, in England, 99.2 per cent of bowel cancer patients see a consultant within two weeks of urgent referral, whereas only 45 per cent of such patients do so in Scotland? Given that cancer care is a chosen priority on which the First Minister regularly boasts about Scotland outperforming England, why do more than half of bowel cancer patients in Scotland wait more than two weeks to see a consultant while less than 1 per cent of such patients do so in England? Does he not have some serious explaining to do?

The First Minister: As we debated last week and the week before, those figures are precisely due to the situation with out-patient waiting times in Scotland. That situation, after much delay, is now finally starting to improve. It is right that that is now happening in our health service, given the priority that should perhaps have been given in the past to out-patient waiting times but is certainly being given now. Changes are being seen, with dramatic reductions both in out-patient waiting lists and in out-patient waiting times. Those reductions in waiting times are to be seen right across the specialities.

I remind Ms Sturgeon that the report from which she quoted does not say only that the targets for cancer treatment will be challenging and difficult to meet. The report also states:

“Bowel cancer services in Scotland are performing well against clinical standards and waiting times are improving.”

It states:

“Scotland’s managed clinical networks for bowel cancer have made good progress in auditing clinical practice and promoting high quality care.”

It also says:

“Most bowel cancer patients in Scotland receive high quality, well co-ordinated care.”

However, Ms Sturgeon did not want to quote those parts of the report, which recognise the efforts of health service staff and the investment that we are providing.

Nicola Sturgeon: Last week, the First Minister said in the chamber that all targets were being met and that Scotland was doing better than England, but I have shown that both those assertions are false. All patients wait too long in the national health service in Scotland. Is it not the case that we now know that cancer patients also wait too long? When will he stop offering excuses for failure and start delivering some results for Scottish patients?

The First Minister: As I said last week very clearly, the targets that were set for in-patients have been met in Scotland ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom and we remain the place for the best and fastest levels of such treatment in the United Kingdom. On out-patients, we are far behind England, but we are now reducing out-patient waiting lists and waiting times, which reduced dramatically in the final quarter of last year and will come down towards our target of six months, which we intend to meet by the end of this year.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive’s Cabinet. (S2F-1548)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Cabinet will not meet next week, but at our next meeting we will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

David McLetchie: I hope that the Cabinet will get round to discussing its enterprise strategy. As the First Minister will be aware, the Scottish Executive's stated aim is to create a smart, successful Scotland in which, the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has stated,

"We need ambitious, innovative people in our small, medium and large companies".

Does the First Minister think that a top rate of income tax of 50 per cent would help or hinder the meeting of that Scottish Executive policy objective?

The First Minister: Some members on the Executive benches may take a different view from me on those matters and I recognise their right to do so. Very fortunately in this Parliament, we do not have the powers to raise income tax beyond 3 pence in the pound. We know what the characters on the SNP benches would do. They would have taxes in Scotland go through the roof to pay for the promises that they make every week in the chamber.

In Scotland today, we are not just pursuing the right policies for a smart, successful Scotland and using our resources effectively to help to create a smart, successful Scotland, but putting in place the right culture for a smart, successful Scotland. That was recognised last week by the chancellor when he announced that our enterprise in schools initiative—ahead of the game and the best in the United Kingdom—would be copied elsewhere. We hope that the rest of the UK does not catch up with us and that we stay ahead of the game in the years to come.

David McLetchie: The First Minister seems curiously reluctant to offer an opinion on what I thought was a simple question. Does it seem odd to him that we have a Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning whose responsibility is to encourage entrepreneurs and businesses in Scotland but whose party's policy is in direct conflict with those ministerial aims? Does the First Minister think that a 50 per cent tax penalty would encourage a new generation of entrepreneurs like Tom Hunter, Ann Gloag and Tom Farmer? Does he think that a 50 per cent tax rate would encourage dynamic young graduates to stay in Scotland or enterprising executives to come here under his fresh talent initiative? We may well ask the First Minister why, given the views that he holds, Jim Wallace is in charge of enterprise in Scotland when he is very much anti-enterprise.

The First Minister: Jim Wallace is doing an excellent job as Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, as evidenced by the announcements in the past month of significant investment in Glasgow and in Stirling by top-quality international firms that are coming to Scotland because of the skills and culture that we have in place and the infrastructure that backs up those skills and that culture. If Mr McLetchie wants to talk about the choices that might exist in an election campaign, I am happy to do so, too. He can debate 50 per cent tax rates with the Liberal Democrats in another place and at another time, but I remind him that the top tax rate was higher than that for most of Mrs Thatcher's period in office.

I also remind Mr McLetchie that he has yet to answer the point that I put to him last week in the chamber. His party said on the record just six weeks ago that it would publish its proposals for cuts in Scotland's budgets before the general election. However, it promised last Thursday not to do so, but to keep them secret until after the general election. Let us not have Mr McLetchie debating with me a proposal by the Liberal Democrats on tax. Let us have a debate about his proposals for cutting the Scottish budget and let us explain to the people of Scotland the impact that those proposals would have not just on health, education and tackling crime, but on our enterprise strategy.

David McLetchie: Once again, we seem to be back at leader of the Opposition's question time instead of First Minister's question time. I reiterate the points that we made last week. Under a Conservative Government, there will be no cuts in the Scottish budget, but there will be cuts in Scottish taxes paid by Scottish taxpayers.

Having reflected on "A Smart, Successful Scotland" in relation to a disastrous policy of increasing taxes in Scotland, I now turn to an area in which that strategy is being undermined by a specific proposal in the chancellor's budget last week. As the First Minister will know, "A Smart, Successful Scotland" was meant to be reinforced by the creation in Scotland of some 140 enterprise areas to benefit the most deprived wards. In order to assist that and to promote economic growth in urban regeneration, stamp duty on commercial property transactions in those areas was abolished in 2003. However, that relief has been ended prematurely in this year's budget. Is that not a blow to some of our most deprived and disadvantaged communities? What steps, if any, is Mr McConnell's Executive taking to compensate for that loss?

The First Minister: We seem to have moved from leader of the Liberal Democrats' question time to Chancellor of the Exchequer's question

time. I took the liberty of not commenting on the Liberal Democrats' proposals on tax for the election, but I am certainly prepared to defend the chancellor's decisions. Last week, the chancellor announced a doubling of the threshold for stamp duty across the country. People in the House of Commons said that that would be of no use to Scotland whatsoever, when in fact it will be a direct benefit to many people in Scotland—not just to first-time home buyers, but to many others, too.

Mr McLetchie might want to divert attention on to another part of his set of proposals, but the reality is that the budget last week will not only encourage enterprise and ensure that the amazing stability in the United Kingdom economy over the past eight years, which was never matched at any time in 18 years of Conservative government, and the amazing investment in public services, which was never matched at any time in 18 years of Conservative government, are both in place, but introduce measures to encourage home buying and to ensure that young people can, with support from the chancellor, enter the housing market for the first time. The chancellor is right on that issue and he has my full support.

The Presiding Officer: We will have one constituency question.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the 176 job cuts that are proposed at BBC Scotland headquarters, which is in my constituency, and the economic impact that that will have on Scotland. Does he share my view that the impact of such cutbacks can only be to undermine the quality of output and the case for public service broadcasting, which has been so important in promoting devolution and Scotland's distinct culture? Does he share my concerns about plans to move to more local news at the expense of national programming? Will he assure me and the Parliament that, in so far as those issues are devolved, he will resist any detrimental economic and cultural impact on Scotland?

The First Minister: Those are decisions for the BBC to take in the light of its judgment about what is best for Scottish viewers. However, I believe that it is vital that we seize—across the BBC and, crucially, the private independent television production sector in Scotland—the opportunities that might be available as a result of BBC reorganisation, because there will be a significant increase in production in Scotland in years to come. That is an opportunity for our creative industries and I hope that they take it.

Mordechai Vanunu

3. Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): To ask the First Minister what representations the Scottish Executive will make to the Israeli Government

requesting it to allow world peace campaigner, Mordechai Vanunu, to visit Scotland to take up his role as rector of the University of Glasgow. (S2F-1566)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Scottish Executive has had no representation from the University of Glasgow on the matter. Any response to such a representation would involve consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Colin Fox: I hope that the First Minister accepts that Mordechai Vanunu is recognised across the world as a man of peace, a man of principle, a man who demands justice for the Palestinian people and a man who, after being kidnapped by the Israeli state, spent 18 years in jail for exposing Israel's nuclear weapons programme. Given that the Parliament has discussed nuclear weapons this morning, I am sure that the First Minister understands the importance of that. Is the First Minister aware that Mordechai Vanunu's bail conditions are up for their six-monthly review on 21 April? Will he make representations to the United Kingdom Parliament and to the European Parliament to urge them to make every effort to ensure that Mordechai Vanunu's human rights to speak and to return to Europe are recognised?

The First Minister: In general, those are issues for the UK Government and for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. If we receive representations from the University of Glasgow about the representation of students there, we will be happy to discuss the matter with both the University of Glasgow and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Colin Fox: I am disappointed that the First Minister cannot be more forthright. That is the second time that he has opted out of giving an opinion on the matter. What does he think of the decision by University of Glasgow students to elect Mordechai Vanunu as their rector? Mordechai Vanunu is a potent symbol of hope, of peace in the middle east and of justice in the world. Will the First Minister encourage all Scots to e-mail or write to the Israeli embassy in London or the Minister of the Interior in Jerusalem, or to sign the petition that has been organised by *The Herald* newspaper, to demand Mordechai Vanunu's release from the new prison outside a jail that his bail conditions in effect create? Finally, does the First Minister accept that there would be no better sight to greet the arrival in Scotland in July of hundreds of thousands of visitors, who wish to see peace in the world and to make injustice history, than Mordechai Vanunu standing at the head of the march?

The First Minister: I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Government have made regular representations

on the matter to the Israeli Government. I am sure that they will continue to do so.

If I had been a student at the University of Glasgow during the recent rectorial election, I suspect that I might have voted for the Labour candidate for rector. She was a good candidate and she would have served the University of Glasgow well. However, given that the students at the University of Glasgow have chosen to make a public statement in support of human rights in that part of the world by electing Mordechai Vanunu, it is important for us to recognise that they have made that statement and to listen to any representations that they make calling on us to make representations on their behalf.

Justice System (Victims of Crime)

4. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how reforms to the justice system will meet the needs of victims of crime. (S2F-1561)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Earlier this week, the Minister for Justice announced our proposed reforms to the summary justice system. The reforms will ensure that justice is carried out, and is seen to be carried out, more effectively throughout Scotland. If they are successful, there should be less delay, more effective punishment and more confidence in the system on the part of victims.

Bill Butler: The First Minister referred to the Minister for Justice's announcement this week on reforms to the summary justice system, which include fiscal compensation orders. How does the Executive intend to engage with communities to reassure them that such alternatives to custody do not constitute a soft option and can meet the needs of victims of crime, given that there will be no formal court process?

The First Minister: It is important to stress that the reforms are not alternatives to custody; they are measures that will ensure more prompt and effective justice for victims, but only in cases that would not normally result in a prosecution plea for a custodial sentence. When the new sentences to toughen up our justice system are used, the victims and the communities affected by criminal behaviour will be able to see that justice has been carried out. For that reason, we will provide more information to communities than ever before about the way in which the justice system is defending them. We are already producing more information for individual victims than ever before on the decisions that are taken on their behalf in our courts. As was announced this week, more information will be available to victims in future.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I draw the First Minister's attention to a gap in provision for victims in the immediate aftermath of a serious

crime. There is great variation in the service provided to victims of crime, particularly by some police forces. For example, victims of crime are not provided with information on counselling and other support services that are available to them. Furthermore, they are not kept sufficiently abreast of progress on investigations or told when someone is being brought to justice for their crime. Will the First Minister examine that gap and determine whether we can find a better way of providing those services, especially in the immediate aftermath of a crime, when victims are at their most vulnerable?

The First Minister: I agree entirely with Alex Neil's objective. We have seen significant improvements in this area—among the very best improvements in any public service in Scotland over the past five years. With the reforms that we have introduced to court procedure and to the way in which the police operate at a local level and—crucially—with the clear direction and new legislation that gives rights to victims in Scotland, victims get more information more often than ever before. However, too many victims throughout Scotland are provided with patchy and incomplete information. That is why we are persisting not just with the implementation of the many decisions that we have already taken, but with further measures. The measures that were announced this week will ensure that victims receive more information more quickly, which can only be the right thing for us to do.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): The measures to which the First Minister refers will effectively air-brush criminals out of the criminal justice system—no record, no conviction. Victims in Scotland will no doubt be open mouthed at that. The proposal is to increase greatly the burden of the imposition of fines, but the existing system for the collection of fines is failing lamentably, so how on earth does he expect collection to improve?

The First Minister: Annabel Goldie has had an honourable reputation in the Parliament as someone who deals with issues in the proper manner—until recently. The exaggeration and misrepresentation of our reforms to the justice system by her and the Conservative party in recent weeks are shameful and will wrongly scare victims throughout Scotland. The reforms will improve the justice system and ensure that people are dealt with more quickly and effectively and that they are less likely to reoffend.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Answer the question.

The First Minister: We will not take people out of custodial sentences, but ensure that people are dealt with through the fiscal compensation fine in a way—

Phil Gallie: Answer the question.

The Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Gallie.

The First Minister: Mr Gallie perhaps does not like the answer to the question, but he must listen to it.

Our measures will improve the execution of justice in Scotland. More people will see more action against criminals who commit crimes in our communities and more victims will be informed as a result.

Schools (Healthy Eating)

5. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress is being made to encourage pupils to eat healthy food during school hours. (S2F-1552)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I am proud that Scotland is leading the way in the United Kingdom on improving school meals. Our flagship programme, the hungry for success initiative, is delivering much-needed improvements to the school meals service across Scotland.

Richard Lochhead: Many people welcome the fact that the issue is higher up the agenda in Scotland than it is elsewhere in the UK, where it has taken the sterling efforts of a celebrity chef to spur the Government into action. However, does the First Minister accept that Scotland has a long way to go to defuse the ticking time bomb that is the poor diet of many children in Scotland, especially in the light of last week's figures that showed that obesity is on the rise among under-18s in Scotland? Will he explain to parents in Scotland why, six years into devolution, nurseries that are funded by Labour councils in his back yard of Lanarkshire are teaching children how to buy burgers and fries at McDonald's? Does that ludicrous situation not make a mockery of his efforts and what is he doing about it?

The First Minister: We are unlikely to improve the diet of Scotland's children through stunts in the parliamentary chamber. However, we will ensure that, across the length and breadth of Scotland, not just in primary and secondary schools, but—as the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People made clear yesterday—in our nursery schools, the hungry for success programme is implemented and there are healthier meals. We will also see the provision of free fruit in the early years of primary, the provision of water and milk, the reduction in advertising for commercial products and the efforts to increase physical exercise among young people, all of which are making a difference. Year by year, piece by piece, those changes will ensure that the next generation in Scotland will be significantly healthier than the present one is.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I thought for a minute that the First Minister was suggesting pieces all round.

Will the First Minister examine the parallel between the situation that led to the Executive's policy change on the recruitment of specialist physical education teachers—a gap had arisen—and the situation in relation to home economics teachers? Is he aware that, in 2003, only 14 home economics teachers graduated and, I think, only 1.1 per cent of higher applicants took home economics? We should follow the same path as we took with the recruitment of physical education teachers. The whole subject must be considered, but specialist home economics teachers are needed in schools now.

The First Minister: I am not sure what the current situation is, but I am sure that the Minister for Education and Young People would be happy to write to Margo MacDonald on the issue. As part of our comprehensive programme of improving diet and exercise in Scotland, we need not only to have the 400 new PE teachers that we are committed to providing and the hungry for success programme to improve school meals, but to ensure that, as part of the curriculum in schools, youngsters are taught life skills that will help them to provide healthier food for their children in years to come. We need a comprehensive programme in relation to exercise, diet and skills for the future and we are working on all three.

Faith-based Schools (Teachers)

6. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether faith-based schools are able to discriminate against teachers because of sexual orientation. (S2F-1558)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Local authorities cannot discriminate against teachers solely on the ground of sexual orientation, in faith schools or in any other schools. Teachers should be chosen on their ability in the classroom, not on their personal relationships.

Nora Radcliffe: Does the First Minister agree that there would be a concern about public funding going to schools that were not conforming to requirements that had been enacted under the European convention on human rights?

The First Minister: I hope that those circumstances would not arise. Schools in Scotland should be choosing their teachers on the basis of people's ability to impart knowledge and to inspire confidence and a desire for learning in young people and they should be ensuring that teachers conduct themselves in the most professional manner in the classroom. Those are the qualities according to which teachers should be chosen.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Given the large number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people who are doing a fine job teaching in Scottish schools but feel themselves to be under a direct threat of a purge based on bigotry, not faith, what reassurances can the First Minister give that under no circumstances will that threat be realised? What reassurance can he give that their contribution to the education of Scotland's young people is valued highly?

The First Minister: I think that I have just given those reassurances. I hope that they are sufficient on the matter.

The Presiding Officer: During First Minister's question time, we were joined by four members of the United States of America's House of Representatives: Congressmen Oxley, Duncan, McIntyre and Scott. We welcome them to the Scottish Parliament. [*Applause.*]

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Environment and Rural Development

Livestock (Transportation Costs)

1. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it can provide to reduce the cost to producers of delivering livestock to markets from island and remote communities. (S2O-5963)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Any direct support to producers in island and remote communities is governed by the European Union's agricultural state-aid rules, which are very restrictive. The Executive is currently exploring options in that area.

Rob Gibson: I understand the restrictions, but since it has been widely reported that Liberal Democrat leaders have failed to convince the European Commission of the case for keeping ferry fares down, is not it time that we took a cross-party approach that could deliver practical and political sustainable results in the form of an historic commitment to producers in the islands that they will receive social and economic justice? If the minister were able to respond in the spirit that my question describes, I think that we would convince the EU.

Ross Finnie: That is an interesting tack to take. I was at the convention of the Highlands and Islands in Shetland on Monday and I have had discussions with people in the northern isles. I am regularly apprised of particular issues there by the two constituency MSPs, Tavish Scott and Jim Wallace. I am surprised that Rob Gibson would think it particularly partisan of the two local members to take the trouble to go on their own account to meet the commissioner. To try to persuade the Commission on ferry fares seems to be a perfectly proper move for a constituency MSP to make. The members raised a number of issues and Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel responded with a number of suggestions, which are being considered. It is not necessarily a question of persuading the commissioner on ferry fares. Rules and regulations have to be adhered to. They are not easy, but as I said in my opening answer, we continue to explore the options.

Waste (Reduction and Recycling)

2. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage waste reduction and recycling. (S2O-5982)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): We are providing substantial resources through the strategic waste fund to improve recycling facilities. We are also funding the waste and resources action programme—WRAP—for waste prevention work in respect of home composting, real nappies and retailers.

Dr Jackson: What moves are being made by the Scottish Executive to reduce the amount of packaging on goods? In particular, what discussions are taking place with manufacturers and supermarkets?

Ross Finnie: We have a framework for packaging regulations and a recovery target within that. In November 2004, we launched the innovation fund that is run by WRAP. It is designed to help retailers to minimise waste from packaging and products. We have regular discussions with retailers. The amount of packaging that is used during transportation of goods from retailers to their stores has reduced, but I continue to be disappointed by the level of in-store product packaging that remains and we continue to pursue that with the retailers.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): Liberal Democrat MP Sue Doughty stated in a Westminster debate last month that

"Liberal Democrats have been debating zero waste strategy for some years, and it is now party policy."—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 21 February 2005; Vol 431, c 67.]*

What will the minister do to ensure that his party's policy of zero waste is put into practice here in Scotland where the Liberal Democrats have the power to do that?

Ross Finnie: With all due respect to my colleague down south, simply to state that we have zero waste does not mean that we have no waste. I appreciate that the member might believe that, but I do not. To wave a magic wand and simply say, "Abracadabra! We have no waste" would be an interesting policy, but one has to take action on the policies, although I am grateful that the member thinks I have such powers.

To be serious, it is fine to make a statement, but whatever the statement, policies must be in place if we are to reduce waste. As I said in response to Sylvia Jackson, the packaging recovery targets and the legislation that applies to them and the innovation fund are directed at seriously reducing levels of waste. They are essential components of

a move to much lower levels of waste in this country.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Has the minister given thought to the grievances that owners of small businesses often express? They think that Government policy puts in place many measures that help householders in collection and disposal of waste, whereas small businesses are left to pick up their own costs. Are there plans to give more help to small businesses for collection and disposal of waste?

Ross Finnie: I suspect that the member's question arises from concerns that have been expressed by the Federation of Small Businesses. I met—as I think he did—representatives of that federation, with whom I discussed the matter. There is an issue, not necessarily about help, but perhaps about trying to bring together a grouping, because I think that the member would acknowledge that a key area is not so much the amount of waste but the need to collect waste together in volumes that lend themselves to more efficient recovery and disposal. In my conversations with the FSB, I said that I would be willing to try to find a forum in which we might explore the matter further, because I am conscious of the problem.

European Beavers (Trial Reintroduction)

3. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what the timescale is for determining whether approval should be granted for the proposal by Scottish Natural Heritage for a trial reintroduction of European beavers in Argyll. (S2O-6005)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): SNH made its proposal in January 2002. Ministers asked the organisation for more information in December 2002, which was provided in February 2005. We will reach a decision when we have had the opportunity fully to consider the facts of the case.

Eleanor Scott: Is the minister aware that the project has been delayed for a number of years and that if no decision is made this spring it will be delayed for another year, which would be regrettable given the work that SNH has put into the project, the strong backing of the conservation sector and the potential benefits for wildlife tourism?

Lewis Macdonald: As I said, the original application was made by SNH some years ago, but the additional information for which SNH was asked in 2002 was provided only last month. I am sure that the member agrees that information that has taken such a long time to assemble clearly requires to be considered with care. The situation

with regard to the application is unusual, because SNH usually acts as our adviser on such applications, whereas in this case the organisation itself is the applicant—a situation which poses unusual questions. However, the main consideration from ministers' point of view is that we should explore all the potential impacts of such a development before we make a decision.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

5. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to ensure that producers of unsubsidised crops are not disadvantaged by the single farm payment scheme. (S2O-5915)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Executive is not planning to take specific action because the single farm payment scheme should not disadvantage producers of unsubsidised crops. Under decoupling, production decisions will be influenced by market returns but not by subsidy payments.

Alex Fergusson: I recently failed to get much sympathy from the minister on the issue with regard to deer farmers in Scotland; I hoped that the minister might have a little more sympathy for Scotland's potato producers. Does he accept that an increased area-based payment south of the border is bound to be reflected in the market price of potatoes throughout the United Kingdom, and does he also agree that Scotland's potato producers will be put at a serious competitive disadvantage because their support payments will be based on historic payments, for which potato crops did not qualify?

Ross Finnie: There is no lack of sympathy, but there is clearly a difference between Alex Fergusson and me on why I opted for the historic basis. I can only repeat my view of the financial state of Scottish agriculture, which is that far too small a percentage of businesses at the top end in each sector is anywhere near being financially viable. As a consequence, I concluded that to embark on total redistribution of Scottish subsidies while entering the radical change of decoupled payments would have had a very deleterious effect on the whole of Scottish agriculture.

I accept that every decision has consequences but, on balance, I remain of the view that for a substantial proportion of Scottish agriculture, the decision to stick with an historic basis was and remains the best decision, based on the performance of each sector.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): The minister will be aware of constituents' cases that I

have raised with him in relation to uncertainty over entitlements in respect of historic patterns for the single payment scheme. Will he tell us when his department will resolve uncertainties over entitlements for farmers under the single payment scheme?

Ross Finnie: We are very close to a final resolution. I deeply regret that it has taken so long, given that the scheme came into being on 1 January. Farmers are very close to completing the forms to meet the deadline.

As I have explained to John Swinney, there have—I regret to say—been some fairly late refinements to regulations emanating from the European Commission. It has therefore been necessary for us to reflect those refinements in the regulations that have gone through the Scottish Parliament. We are close to resolution, but I would not want to give a precise date, although I am very conscious that there is uncertainty and of how unsettling that is for Scottish farmers.

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Will the minister confirm whether there is any pressure from the EU to change the basis of payment in Scotland from the historic basis to the area basis?

Ross Finnie: I am not aware of any such pressure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to welcome the Slovenian ambassador to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Iztok Mirošic, who is here with us in the balcony this afternoon. [Applause.]

Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Marine Legislation

7. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has plans to introduce legislation similar to the United Kingdom Government's proposed marine legislation. (S2O-5983)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I am considering the options for the sustainable management of Scotland's marine and coastal areas following a wide-ranging consultation last year. No decision has yet been taken on legislative or structural changes that might be required.

Maureen Macmillan: I welcome the recently announced inshore fisheries strategy. We will be making more and more use of the marine environment, whether through increased recreation or increased freight carriage—freight facilities grants were recently announced—or through offshore wind power, wave or tidal power, or undersea cables or pipelines. Does the minister agree that we must begin to put together a

strategy to absorb all those uses of the marine environment sustainably?

Ross Finnie: I wholly agree. That is why I have made it clear that I want all aspects of our marine use to be brought within the framework of a sustainable strategy for the marine environment. We will have to decide what that framework will be and what outcomes we want in terms of improving, protecting and conserving the marine environment, taking into consideration all the competing pressures. Once we have established that framework, we will be in a better position to consider the legislative framework. We have to work in harness with the United Kingdom Government because much of the sea that is affected is not within the direct control of the Scottish Parliament.

Less Favoured Area Support Scheme

8. Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive why there has been a delay in payments under the less favoured area support scheme. (S2O-5956)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Mr Arbuckle has become a member of the Scottish Parliament and is consequently less well-informed than the journalist he once was. I therefore advise him that there has been no delay in issuing payments under the less favoured area support scheme 2005. Payments for 2005 are being made and started to appear in bank accounts on 22 March 2005.

Mr Arbuckle: I am reassured—more important, hill farmers are reassured—by that information. I assure the minister that I am still very much in touch with the industry. Does the minister have any plans to publicise individual payments under LFASS or the common agricultural policy, as the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs has done this week?

Ross Finnie: I think that ours was the first department to make it clear that the single farm payment scheme, to be introduced this year, will have to come within the ambit of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

I have examined carefully the circumstances of past payments and the rules and regulations that apply to those payments. On individual farm payments, the Data Protection Act 1998, together with European regulation, suggest that it would not be appropriate to release that information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As Sarah Boyack is not here to ask question 9, we move straight to question 10.

Rural Development (Land Availability)

10. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps have been taken to assess the impact of land availability on rural development. (S2O-5936)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): On 7 February, the Scottish Executive published a document detailing Scottish planning policy, entitled "Planning for Rural Development". The document says that local authorities should adopt a proactive approach to providing land for development and that they should allocate sufficient land in development plans for business and housing developments.

Richard Lochhead: The minister will be aware that demand for housing, particularly in rural areas, continues to outstrip supply; therefore, more land should be made available on which to build houses, as well as for other aspects of rural development. Is the minister satisfied that there has been diversification in land ownership in rural Scotland since the coalition came to power in 1999? Is he considering introducing any new measures, given that land availability is a serious problem in many areas of rural Scotland, which should be addressed? The Government has so far proposed two solutions. The first is a planning review, but planning helps only if land is put up for sale in the first place. The second is to make Forestry Commission land available for housing, but that is not appropriate in all areas. Can other measures be used to make more land available?

Ross Finnie: I acknowledge the problem, which is why the Executive embarked on discussions with the Forestry Commission on whether there are ways of making additional land available. My colleague Lewis Macdonald continues to take that forward. Planning is important. Although Mr Lochhead is right that ownership may be part of the problem, it became clear in the work that went on before producing the planning guidance in February that even within local authorities there is reluctance to redesignate land appropriately. However, the Executive currently has no plans to introduce new legislation regarding acquisition of land.

Freshwater Fishing

11. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making in increasing access to freshwater fishing. (S2O-5906)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): A group of stakeholders who have been examining access to freshwater fishing reported to a meeting of the freshwater fisheries forum in February. The options are being reviewed in the light of

comments that were received at the forum and feedback that was received from forum members.

Dennis Canavan: I am grateful to the minister for that information. In the meantime, however, will the minister tell Scottish Water that it would be completely unacceptable to sell or to lease out to the highest bidder the fishing rights on reservoirs such as Loch Katrine, Loch Arklet and Glen Finglas because that could mean that access would be restricted to syndicates of wealthy people, while ordinary anglers would be excluded?

Lewis Macdonald: Scottish Water's primary responsibility is for the supply of water and sewerage services—that is what the Scottish Executive expects it to do. In considering future arrangements for the waters to which Mr Canavan refers, Scottish Water has kept in close contact with local communities.

Health and Community Care

NHS Tayside (G8 Summit)

1. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what provisions are being put in place for Tayside NHS Board to cope with the expected demand that will be placed on it during the G8 summit. (S2O-5921)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): NHS Tayside has been actively engaged with the police and other agencies in planning for the G8 summit at Gleneagles. It has contingency plans to deal with major emergencies, which will be invoked should the need arise. It has also taken into account the need for enhanced security in the area surrounding Gleneagles Hotel. NHS Tayside expects to offer the full range of routine and emergency health services to all Tayside residents.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the minister for his comprehensive response. He will be aware that there are concerns locally about additional demand on the health service because of the influx of visitors to the area. Will he assure us that there will be the necessary support for NHS Tayside and—in particular—that there is no possibility that there will be a diminution in services to local residents as a result of the extra demands?

Mr Kerr: Since the location and destination of the G8 summit was announced, the health service has been working with the local health board and the ambulance service to ensure that that will be the case. The planning that they have outlined to me is focused on emergency and routine services for Tayside residents, emergency and routine services for residents within the security cordon and contingency planning for major incidents and emergencies, should they arise. Furthermore, all

health boards in Scotland were written to as a result of the G8 decision in order that we could ensure that mutual aid will be available should the need arise.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The strain on the national health service might well be exacerbated by the fact that there is not yet a single safe location in Perthshire for peaceful protesters. What steps is the Executive taking to ensure that such a location is identified, which would ensure protesters' health and safety?

Mr Kerr: Such matters are for those who are planning the event. As far as the stress and strain on the NHS is concerned, we are planning ahead, as we do for all events in Scotland. Indeed, contingency planning for emergencies is a routine part of the Executive's work in partnership with NHS boards, local authorities and others. Mark Ruskell talked about the strain on the NHS, but I argue that we are planning for that strain and will be able to cope with it whatever decision is made about the safe location to which he referred.

Organ Donation

2. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the success rate has been of recent organ donation campaigns. (S2O-5994)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): As a result of our recent advertising campaigns, the number of Scottish people who have put their name on the organ donor register has increased significantly. By the beginning of this month, 1.3 million people in Scotland had put their names on the register. That is a figure of which we can be very proud. For the sake of all those who are waiting for new organs, we hope that organ donation rates will be boosted by two other recent initiatives: the creation of the Scottish organ retrieval team and the establishment of non-heartbeating donor programmes in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Janis Hughes: I welcome the improvements that the minister has mentioned, but much more can be done. Will the Executive consider encouraging, and collaborating with, appropriate agencies on more innovative methods of registering people who wish to donate their organs, such as issuing donor card registration forms at the same time as council tax renewal forms, voter registration forms and passport and drivers licence application forms are issued?

Rhona Brankin: Yes. In fact, many companies and organisations have links to the organ donor register; one of our approaches will be to develop the links that exist so that we can ensure that as many people as possible are aware of how easy it is to become an organ donor. We need to make it

easy to donate so that we increase the number of organs that are available for donation.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware that there is an age limit for blood donors. Do any age limits apply to organ donations?

Rhona Brankin: I do not have that information with me, but I will be more than happy to give it to Phil Gallie. The central point is that the public should have access to information that will encourage them to donate wherever possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Diabetes (Complications)

4. Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken to reduce complications suffered by diabetics. (S2O-5947)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): A wide range of national and local initiatives has been put in place to improve diabetes services and the care that is offered to people who have diabetes. Since the publication of the "Scottish Diabetes Framework" in April 2002, good progress has been made, particularly on managed clinical networks, clinical management systems and eye screening. An updated framework will be launched later this year following consultation that started last November.

Mr Maxwell: Is the minister aware of the type 1 diabetes management system that is known as insulin pump therapy? It can provide flexibility for patients and reduce the worry of having hypoglycaemic episodes by delivering insulin as and when required. Is she also aware that, in February 2003, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued guidelines for the national health service in England and Wales concerning prescribing of insulin pump therapy for people who are unable to control their diabetes? Given the many serious complications that are associated with ill-managed diabetes and the cost of those complications, why are patients in Scotland not being offered the therapy if it is appropriate? Will the minister look into the prescribing or non-prescribing of insulin pump therapy in Scotland?

Rhona Brankin: NHS Quality Improvement Scotland has issued guidance that sets out the criteria for the use of pumps, and the Executive expects health boards to implement that guidance. Some parts of Scotland have been slow to develop a pump service, but the situation is improving. I am more than happy to furnish the member with an up-to-date picture of where insulin pumps are being prescribed.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that severe and costly diabetic complications can be avoided or mitigated by timely reference to an appropriate specialist? Does she agree that using the estimated glomerular filtration rate rather than the much less accurate serum creatinine could enable patients who have lost renal function to avoid renal dialysis? Will she consider encouraging health boards to use GFR as the test and reference trigger for patients who suffer loss of renal function?

Rhona Brankin: I am conscious that the Scottish Executive must deal with many complex measures. I have an education background rather than a medical background, so I do not dare to enter into a highly technical specialised discussion with Nanette Milne, although I am more than happy to answer her question in writing.

The diabetes framework shows how seriously we are taking the issue. We are ahead of the game in the UK, but we are not resting on our laurels. Our fully updated framework will be launched later this year, with a twin-track approach of prevention and education that will help to reduce the risk of people developing type 2 diabetes, and help people with diabetes to reduce the risk of complications.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

NHS Lothian (MRI Scans)

6. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to reduce waiting times for magnetic resonance imaging scans in the Lothian NHS Board area. (S2O-5913)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): We identified the need to reduce waiting times for key diagnostic tests, including MRI scans, in our statement on future directions for the NHS, entitled "Fair to All, Personal to Each", which was published in December 2004. We are on track to deliver on our pledge to announce new waiting-time standards this spring, which will help to speed the patient's health care pathway by substantially reducing the longest diagnostic waits.

NHS Lothian is taking steps to address waiting times for MRI scans and the board is implementing a new service at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh. We are supporting the NHS by providing more funding to replace and upgrade medical equipment. To address that, we have set aside £125 million over three years for medical equipment, to ensure that patients benefit from modern equipment that is suitable for 21st century health care.

Mike Pringle: I have brought the matter to the minister's attention because a constituent of mine was told that she would have to wait until December for an MRI scan. I am also led to believe that the new Edinburgh royal infirmary's MRI scanner often lies unused. If that is the case, does the minister agree that it is even more unacceptable to keep my constituent waiting? Given that the situation is similar to a situation that arose last year in respect of long waits for eye treatment, are long waiting times for routine treatment and inquiries endemic in NHS Lothian?

Rhona Brankin: I mentioned steps that NHS Lothian is taking to address waiting times for MRI scans. The board is implementing a new service at the Western general in Edinburgh. Once it is up and running, throughput should improve. However, we share the member's concerns about waiting times, which is why we are introducing reduced waiting times for diagnostic tests. The time until a diagnosis is confirmed is a time of uncertainty and anxiety for patients, so it is vital that waiting times be as short as possible. That is why we have included a commitment to set new waiting-time standards for key diagnostic tests, which we will announce shortly.

Specialist Nurses (Parkinson's Disease)

7. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure increased provision of Parkinson's disease specialist nurses in the national health service. (S2O-5918)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): Workforce planning to deliver to patients first-class health services, including specialist Parkinson's nurses, is primarily a matter for NHS boards.

Donald Gorrie: If that is the case, can the minister do anything to help the people in Lanarkshire, who were promised a Parkinson's specialist nurse in post by Easter 2002? No nurse appeared, however. They were then promised that two such nurses would be in post by November 2004, but none has appeared and the efforts to find any such nurses seem to have been extremely feeble. What can the minister do or what does she suggest I do?

Rhona Brankin: The matter is an issue for the health board in that area. The specialist nurse role has to be seen in the context of a multidisciplinary team that includes medical staff, allied health professionals, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, as well as nurses who have a special interest in caring for people who have Parkinson's disease. Many patients have contact with nurses who have specialist knowledge of Parkinson's disease but who are not necessarily specialist nurses.

On education and training of nurses, Donald Gorrie might be interested to hear—given the difficulties that have been reported to him—that all NHS organisations ensure that staff have personal development plans, in which staff can identify their specific training needs. Most NHS boards have continuing professional development frameworks for nursing, which identify the key clinical skills and competencies that are essential to the organisation. It might be worth Donald Gorrie's while to ask Lanarkshire NHS Board what opportunities there are for training for nurses in relation to Parkinson's disease.

National Health Service (Nursing Staff Retention)

8. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to improve staff retention by providing flexible employment opportunities for NHS nursing staff. (S2O-5996)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): Facing the future is the banner under which recruitment and retention initiatives are being progressed to ensure that the modern health service in Scotland has the right quality and quantity of nurses and midwives to meet the growing demands of local communities now and in the future. The Scottish Executive Health Department has provided funding to NHS boards for return-to-practice programmes for trained nurses and midwives, enabling boards to bring more nursing staff back to the health service in Scotland.

Mrs Mulligan: I welcome the increased flexibility in the service, which is necessary if we are to attract and retain staff. I ask the minister to speak to his colleague the Minister for Transport, because I have received complaints recently from constituents who are unable to get to their places of work either because no bus service is available or because car parks are so expensive, particularly in Edinburgh, that people cannot use them. That is a simple issue, but it needs to be addressed quickly.

Mr Kerr: That is a valid point. I have had two meetings with Nicol Stephen, the Minister for Transport, to discuss the matter. To date, our discussions have been on patients and visitors travelling to nursing facilities, but the member adds the dimension of staff travel to work. I look forward to reporting back to the member in due course when those discussions have concluded.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want the minister to imagine that I am a Lithuanian nurse who will be arriving in Scotland tomorrow. How soon could I be working on a Scottish ward?

Mr Kerr: We have a number of routes into the health service, one of which allows the international nursing qualification to be obtained. Of course, it is only when an individual has completed that clinical course to ensure that they have the adequate skills and talents to work in our national health service that that will occur. It is down to the individual to get on to one of the courses that we provide, information on which is provided on our website as well as by our universities and colleges. I suggest that the best route in is the international qualification that we provide for nurses who seek to work in our health service. The length of time that that takes varies depending on the individual's skills.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Given that many nurses in the Highlands are being given short-term contracts and others are moving out of the area to find work, will the minister consider setting up smaller NHS call centres in the Highlands? That would benefit patients and nurses alike.

Mr Kerr: The drive of NHS Scotland is to ensure that we provide as many services as we can in the local community. Indeed, more than 90 per cent of what we do in the health service is in the community setting. In addition, given the work that we are doing on asthma and diabetes and the many other treatments that we now do in the community, I suggest that there are many more opportunities that involve less travel for both patients and staff. We are also providing challenging, high-quality environments in which staff can work.

I am happy to consider individual cases, but the direction of travel of our national health service in Scotland is for it to be as local as possible. That is the driving feature; we want to ensure that we get as many skills as possible into the community and that we have the right quality of trained staff in the community to provide much-needed services such as chemotherapy, which is being provided in community settings more than ever. Fifteen years ago, the health service was a centralised service, but because of the skills agenda and the equipment and resources that are being put into it, we are delivering much more in our local communities. That is good for patients and good for the staff who work in the service.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Has the minister taken action to do away with the agist policy of compulsory retirement of nurses?

Mr Kerr: An issue that affects the whole health service—and indeed public services in their entirety—is how to retain on fair terms the skills that have been developed there. I have commissioned work in the Executive to ensure that we engage positively with those who are approaching retirement age and want to work less

but still be involved in the health service. I am happy to correspond with the member about the conclusion of those discussions. We have much-needed talent in our health service. Sometimes people leave the health service through their own choice, but we sometimes make it difficult for those who want to stay to do so. I want to make it easier for people to stay and provide a service to the public. I want us to retain their talents in the public sector.

Alcohol Use

9. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it monitors safe alcohol use. (S2O-5942)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): The current safe limits for alcohol use are 14 units a week for women and 21 units for men. The principal source of data to monitor safe drinking levels within the population is the Scottish health survey, the latest results of which will be available in the autumn.

Stewart Stevenson: I received recently an answer to a parliamentary question, which I am sure that the minister will recall, which said that the Executive does not monitor directly the effect of the safe drinking recommendations. In the light of the changing human population and the rise in the number of drink-driving convictions, particularly among women, there is clear evidence that alcohol abuse and overuse are rising. Will she reconsider measuring morbidity and ill health arising from unwise alcohol use directly in order to contribute to improving Scotland's health?

Rhona Brankin: Yes. I, too, am aware of the facts to which Mr Stevenson alludes. We are currently revising our plan of action for alcohol, which will commit us to a range of actions and to ensuring that we have the best, most up-to-date information and access to the best, most up-to-date research. Alcohol is a major problem for us in Scotland. We need to ensure that we have an up-to-date plan for action that covers all areas, such as crime, prevention, education, treatment, protection and controls. We must reduce alcohol-related harm throughout Scotland and we will do just that.

Dental Services (Remote and Rural Areas)

10. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how its oral health proposals will facilitate access to dental services in remote and rural areas. (S2O-5992)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): "An Action Plan for Improving Oral Health and Modernising NHS Dental Services in Scotland", which I launched on 17 March, outlines a range of further

measures to provide better access to dental services in remote and rural areas.

Richard Baker: The new strategy and investment are welcome, especially in rural areas of north-east Scotland, where there have been problems with access. What dialogue will the Executive engage in with the relevant professional bodies to ensure that they actively support initiatives such as the 50 per cent increase in the remote areas allowance and play a key role in encouraging dentists to provide services in rural areas, including NHS dentistry?

Rhona Brankin: I will be meeting the British Dental Association shortly. I am keen to discuss with it how we can implement changes and additions to the current recruitment and retention measures and how it intends to take advantage of the increase in the remote areas allowance from £6,000 to £9,000. I will also discuss with it the implementation of outreach teaching for dentistry students and students of professions complementary to dentistry at centres in Aberdeen, Inverness and Dumfries. I would also like to discuss how we provide support for remote practices to ensure sustainability—for example in relation to supporting extra staff—and how we can implement recruitment and retention measures for the dental team similar to those for dentists, such as financial support for professions complementary to dentistry. In my visit to Aberdeen I will be keen to discuss with NHS Grampian the provision of the outreach centre in Aberdeen, which is to be operational in September 2006 and which will combine teaching for dental and therapy students with facilities for salaried dental services.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Does the minister accept that there will be a substantial time gap before sufficient dentists are produced to meet the current shortage? How will that gap be filled between now and the future when qualified trained dentists enter the system and how can she ensure that all areas of Scotland will benefit?

Rhona Brankin: We are investing £150 million of new money in NHS dentistry and in improving children's oral health. That will cover a range of actions to encourage dentists to enter NHS dentistry, ensure that dentists stay in NHS dentistry and ensure that we provide the highest-ever level of care and development for children's oral health. We need to ensure that the action plan is implemented as soon as possible, as we are aware that there are major problems of access to NHS dentistry.

General Questions

Commonwealth Games 2014

1. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on Glasgow's bid to host the Commonwealth games in 2014. (S2O-5940)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): It was announced on 18 February that PMP Consultancy has been appointed by the bid assessment group, chaired by David Mackay, to help to assess the feasibility and winnability of a bid by Glasgow to host the 2014 Commonwealth games. David Mackay is expected to present the findings of the group to Scottish ministers in the summer.

Karen Gillon: Like all other members, I wish Glasgow every success in securing the games in 2014. What discussions will take place with surrounding and neighbouring local authorities to ascertain what benefits they can gain from a successful Glasgow bid and what they can contribute to the bid in the run-up to the selection process?

Patricia Ferguson: It is fair to say that economic benefits would come from tourism and visitor expenditure in Glasgow and throughout Scotland, as well as from the employment that would be generated by the organisation and staging of the games. The games might also provide opportunities for Scottish businesses to enhance trade with the Commonwealth countries that participate. In addition, the games would provide an impetus for sports development in Scotland, and Scottish athletes would benefit from competing on home soil. The benefit of holding the games in Glasgow could be spread around the rest of the country, and we would encourage other local authorities, organisations and businesses to get fully behind the bid if it is to go ahead.

Disabled People (Employment)

2. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being considered to encourage businesses to employ disabled people. (S2O-5932)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): Employment policy is reserved to the United Kingdom Government. The Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus support employers in raising awareness of good practice in employing disabled people and in fulfilling their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. We welcome the Disability Rights Commission's recently launched employment campaign, which extends across the UK. The Scottish Executive's "Healthy Working Lives" action plan and its

“National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being” support the employment and retention of people with disabilities.

Mrs Mulligan: I am pleased that the minister mentioned the fact that disability goes beyond physical disabilities. Is the Executive involved in any action to ensure that a business's recruitment process is carried out in such a way that people with disabilities are not discouraged even from applying in the first place?

Allan Wilson: We are considering the specific needs of disabled people in the development of our wider employability strategy. That involves a deal of discussion with the DWP specifically about benefits and programmes that can be developed for disabled people to enable individuals to benefit from the growing employment market. Those include the new deal for disabled people and pathways to work. The pathways to work pilot schemes have achieved substantial success in Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, and Argyll and Bute, with people who are on incapacity benefit being eligible for a £40 a week return-to-work credit. That is proving to be beneficial for the individuals concerned.

Higher Education (Research Funding)

3. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that Scottish Higher Education Funding Council research funding is in line with Executive policies. (S2O-5972)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): My annual letter of strategic guidance to the funding council sets out the Scottish Executive's priorities for all aspects of the council's activities, including research.

Nora Radcliffe: Does the minister agree that the emphasis on research funding in the field of energy should be on the development and effective use of renewable energy technologies, not just to the direct benefit of Scotland, but to enable us to export those technologies to the developing world to help it to meet its rapidly expanding requirements in safe and sustainable ways?

Mr Wallace: I have to tread carefully because I am prevented by law from directing SHEFC to fund particular institutions or research programmes. That said, I am certainly aware that a considerable amount of research has been done into the kind of alternative renewable energy developments that will be beneficial to Scotland and will help us to meet our challenging target of 40 per cent of electricity generated from renewables by 2020. As Nora Radcliffe says, that could also have applications furth of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

International Development Strategy

5. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultation has taken place on the formulation of its international development strategy. (S2O-5917)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): A range of internal and external stakeholders were consulted as our international development policy was developed. There were meetings with the Department for International Development, the British Council, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a number of Scottish local authorities and a range of Scotland-based international aid agencies. NIDOS—the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland—also conducted an informal consultation of their members on our behalf.

Mr Swinney: I thank the minister for her answer and for the extensive consultation that has gone into the formulation of the strategy. I welcome the strategy and ask her to share with Parliament what she believes will be the impact of the strategy on communities outwith Scotland.

Patricia Ferguson: I thank Mr Swinney for his helpful question. One only had to be present on the evening when we discussed the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation's trip to Malawi to understand the scale of the problem that is faced by aid agencies around the country.

It is fair to say that the impact that we can have should be seen as complementary to the impact that DFID can have through its leading role. We have tried hard to focus our resources so that we get maximum impact from them. For that reason, we have decided to focus on a particular region, sub-Saharan Africa, and on Malawi specifically. We will also work hard to increase the capacity of non-governmental organisations in Scotland. In that way, we think that we can make a direct impact in Malawi as a first step.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that life sciences play an important role in creating wealth and improving health and quality of life in Scotland? What consultation has the minister had with life sciences organisations with respect to using their special skills in international development activities?

Patricia Ferguson: The Executive does not think that its international development policy is a static piece of work; it is a living document and it will evolve and change with time. We will enter into more negotiation with the general business community in Scotland about the efforts that it can

make. At a very good seminar on Monday, the Secretary of State for Scotland, Gareth Thomas of DFID and I talked to a wide range of contributors, such as NGOs and aid agencies, as well as businesses, about the work that they might want to do. Organisations throughout Scotland such as local authorities, schools and education providers, and businesses are willing to take part in and contribute to what we are doing. We will talk to anyone who has something to contribute to this process.

Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (Dungavel)

6. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many children being held at Dungavel House immigration removal centre have been referred to the children's reporter under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. (S2O-5962)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Six children resident in Dungavel House immigration removal centre have been referred to the principal reporter under section 52 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. None of the children was referred to a children's hearing as a result of those investigations.

Christine Grahame: I refer the minister to an e-mail retrieved under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 from Alan Miller to Yvonne Strachan at the Scottish Executive, dated 12 September 2003, in which he states, inter alia:

"I note with interest the recommendation in the recent HMIP report that regular and independent assessments of child welfare and development needs should be implemented for all children in Dungavel."

He goes on to ask for guidance from the Home Office on

"(1) the likely response to this recommendation and

(2) the timescale on which a response is likely."

He asks further:

"Is it possible to get any clarification on these points? An early response would be very helpful."

However, after my FOI inquiry, the trail goes dead. Can the minister bring me up to date?

Peter Peacock: I have no specific insight into the points that Christine Grahame makes. I am happy to look into the matter and to write to her, if that is appropriate and there is anything further to follow up. Notwithstanding what she said, any matter that is referred to the reporter for investigation will be investigated. If, in the reporter's judgment, matters need to be taken further and compulsory measures are required, those matters will be taken further.

Written Questions

7. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with the standard of answers that it provides to written questions from members. (S2O-5941)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Ms Margaret Curran): Yes. Questions are considered very carefully, with the aim of providing answers that are as informative as possible.

Stewart Stevenson: I am grateful for that response. From some information that I have already provided to her, the minister will be aware that all is not rosy in the garden of parliamentary questions. For example, has she considered the parliamentary answers that were given in the week beginning 21 February? Eleven of the answers could have been checked for manifest errors, as they included totals in tables. There were seven errors in those 11 answers. I have in my hand a 22-page document with answers that contain manifest errors. If there are manifest errors in answers that can be checked objectively by adding up the numbers, how many errors are there in answers that we cannot check so easily? Is it time for the only other mathematician in the Parliament to move over to make way for the one mathematician in the Parliament who can count?

Ms Curran: The mind boggles at the thought of Stewart Stevenson being Minister for Parliamentary Business and having responsibility for such matters.

Christine Grahame: He was talking about being First Minister.

Ms Curran: The member has bigger ambitions that I did not properly attribute to him.

It is not acceptable that answers that contain manifest errors are given to members from any party. I take responsibility for what has happened and will pursue the matter. The answer that I gave was not intended to detract from the issue of miscalculations. For example, one figure should have read 10,961 and not 10,200. I am happy to correct that. However, I assure Stewart Stevenson and other members that we make great efforts to ensure that we give clear, direct information to members. I spend time with my ministerial colleagues, so I know that they check the answers that are given to them. Perhaps we do not get out our calculators to check the background tables in the annexes, but we will ensure that staff do that properly in future. I would be the first to criticise staff when they get things wrong but, broadly speaking, we are well served by people who want to provide information in answers. Any mistakes are inadvertent and are not intended to mislead members in any way.

Women's Football

8. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support women's football. (S2O-5952)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Since 1997-98, sportscotland has invested in excess of £1 million of Exchequer and lottery funding. It has committed a further £400,000 to support the Scottish Women's Football Association's current four-year development plan. Women's and girls' football has also benefited from facility awards and our substantial investment in initiatives such as active schools. Implementation of the action plan for youth football will also deliver a step change in the development of women's and girls' football.

Dr Jackson: I thank the minister for that full response, especially after the previous question. I gather that interest in women's football is growing. Can she reassure me that the necessary support is being given to the sport to ensure that it grows within an effective management structure?

Patricia Ferguson: Sylvia Jackson is correct to say that the sport of women's football is growing. Some 4,000 players are now registered, in addition to the 20,000 girls who we know are playing football in schools. This is a growing sport that is to be encouraged. The governance arrangements that have been put in place for women's football are a model that could be used by other sporting organisations and governing bodies. We have recently appointed in sportscotland a new women, girls and sport officer, who will lead the implementation of the organisation's women, girls and sport action plan. I hope that that will contribute to the continuing increase in the number of women playing football.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister join me in congratulating the work of the Scottish Schools Football Association, which has established a range of interschool competitions for girls, including the Bank of Scotland-sponsored senior shield competition? What action will she take to support schools that have had to cancel football matches due to fears over insurance and liability in the wake of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003?

Patricia Ferguson: As I am delighted to congratulate anyone who is helping to encourage excellence and participation in sport, I join Jamie McGrigor in congratulating the SSFA. As for his other question, some bodies that are involved in sport have perhaps been a little overzealous in some of their precautions over and arrangements for insurance. The best advice that I can give is that anyone who is concerned about such issues should contact sportscotland, which will provide

very good and expert guidance about how to manage such issues.

Moray Air Bases (Job Losses)

9. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to address the impact on the local economy of the loss of 1,000 jobs at the Moray air bases. (S2O-5899)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): The First Minister and I met representatives of Moray Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise on Monday, prior to the convention of the Highlands and Islands. Following a very informative and constructive discussion, we were pleased to announce that Highlands and Islands Enterprise will establish a small dedicated team within the local enterprise company that will build on the work of the existing local partners' task force to support the diversification and sustainability of the Moray economy.

Mary Scanlon: Given that it has the lowest wage rate in Scotland, Moray already faces serious problems. Will the task force address those underlying weaknesses in the area's economy as well as the loss of the 1,000 jobs at the air bases?

Mr Wallace: Very much so. Part of our discussion centred on this opportunity to think about the diversification of the Moray economy which, as many people would accept, has been defence dependent for many years. Such considerations will form an important aspect of the role of the team, which will work with other organisations in the area that have been looking at and undertaking important work on this issue.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Given that many of the people who are employed at military bases in Moray will now leave the area, and that their partners and spouses work in schools and hospitals and form a vital part of its infrastructure, what support will be given to Moray Council and NHS Grampian to ensure that such a situation does not do any further damage to the area's economic prospects?

Mr Wallace: I am very aware of the fact that, as Stewart Stevenson has pointed out, the people whom he mentioned are engaged in the local health service and in local education and that service personnel children attend local schools. The Minister for Education and Young People and the Minister for Health and Community Care are also taking an interest in this matter. Any effect on the durability of such vital services will be considered by the local partners as they develop

their action plan over the next three months. I assure Mr Stevenson and the Parliament that the relevant ministers and I will continue to monitor the issue closely.

Public Demonstrations (Management)

10. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what lessons in the management of demonstrations have been learned as a result of the Trident Ploughshares demonstration outside the Parliament on 10 March 2005. (S2O-5924)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Police forces regularly deal with demonstrations, and I am sure that Lothian and Borders police will have assessed the handling of the demonstration in question as a matter of routine. Any lessons would in the first instance be a matter for the chief constable.

Donald Gorrie: People who have to police demonstrations and who have to look ahead to the next one have a natural tendency to overreact, because they will be criticised more for underreacting than for overreacting. Will the minister try to ensure that there is no such overreaction to the much more serious demonstrations that are likely to occur during the G8 summit? After all, the fear of hype and of being involved with alleged troublemakers will discourage ordinary peaceful people from going on legitimate demonstrations.

Cathy Jamieson: In the interests of giving accurate information to Stewart Stevenson and to other members who always like truthful answers, I point out that I have been involved in peaceful demonstrations and that I take seriously people's right to protest peacefully. People who are planning for the G8 summit have particularly noted the issue that the member mentions. I say to people who want to protest that doing so is perfectly legitimate but that they should protest safely and within the confines of the law. If they do so, they have nothing to fear.

Life Sciences

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2644, in the name of Jim Wallace, on life sciences.

15:00

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): I am delighted to open this debate on Scotland's life sciences sector; indeed, I think that this is the first specific debate in the Parliament on such an important contributor to Scotland's economy.

The sector is a key and growing part of our economy. Many challenges undoubtedly lie ahead, but the sector can justifiably claim to be one of Scotland's major success stories. The economic and social benefits that can arise from developments in life sciences are potentially enormous. That was brought home to me in stark terms in January this year, when I led a mission of Scottish life sciences companies to China. The companies are ambitious and innovative and wanted to seek out partnerships and opportunities in a country whose demographics mean that even securing a small share of the market promises to deliver widespread benefits and considerable rewards. Indeed, during question time, Mr Gallie highlighted the opportunities for taking life science developments to developing nations throughout the world.

From the discovery of the antibiotic to the development of the first cloned mammal, Scotland has been responsible for key breakthroughs in health-related research. Our innovations have been a key catalyst for productivity and growth, as new ideas drive enterprise, create new products and markets, improve efficiency and deliver benefits to firms, customers and society.

I see life sciences making a major contribution to creating sustainable, long-term growth in our economy, but a true partnership approach that involves the Government, industry, academia, the national health service and the enterprise networks will be required. That partnership is at the heart of our new life sciences strategy, which is outlined in "Scottish Life Sciences Strategy: Achieving Critical Mass for Sustainable Growth", which I launched last month. The publication of the strategy represents a pivotal point in the remarkable development of the sector, which is industry led, but founded in partnership.

The strategy sets out a long-term vision of a sector that is globally focused. It seeks to exploit our talent and strengths in scientific excellence, financial services and innovative business models

and it is coherent for all parts of the sector in Scotland. I firmly believe that the strategy can guide our collective efforts and help Scotland to realise its full potential as a world-class player in scientific research and its industrial applications.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Page 13 of "Scottish Life Sciences Strategy: Achieving Critical Mass for Sustainable Growth" mentions the financial community. The document states:

"Scotland's investment community and the local life sciences industry are poorly connected. We will seek to improve this through dialogue between our communities to reduce the barriers to investment."

What are the barriers to investment? What is the Executive doing about them?

Mr Wallace: It has been felt that there has been disconnection—although that might be too much of a generalisation—in a number of key areas between the life sciences sector and the business and financial community. I have discussed that matter, which is reflected in the section of the document from which Fiona Hyslop has just quoted. Perhaps opportunities are not being recognised. Yesterday, I followed up the commitment that I gave when the strategy was launched by writing to a number of financial services sector leaders in Scotland to invite them to meet me and players in the life sciences community in order to try to establish dialogue. We are also trying to address another issue that has been raised: how we can help companies that are looking for venture capital in the £2 million to £5 million range. There are sometimes long lead times for drug development and much life sciences work can be inherently risky. However, I will say more about that in a moment.

First, I want to consider the different partners. Our universities are powerhouses in the field of life sciences and there are particularly large clusters of life scientists in our cities, which brings the advantages of critical mass. That has helped our life sciences sector to secure about one fifth of all United Kingdom higher education research income, which is the highest proportion that has gone to any part of the United Kingdom.

It is worth bearing in mind the contribution that our universities make in life sciences. They are responsible for 13 per cent of the UK's first life sciences degrees, 16 per cent of the UK's pharmacy degrees, 31 per cent of the UK's first genetics postgraduates and 30 per cent of the UK's microbiology PhDs. Those figures show the extent to which Scotland punches above its weight, given the size of its population.

Increasingly, that research excellence in life sciences is being translated into real benefits for the wider economy. Research at the University of Dundee has spawned a substantial biotechnology

cluster that employs some 2,500 people and accounts for 14 per cent of the local economy. In Edinburgh, the creation of a £200 million biomedical research centre will create the UK's largest research site. Six thousand jobs will be provided and more than £440 million will be put into the economy each year. Edinburgh will become one of the world's top 10 locations for biomedical research and development.

I accept that it is crucial that we maintain our competitive edge. That is why, since devolution, ministers have committed record levels of investment to Scotland's universities. By the end of the current spending review period, they will be receiving £1 billion a year, which represents a 20 per cent real-terms increase since 1999. Much of that money will go into research.

Our life sciences company base is expanding. There are 550 life sciences companies and organisations that employ more than 26,000 people throughout Scotland. The sector contributes an estimated £582 million of gross value added to our economy, but the challenge remains to build critical mass. Although the strategy may be long term, the work to develop our life sciences capacity and capabilities continues apace.

I will give some examples of that. Two weeks ago, I was privileged to participate in the official opening of United States-owned Upstate's new Dundee facility and to share a platform with the Nobel prize winner Professor Ed Fischer, whose scientific discoveries are being utilised in the technology that is applied by Upstate at Dundee. That opening followed hard on the heels of the announcement by Inverness Medical Innovations of a multi-million pound investment—and the creation of 500 new jobs—in Stirling, in the field of heart disease. That speaks volumes about our highly educated workforce, our infrastructure and the increasing breadth and depth of the skills and knowledge base within a number of life science fields. Only yesterday, a £15 million package to create a centre for health science in Inverness was announced. That heralds a world-class facility for health care and biotechnology research, education, training and business development.

Those are just some of the major projects that are going on. A wide range of businesses are operating in life sciences, from Hebridean Biotech in the Western Isles to ProStrakan in the Borders and from CXR Biosciences in the east to Crusade Laboratories in the west, all of which are striving to fulfil our 15-year vision of building critical mass.

In a number of key areas, the potential for success is even more striking. The fact that Scotland is already recognised as a European and international centre of excellence for stem cell-related research makes it an attractive location for

talented scientists worldwide. We appreciate that ethical issues surround some of the work that is being undertaken, but with a clear, stable and publicly acceptable regulatory framework that has been derived through full debate and engagement with the public, industry and scientists, we believe that the benefits will be recognised in the long term.

Our universities have the expertise and although our company base needs to grow, it has ambition. Where can the Government and its agencies add value?

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister mentioned the IMI investment in Stirling, which could lead to the creation of 500 jobs. Is he able to tell the Parliament how quickly those jobs will come on stream? Are they not dependent on the manufacturing that will come from research? Can we be certain that that manufacturing will bear fruit relatively soon?

Mr Wallace: I cannot give an exact date. The proposal involves a combination of high-value research jobs and manufacturing jobs. Both when I discussed the possibility of a location in Scotland with IMI representatives and at the launch, I found that there was considerable confidence that the work that would be done would be pioneering in nature and at the cutting edge and that it would be possible to deliver on the expectation that 500 jobs would be created.

As well as having the Executive's full support, IMI will get help from the intermediary technology institutes. The ITIs, to which I will return, represent just one of the ways in which we have been supporting the life sciences sector.

The Scottish co-investment fund has played a crucial role in helping to stimulate and support a wide range of early-stage life science investments by providing up to £2 million. However, as I said in response to Fiona Hyslop, there remains a funding gap for technology companies—especially those in the life sciences sector—of between £2 million and £5 million. We have recognised that and the enterprise networks are carrying out a consultation on a new Scottish investment fund.

As part of that process, I am pleased to be able to indicate today that the Scotland Executive and Scottish Enterprise will each commit £20 million to the fund, subject to a positive outcome to the consultation. We intend to use the £40 million to lever in resources from a range of other players, including the private sector. That should provide a substantial fund to help to address constraints facing life sciences and other innovative businesses, as part of our firm commitment to help them to realise their full growth potential.

The investment of £450 million in the intermediary technology institutes—ITI Life

Sciences, ITI Techmedia and ITI Energy—shows how serious we are about the importance of the contribution that science can make. All three ITIs will help to stimulate company and research base growth. Indeed, ITI Life Sciences was critical to securing the investment in Stirling Medical Innovations by IMI, to which I referred earlier.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Wallace: My apologies; I am in my last minute.

Scotland's life sciences sector has already benefited significantly through the support mechanisms that we have put in place and we intend to build on that initial investment. The partnership approach that the Executive is taking is not confined to my department alone. The Executive knows that Scottish science cannot continue to prosper and deliver our current level of excellence without a steady stream of future scientists. Therefore, it is vital that our schools play their part too. To ensure that that happens, we have allocated £10 million to education authorities over three years from 2003-04 in support of the science strategy. Indeed, support will also come from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and our Health Department. We cannot rest on our laurels. Scotland continues to face stiff competition from mature life sciences locations in the United Kingdom, around Europe, in the United States of America and elsewhere.

To help to ensure that we can go forward with the strategy, a life sciences alliance will be established. The group will include representatives from industry, academia, Executive departments, enterprise networks, the financial community and others to ensure that we can provide a fully joined-up approach to the development of the sector, including the broader infrastructure that is necessary for global success. I am delighted that Simon Best, the chairman of Ardara Bioscience, has accepted my invitation to chair the alliance.

We have much to be proud of—indeed, there are many good reasons to feel positive about the Scottish economy and life sciences in particular. We should remember not only that life sciences deliver a positive message for the economy but that the products benefit people's lives, health and welfare.

The strategy will allow us to play to our strengths. It is up to each of us now to play our full part in delivering the strategy. I remain confident about the future of life sciences in Scotland and I commend the motion to the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the important role of life sciences in Scottish society and the contribution they make

to economic prosperity, wealth creation and improving the health and quality of life of millions of people; believes that the sector harnesses Scotland's world-class scientific excellence and fosters greater entrepreneurial spirit; endorses the Scottish Executive's support to the sector, notably through successful, innovative initiatives such as the Scottish Co-investment Fund and the Life Sciences Intermediary Technology Institute; welcomes the Executive's commitment to the Life Sciences Strategy, working in partnership with industry, academia, the investment community, NHS Scotland and all the other stakeholders to create a stable infrastructure in which the life sciences sector can flourish, and supports the firm intention to work in partnership to deliver the 15-year vision for 2020.

15:12

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): The debate is likely to be one in which there will be a large degree of consensus around what we need to do in Scotland to invest in the life sciences.

For a long time, my view has been that the key to economic development in Scotland is to make Scotland the science capital of Europe. Last week, in his budget statement, we saw the Chancellor of the Exchequer steal some of my ideas when he launched three science cities south of the border. Clearly, life sciences play a major role in the Executive's wider strategy to create a smart, successful Scotland and, specifically, to try to make Scotland the science capital of Europe.

I want to put on the record an issue that arose in relation to the role of the new intermediary technology institutes. The ITIs are part of the long-term solution to the problems of the Scottish economy. I believe that they have a vital role to play in making Scotland smart and successful. Quite rightly, the Executive has earmarked £450 million over 10 years for investment in the ITIs.

A point to which I keep returning—indeed, I have made it every time the ITIs are discussed in the chamber—concerns the onus on every politician and responsible commentator in Scotland not to jump on the passing short-term bandwagon and hammer an ITI at the first hurdle, when the first mistake is made and the first investment or risk goes belly-up, just because the ITI took a risk and failed. If an ITI has not had any failures, it is likely that it has not taken risks in the first place.

It is regrettable that someone of George Kerevan's intelligence was so critical in *The Scotsman* of the IMI announcement. Mr Kerevan wrongly stated that all the intellectual property would transfer to the company. However, it is a fact of life that if we want to create the high-end, added-value investment and jobs of the future, we have to be in the business of doing deals with companies such as IMI. The onus is on all of us to champion decisions where risk is taken in the light of experience.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Does the member agree that it is important for inventors to ensure that it is written into their contracts that they retain the intellectual property of their ideas? In law, the default is otherwise.

Alex Neil: Of course I agree with Stewart Stevenson. Who could disagree with him?

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): Does Alex Neil agree that one of the things that holds back business in Scotland is the attitude of the Scottish banks? Does he think that the banks have become a bit more adventurous in being prepared to lend money and grant longer-term loans with such companies?

Alex Neil: Absolutely—particularly at the lower end of the scale. As the minister said, someone who is trying to secure an investment of £15 million or £20 million in Scotland can find that such investments are generally much easier to obtain than a £2 million investment, particularly when it comes to start-ups or higher-risk sectors. Access to finance at reasonable rates and with reasonable terms and conditions is a precondition and prerequisite to achieving our objective of making Scotland smart and successful.

As the minister mentioned, we have a long track record of invention in Scotland, not just in the life sciences but in many other areas of activity. Three recent inventions in the life sciences are magnetic resonance imaging, Dolly the sheep and the p53 cancer suppressor gene. All those discoveries were made by Scottish universities in Scotland. We suffer, however, from a general problem in life sciences, as in other areas: when we invent something in Scotland, often somebody elsewhere makes it. Much of the downstream activity gets done furth of Scotland, and we need to address that.

About 17 per cent of all the patents that are registered in the UK in an average year are from Scotland, yet only about 5 per cent are actually developed in Scotland—a difference of 12 per cent. We are creating wealth for other nations and are making discoveries that other people exploit. We need to find more imaginative and innovative ways of ensuring that a higher percentage of the research that is undertaken in Scotland ends up in development and downstream activity here. That is as true of life sciences as it is of many other sectors.

I had the pleasure of speaking at the University of Glasgow just before Christmas, at the launch of a project on the pooling of research facilities in Scotland, specifically in physics and chemistry. Last week, I chaired a presentation by organisations now known as SUPA and ScotCHEM. SUPA is the Scottish universities physics alliance; ScotCHEM is the formal

organisation for pooling together all the chemistry departments, and their resources, of the main Scottish universities. Their work must be developed fully, and I hope that the minister will continue to support their initiatives.

Even considering the strength that we have when we pool our resources and the number of scientists we have available, we still come below Oxford, Cambridge and University College London. Our objective as Scottish universities incorporated, as it were, should be to be larger than any one of those single institutions. I believe that we must pursue that goal in life sciences as well as in other disciplines.

Dundee provides a classic example of what we need to do throughout Scotland. When I attended the University of Dundee in the early 1970s, it only produced brilliant economists. There was no research into cancer and there were no biomedics—there were none of those leading-edge sciences and technologies. In the past 10 to 15 years, Dundee has put itself on the map, not just of Scotland or Europe but of the world, as a major centre of excellence in cancer research and, more important for the long term, gene technology and discovery.

If we can repeat the Dundee example in many other parts of Scotland, we can create the high value-added, exciting, leading-edge economy that we all desire. Unfortunately, I cannot tell members exactly how to do that in seven minutes. However, I welcome the creation of the new £40 million fund and I hope that it will be used to leverage additional private sector funding into research and development in Scotland. I tell the minister that he will have the support of members on this side of the chamber for that project.

I move amendment S2M-2644.1, to leave out from “endorses” to end and insert:

“and also recognises the need to root that spirit and its resultant wealth in Scotland by gaining the economic powers that will allow Scotland to produce an increasingly more competitive proposition, thereby retaining and attracting more investment and talented people and providing an environment that encourages the growth of indigenous and multi-national businesses in Scotland.”

15:20

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome back to the chamber the Deputy First Minister after his mysterious absence yesterday. Perhaps this is the first success of the Executive's new anti-truancy strategy that was announced today.

Much as I enjoyed Alex Neil's contribution, he did not in any way speak to the SNP amendment, which was about a completely different subject. I suppose that we should be grateful because we have been spared Jim Mather's speech for the

15th time, although I dare say that we will hear it later.

I welcome this opportunity to debate the important role that life sciences play in Scottish society and the contribution that they make to economic prosperity and wealth creation. As has already been said—I am sure that there will be much consensus in this debate—Scotland has the potential to be among the world leaders in life sciences. There is no doubt that the life sciences sector has been a Scottish success story in recent years.

There are well over 360 organisations in Scotland's life sciences community and they employ more than 25,000 people. The number of companies in the sector has grown by an average of 28 per cent each year, outstripping the European average of 15 per cent since 1999. We in Scotland have 50 per cent of the UK industry's manufacturing facilities. As we heard, Dolly, the world's first cloned sheep, was born in Scotland in 1996. Scotland has an enviable reputation for the quality of scientific research in academia. The recent research assessment exercise saw a doubling of top-rated 5* departments and a trebling of staff.

We are particularly strong when it comes to people. As the Deputy First Minister said, Scotland is home to many top bioscience graduates. With less than 9 per cent of the UK population, our universities have 13 per cent of the UK's bioscience degrees, 61 per cent of the UK's pharmacy degrees and 31 per cent of the UK's genetics graduates.

The sector is particularly strong in the universities, which have world-class research capacity. Much of that research is funded by the Medical Research Council, which has an annual spend of £40 million on medical research in Scotland.

As Alex Neil said, one university that has a particularly strong life sciences department is Dundee, where division of signal transduction therapy—DSTT—which is a collaboration between the university and six pharmaceutical companies, has seen great success. It has been one of the largest research collaborations between the pharmaceutical industry and the UK research institution. In 1999, the pharmaceutical company Pfizer Ltd described DSTT at Dundee as its most important academic collaboration worldwide. Therefore, there is much to celebrate.

I note that the University of Dundee has made an interesting proposal to set up a Scottish institute for life sciences. Dundee would be the perfect place for such an institute if we were to go down that road. I ask the Deputy First Minister to look on that proposal sympathetically.

I should declare a small interest in passing. I have a slight connection with the University of Dundee, in that I am on the board of management of the students association. Sadly, that is not a pecuniary interest, but I put it on the record in case anyone thinks that I am being unduly partisan.

Not everything in the garden is rosy. The UK lags behind in the bioprocessing sector. The preferred investment location for bioprocessing is the United States of America and western Europe, not Scotland or the UK. At present, the UK has only 2 per cent of global capacity for microbial-derived biologics. There is a great opportunity for growth here. The BioIndustry Association works hard in the area to promote the sector. The bioscience innovation and growth team, which it leads, reported to Westminster in November, recommending that the UK build a strong bioprocessing sub-sector that would include a network of bioprocessing centres of excellence throughout the UK. The industry believes that the recommendation to set up such centres of excellence presents an opportunity for existing Scottish companies and the economy of Scotland as a whole.

The difficulty of obtaining funding is one of the greatest challenges that the sector faces. Considerable investment from third parties is required to grow life science companies and develop products for the marketplace. Since 2001 there has been a serious downturn in the investment market, with the result that many bioscience companies are struggling to realise their potential. Scotland is home to a large number of financial institutions and has an active angel-investment network, but we simply do not have enough venture capitalists. That is holding back the sector. The industry believes that tax breaks are vital for Scottish organisations that invest in bioscience, because they would encourage our healthy financial community to invest at home.

Alex Neil: Does the member agree that a reduction in corporation tax from 30 per cent to 20 per cent would provide a major boost to the sector?

Murdo Fraser: As the member knows, I am generally in favour of tax reductions across the board. I am sure that the sector would welcome any measure that would reduce the tax burden.

The Conservative amendment refers to the Scottish life sciences community strategy. The industry welcomes the strategy in broad terms, but the people in the industry to whom we spoke had a number of concerns about aspects of the strategy, such as the speed with which it was drawn up and the fact that some sections of the community thought that their views were not sought or taken on board. The people to whom we spoke thought it important that the Deputy First

Minister should personally chair meetings and have hands-on involvement in the strategy—rather than leave that to Scottish Enterprise—because that would give the strategy the necessary impetus. I hope that the Executive will reflect on that.

We heard about the intermediary technology institutes. The ITI in Dundee has been very active and recently announced a substantial investment in Stirling Medical Innovations. The jury is still out on whether that will turn out to be an effective use of public funds, particularly as such a large proportion of the ITI's budget has been spent on that single project. My colleague Brian Monteith will say a little more about that.

The industry's concerns are much the same as those of other sectors. There is continuing concern about the growth of bureaucracy and regulation, which holds back development, and about the lack of available skills. We need to encourage more young people to choose a career in science, to provide the flow of graduates that the industry needs.

The deputy presiding officer is looking at me menacingly and I know that I am over time. The greatest challenge for the industry remains the need to fill the funding gap. We can provide more venture capital only if we can produce more venture capitalists. For that to happen, we need a business-friendly environment in which people of high net worth are encouraged to come and live and to locate and invest in Scotland. Policies such as those of the Deputy First Minister's party, which wants to increase the higher rate of income tax by 10 per cent for people who earn £100,000 or more, would have only a negative effect on that agenda. The same can be said for the proposals to charge local income tax, which would inevitably hit higher earners and drive away potential investors. We need joined-up Government that considers all the implications of its policies on enterprise and growth, instead of just paying lip-service to the industry's needs.

The life sciences industry presents a major opportunity for Scotland—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish now, Mr Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: That opportunity will be realised only if we are prepared to put in place the policies that will allow the sector to grow and to gain access to those who have the confidence to invest in Scotland.

I move amendment S2M-2644.2, to leave out from "endorses" to end and insert:

"notes the Scottish Executive's support to the sector, notably through initiatives such as the Scottish Co-investment Fund and the Life Sciences Intermediary Technology Institute; regrets, however, that the Scottish

Life Sciences Community Strategy failed to engage adequately with all sectors of the industry; notes the industry's very real concerns about bureaucracy, infrastructure and an appropriate skills base, and therefore calls on the Executive to supplement glossy brochures with tangible action to grow biosciences and encourage venture capitalist investment in Scotland by creating a more business-friendly environment."

15:28

Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): I am happy to contribute to the debate. Dundee is so highly respected in the life sciences that other members have mentioned matters to which I intended to refer, but I will try not to repeat what has been said.

I agree with the Scottish Executive that the sector represents a great success story for Scotland and should be encouraged to grow, so that it makes an even more significant contribution to Scotland's economic prosperity in the future. The document "The Scottish Life Sciences Strategy: Achieving Critical Mass" identifies four key factors that will be at the heart of the strategy: the right people; the right resources; greater focus; and greater collaboration. It goes without saying that there is a need for adequate funding and the right focus, but I think that the most important factors are the need for the right people and the right collaboration.

Dundee represents a prime example of how securing the right people can act as a catalyst for future generations of eminent scientists. Our groundbreaking research in the life sciences attracted a growing list of world-famous scientists, which in turn attracted the next generation of talent from all over the world to study and work in Dundee. I will say something later about how we can make progress on that.

Dundee also has examples of collaborations. We have the BioDundee partnership, which is funded by Dundee City Council, Scottish Enterprise Tayside and the universities. There is also European funding. The partnership is unique and enables the public and private sectors in Dundee to create an environment in which the life sciences sector can grow and develop. I hope that the minister will comment on the BioDundee model and say whether he thinks something similar could be useful as part of a Scotland-wide strategy.

I speak in support of the Executive's motion in the context of my experience. My constituency of Dundee West houses the University of Dundee and the University of Abertay Dundee as well as the United Kingdom's fastest-growing biomedical cluster—one that has quadrupled in size in the past 10 years. Both universities have world-class reputations in life science research. The University of Dundee is the only top-ranking, 5* facility for

teaching and research in Scotland, as well as being an international leader in diabetes and cancer research. It was voted the best scientific workplace in Europe. The University of Abertay Dundee has a growing reputation in environmental sciences and was recently rated in the top five in the discipline.

Dundee's reputation for research is very important to the city. When the First Minister and I visited the Wellcome Trust biocentre, postgraduate students from around the world told us that they were advised at their schools and universities to come to Dundee because of its reputation for international excellence.

There are also important economic benefits for Dundee. My figures are different from the minister's—I got mine from the University of Dundee; I do not know where he got his from. According to my figures, the biotechnology industry now accounts for 16 per cent of Dundee's economy. The University of Dundee has spun out 11 companies—including four in the past two years—and an amazing 20 are in development. Dundee is one of the few places where biotechnology is still rapidly expanding.

In 1971, there were no biotechnology or associated support companies in Dundee; now there are 39. The number of direct jobs has increased from 150 to, last year, 3,800. Indirect employment has increased from 450 to 11,400. There is also investment from the nine of the world's top 10 pharmaceutical companies that have contracts in Dundee. Anybody would agree that that is an enviable record.

There are too many things to go into detail on, but I will mention the Scottish Crop Research Institute. It is not in my constituency but it should be—if the Scottish Executive would agree to redraw the boundaries so that they are the ones that Dundee should have. We also have the life sciences intermediary technology institute, for which we welcomed the investment from the Scottish Executive. Other developments are in the offing, too.

All that and more is happening in Dundee in the life sciences. However, it is still not enough. As Murdo Fraser said, there is a proposal to set up a Scottish institute for life sciences in Dundee. The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and the First Minister have been lobbied heavily on that proposal, but I am not aware of any final decision having been taken. The issue is too complicated for me to go into the details now, but I will say that meeting the Executive's key aims in its Scottish life sciences strategy would be facilitated by having a budget dedicated to the recruitment of outstanding scientists whose major remit is not to teach but to carry out fundamental research. I have been led to believe that the

present set-up does not necessarily facilitate that. I do not want an answer today—because I probably would not get the answer that I want—but I would welcome the opportunity to meet the minister and his officials to discuss how we can make progress with the proposal, which would go a long way towards achieving the aims in the strategy.

I very much support the Scottish Executive's strategy for developing life sciences in Scotland. However, I hope that the minister will acknowledge that, without the contribution that Dundee makes to the sector, the performance of Scotland on the international stage would be somewhat less impressive than it is now. I hope that the tenacity and vision demonstrated by many organisations and individuals in Dundee over the past 10 years or so will be recognised in any funding and initiatives in the future.

15:35

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): In the Lothians, we are conscious of the life sciences as contributors to our understanding of the world and to the local economy. Life sciences in the Lothians also drive the national life sciences agenda and contribute to the national economy. It is right and proper that we should celebrate the successes, identify opportunities and debate Government policy on the issue. We have the institute for stem cell research at the University of Edinburgh, the Beatson Institute for Cancer Research in Glasgow, and, as we have heard, the Wellcome Trust biocentre in Dundee. In my speech, I will touch on the importance of life sciences to the future of Scotland's economy, the contribution from Scottish universities and the challenges facing our education sector.

The target set by the Barcelona summit in 2002 was for 3 per cent of gross domestic product to be spent on research and development and on innovation. The United Kingdom has set a target of increasing business and public investment in R and D from 1.9 per cent of GDP to 2.5 per cent—less than the Barcelona target—by 2014. We face major challenges. Only 2 per cent of the UK's 48 publicly quoted biotechnology companies are Scottish, which shows that we require more companies of significant size and scale in Scotland. We have a reputation for world-class research in life sciences, with one of Europe's most concentrated biotechnology clusters. In 2002-03, our higher education institutions filed 212 new patent applications—17 per cent of the UK total. We are punching above our weight, but the key issue is the development of that research and extending it into commercialisation.

I want to touch on the potential of our universities and on where we should be. In

Finland, Sweden and Spain, more than one in six foreign students are engaged in highly theoretical advanced research programmes. Sir James Black, our only living Nobel laureate and chancellor of the University of Dundee, recently warned that low Government investment in science, combined with the mounting debts that students face, is threatening the future of scientific development. We must celebrate our successes, but we cannot be complacent.

I appeal to the minister to reflect on the challenges that foreign students face, particularly at the University of Edinburgh, in financing their studies. Will he ask the Home Office to address the issue of the increase in visa fees that is being imposed on our foreign students? That increase will deter foreign students; indeed, it is already deterring them. We want that fresh talent to study in Scotland, to stay here and to contribute to our collective future. We want investment—and we welcome the moves on that so far—but on the world stage Scotland has to compete not only with Europe, but with the big United States market. We must make major strides in order to do that. I am excited about the life sciences alliance and, like Alex Neil, about the ScotCHEM and SUPA provisions. The collaboration that the Scottish National Party has called for is starting to come to fruition. That is to be welcomed.

One of our biggest challenges lies in our schools. As much as we want to attract foreign students, we must also grow our own. I acknowledge that the Executive has recognised that in its science strategy and its overhaul of the science education curriculum, but science classes in Scotland are being cancelled because of a lack of equipment and increasingly stringent health and safety guidelines. I do not know about other members, but I remember with excitement the phosphorus glows when we had major experiments in our classroom. However, such activities have been unnecessarily restricted by over-stringent health and safety guidelines, which can put off students from what is an attractive area to study.

Only last week, a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education on improving science education for five to 14-year-olds stated that school science in Scotland is improving in some respects, but is failing to achieve its potential. Graham Donaldson stated that too many pupils leave school with little interest in science and insufficient awareness about its influence on their lives. Science and technology literacy is essential to modern citizenship. On the day that a report from Westminster talks about approving sex selection of embryos, we need a population that understands that science. We need a population that understands that technology.

The HMIE report also says:

"The lack of any national mechanism to deliver high quality professional updating to all science teachers is a major barrier".

We must acknowledge that primary 5 to secondary 2 is the real problem area in science education and I appeal to the minister to talk to his colleagues about the schools of ambition programme. If we are encouraging schools to specialise, which can be done in the comprehensive system, why not have a school specialising in science in Dundee? That would be a major step forward. The minister is asking everyone else to do things, but why did he not attend the European conference on recruitment into science, technology and mathematics in Finland last year when every other nation from the European Union was represented?

If science is the pursuit of truth and technology is the pursuit of control of the world around us, it is essential for our country's future development that we have people who are educated to understand the issues. We need the review of the science curriculum and updating for science teachers, but we also need changes to initial teacher training and technology education that is related to, but separate and distinct from, science education.

The future of life sciences is exciting and we need Scotland to flourish in that respect. We must improve and have firm foundations in education to sustain us and to ensure that we have the students, the ideas, the workforce and, most important, the informed citizens that are necessary for the development and commercialisation of projects in biosciences and life sciences.

15:41

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): Before I start, I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to members, because, although I would not normally leave a debate before it is finished, unfortunately today I have to go and sort out a problem in my constituency.

I welcome the debate, as it gives us an opportunity to put on record the excellent work that is going on in life sciences and to highlight the key role that they can make to the Scottish economy and to personal well-being. The life sciences impinge on every aspect of our national life, from what we eat and drink to how we are treated in hospital. They also define our values in sensitive and complex matters such as how we use animals in research, how we deal with embryonic cloning and how far we go in prolonging life. The life sciences cover a whole range of research, from Dolly the sheep to treatment for Alzheimer's, and the application of research. The industry is based in university departments and in private companies all over Scotland.

I am pleased that, in my constituency, there is already a thriving life sciences industry based near the new Edinburgh royal infirmary and the University of Edinburgh medical school and at the blood transfusion centre in Liberton. The industry can expand only with the development of a research complex to the south of the hospital. The new biomedical research complex is expected to place Edinburgh in the top 10 locations for biomedical research in the world. Around 30 spin-off companies and 100 business start-ups are expected to be created. As other members have said, 6,000 jobs will be created in the Edinburgh area and £500 million will be injected into the city's economy. That shows the real benefit that life sciences can bring to the Scottish economy.

The aim behind the new biomedical park is to allow commercial research to interact with academic expertise and clinical practice, with the goal of enhancing Scotland's standing as a leading centre of biomedical research. However, one troubling issue is the fact that the Executive has now ruled out any further money towards the tramline to the new biomedical park, which, arguably, would attract more custom than other parts of the tram network. That is partly the City of Edinburgh Council's fault in relying on a flawed congestion charge scheme, which voters in Edinburgh roundly rejected.

In advance of the debate, I was delighted to make contact with another huge international biosciences success story that is based in south Edinburgh. Alba Bioscience is part of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service and is based near Liberton hospital. It supplies diagnostic products to more than 30 countries and employs 60 staff after being in business for only five years. It is currently trying to break into the American, Japanese and Chinese markets, which should cause the company to grow even further and faster. I hope that the Deputy First Minister's recent trip to China can help the company and I shall be approaching him about that in due course.

Such companies are vital to the Scottish economy and I am pleased that the Executive is committed to developing them, which is where schemes such as the intermediary technology institutes come in. I hope that the ITI in life sciences will be able to stimulate commercialisation of research and help companies such as Alba Bioscience to get good research ideas into commercial production. As I said in my intervention on Alex Neil about the money that is available for such companies, the Scottish banks need to do more to help our industries and such new businesses and to provide better start-up opportunities. Competition from other countries and within the United Kingdom for such business always exists. We are fortunate that the conditions for growth have been

met in the past decade, but we must ensure growth in the future.

I appeal for any development that we make in life sciences to be sustainable and to carry the people of Scotland with us. The precautionary principle must continue to be applied to ensure that developments now are not a burden on future generations. Many views in society are fuelled by the media, but many groups have concerns over issues such as human cloning and the use of animals for testing. The BBC showed a programme about that last night. Those views can be respected. Our life sciences industry must develop sustainably.

15:46

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Like Jim Wallace, I welcome our first debate on life sciences and the life sciences industries, which are a key and growing part of the economy. I recognise what Jim Wallace said about the importance of a partnership approach. I will talk about that in terms of the development in Stirling.

The university sector, particularly its research excellence, is important. As has been mentioned, we do much better than our population and other features suggest that we ought to. My colleague Kate Maclean made good remarks about the work at the University of Dundee and how the city is developing as a centre for life sciences.

I agree with Fiona Hyslop of the SNP about the importance of science education throughout the whole system—in the primary, secondary and other sectors. I have met some of the people who are concerned with the new development at Stirling by IMI, for whom engineering is also important, and I agree with them that we should examine applied science and developments between science and engineering.

I was pleased to have the good news that IMI is establishing a new company—Stirling Medical Innovations—in the Stirling area. The site is in the Presiding Officer's constituency and is at the University of Stirling. I hope that George Reid does not mind my saying so much about it, but the company's effect on Stirling and its surrounding areas will be great.

A commitment of £30 million has been made to a new research and development programme and a product will be manufactured at the end. Many jobs—500—will accompany the new company, but what is good is the variety of jobs, of which we are told that 100 or slightly more will be in research and development, on the leading edge. That is good news.

Brian Monteith asked when the jobs will come on stream. I gather that the company has taken

root in Stirling already—I think that it is located in or near the Stirling constituency—and that the new building that it will move into will be completed by summer 2006.

Members will recognise quickly how needed is the work that Stirling Medical Innovations will undertake. It will develop new near-patient and home-use diagnostic tests. As Jim Wallace said, those relate to cardiovascular problems. Clinicians and patients increasingly use near-patient tests for diagnostic work and management of conditions in patients' homes, so that patients do not need to make trips to hospital. As we know, cardiovascular disease is a major cause of ill health in Scotland. It is because of that, no doubt, that we have developed clinical expertise in the area, so everything is coming together nicely.

Stirling Medical Innovations is at the cutting edge and we hope that it will lead the world in developing products from its work. When I met its management team, I was delighted to hear how the partnership arrangements, which Jim Wallace talked about, have come together. Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley and Stirling Council have had prominent roles, as has the University of Stirling. The university may not have an established science base, but parts of it have strong partnership links with the new company. Representatives from Falkirk College were also present at the meeting.

I finish by stressing the importance of ventures such as Stirling Medical Innovations, not only in improving health but, as was said at the beginning of the debate, because of the increased quantity and range of jobs that they provide and because of their input into research and development, an area in which we have been seeking improvements for many years. Alex Neil said that we have a good track record in our discoveries at the university level but that we now need to take the research and development and move it into manufacturing. I hope that that is what is happening. The new investment in Stirling is welcome not only for my constituency, but for the Forth valley and for Scotland more generally.

15:51

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I endorse the comments that Murdo Fraser and other members have made about the life sciences sector. Scientists such as Professor Hillman of the Scottish Crop Research Institute near Dundee have shown how an outstanding international reputation can be developed. I believe that there is undoubtedly a consensus in the Parliament in applauding the life sciences, but there is a need for caution. In considering the Executive's strategy, we require a degree of what might be considered a Scottish trait: a genuine,

unpartisan scientific scepticism. That is not to say that I do not wish the sector well—I do. However, I believe that the current strength in Scotland's life sciences is nothing to do with past Government strategies and everything to do with hard work and risk taking by universities, commercial researchers and venture capitalists.

I welcome the announcement of the new jobs that will come to Stirling through the £30 million investment by the Executive and the £38 million matched investment by Inverness Medical Innovations of Massachusetts. However, the new jobs are not immediate and I am simply asking questions to which I am interested to know the answers. What will happen if the company's research proves fruitless? How long will it take for the research to gain the necessary approvals? Those are fair questions, given the public investment in the company, and any member from any party would seek to find answers to them in order to get a better perspective on when jobs will feed into the system in the Stirling area. The 100 high-quality jobs in research are to be welcomed but, if that is all that there is, members must be cognisant of the fact that that means a public investment of some £300,000 per job. That is a great deal of money.

Alex Neil: Is the member's £300,000 estimate before or after tax? If we have 100 well-qualified people earning substantial salaries, they will contribute enormously to the local and national economies. Surely the development is, at least potentially, a far better deal than the white elephant that the Tories invested in at Clydebank.

Mr Monteith: I was trying not to be partisan. The point that I was trying to make is that we might want to begin to compare the costs of jobs and the results that one gets, including tax revenues. Those people will certainly be paying taxes—indeed, if we are to believe what the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning said yesterday, they will be paying more taxes. It is fair to ask whether we are making the right sort of investment if everything that is pumped and promoted so heavily does not deliver.

When I hear the minister talk about life sciences using words and phrases such as “strategy”, “joined-up government” and “the global marketplace”, I am reminded of all the ambitious programmes that previous Administrations, of all political hues and colours, have undertaken to support manufacturing, whether of cars at Linwood, of semiconductors at Bathgate or indeed of nothing at Halbeath, where Hyundai did not turn up—that was under a Conservative Government. I say that to illustrate in a non-partisan manner the point that we can be sold the idea that certain strategies are the way forward only to find that the crock of gold is not at the end of the rainbow.

It is important that we ask questions in the Parliament. I am not saying that ministers will be able to answer them immediately, but the fact that we are asking them means that it is incumbent on the Executive to have a plan B and a fallback position. It is only right that politicians press the Government in that regard. Many Governments have said that they are not in the business of backing winners only to prove it by showing that they back losers. I hope that the Executive can avoid that.

When Murdo Fraser talked about tax, he said that we need joined-up government. It is clear that we need a joined-up coalition—this is the partisan part of the speech. We need taxes that are coherent and predictable. We need a coalition in which the partners are competing to cut taxes, not to raise them—a policy on which Mike Russell now agrees with me, for which Scotland is all the better. I support my colleague Murdo Fraser's amendment and look forward to hearing more probing questions about the strategy in the debate.

15:57

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I am delighted that the Executive has elected to debate this matter. I do not share Brian Monteith's scepticism, because I firmly support the Executive's policy and strategy on Scottish life sciences. Developing Scotland's life sciences industry must be a key priority for the Executive. Over the coming years, the research and development that is carried out by Scotland's life sciences community can have an almost immeasurable effect on the health of people in Scotland and beyond. Our challenge as politicians is to create an environment in which life scientists can flourish.

It would seem that we have a unique opportunity to establish Scotland as one of the leading life sciences nations. As members have said, we have an impressive track record, which is underpinned by an academic base that is second to none. We have heard from my colleague Kate Maclean and others about the work that is being done in Dundee and Stirling in particular.

In Glasgow, the three universities are all providing excellent research to maintain the city's reputation for bioscience excellence. By combining previously disparate departments, they are driving forward research in this crucial area. The University of Glasgow is the largest science-based university in the UK outside London and has one of the biggest medical schools in Europe. By collaborating with other universities, it provides a critical mass of opportunity in life sciences that was not attainable previously. For example, PharmaLinks—the new gateway to the combined

biomedical strengths of the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde—is providing the pharmaceutical industry with direct access to a wealth of new opportunities for therapeutic targets, drug candidates and drug delivery.

In 1994, the University of Glasgow's 11 specialist scientific departments merged into a single institute of biomedical and life sciences. That merger has created a focal point for research, technology and teaching in a host of disciplines. With the creation of that unified department, the university can support large-scale research initiatives and interact much more effectively with industry, commerce and the public sector—the sort of collaborative work that we read about in the strategy.

That is an impressive track record, which shows the Executive's clear commitment to supporting the industry, and the time is now right for Scotland to forge ahead in the life sciences. If the Scottish Executive can provide genuine leadership and support to the industry, we can establish Scotland as a leader in the field. What an opportunity that is.

Advances in life sciences, biotechnology, diagnostics and pharmaceuticals can help us to detect, treat, prevent and even cure diseases. As we have heard, we have a good story to tell on that. Scotland has been at the forefront of the industry for many years, but we can do more. I have worked in medical research, which is an area that allows the extensive clinical expertise that exists in Scotland to be showcased. More important, it provides a well-documented patient population from which crucial medical advances can be made.

The strategy talks about the need to attract more young people to careers in the life sciences; obviously, that is crucial to maintaining and developing the industry. It is imperative that we continue to do that, and the fresh talent initiative will help in that regard. The Executive has provided significant new investment in school science education over the past three years, and it has invested in programmes such as the Scottish space school foundation and the Scottish schools equipment research centre. One of the best ways in which we can encourage young people to follow a career in this discipline is by talking up the industry. If we are able to inform our young people that a career in Scottish life sciences would be a diverse career in a truly world-class industry, we could attract many highly skilled students.

The strategy highlights the need to bring to Scotland people and companies that are looking for a place to succeed. Kate Maclean mentioned the importance of people. I firmly believe that this afternoon's announcement on the long-awaited M74 extension will go a long way towards making

Scotland a more attractive and competitive option for businesses—something that is necessary for the collaboration that we have heard so much about today.

The challenge for the Scottish Executive is to ensure that life sciences throughout Scotland are allowed to flourish in an environment that encourages them to work in collaboration. The strides that are being made in Glasgow are testament to the increased benefits of collaborative working. That is why the creation of a life sciences alliance is one of the most important developments in support for the life sciences in recent times. There is much to be proud of, but much to be done. I encourage the Executive to maintain its drive on the issue and I support the motion in the minister's name.

16:02

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I will take a slightly different tack from that which has been taken by my colleagues around the chamber and look a little wider. Scotland has a proud and long record in the life sciences. Edinburgh, in particular, became one of the leading centres—if not the leading centre—in Europe for the study of medicine. The reason for that was the specific local “asset”—ill health, or morbidity, made the old town of Edinburgh an excellent area for scientists and doctors to study, to test whether their remedies could deliver for the community.

That opens up an important area of interest. Just as we had, in the past, that pool of morbidity for a medical school, we now have for the future an enormous pool of knowledge in Scotland, which we are under-exploiting. We have a community that is genetically diverse, so we have a wide range of people who can be part of the community that participates in the developing and testing of new drugs. We also have one of the best-documented genealogical systems in the developed world. Our register of births, deaths and marriages records more information about both the mother and the father than is recorded even today south of the border. That is an important way in which we can create a database of information that may or may not be used in vivo—as distinct from in the computer—to support the life sciences. It is a priceless resource that very few countries have.

Yesterday we had an interesting debate on entrepreneurship, albeit that there was no motion for debate and perhaps a slightly uncertain purpose. Today we are touching on that vital subject again. The support for universities and the additional funding that the minister has adumbrated are terrific, because our universities are the intellectual engine of an important part of

our future economy. However, that pool of information about our community and that intellectual engine are but two legs of a three-legged stool. They are not in themselves sufficient.

The Government's "Scottish Life Sciences Strategy" document makes reference to the disconnection between the financial community and the life sciences community. I agree that there is little connection. However, that might be based on something of a misunderstanding of the nature of our financial community. Our clearing bank system is highly developed, experienced, effective and world class, but it exists to support mature enterprises; it does not exist inherently—even through business and corporate banking—to do other than support mature enterprises. At the other end of the scale are start-ups, which are relatively well supported by our enterprise network. If start-ups can sell their idea to the enterprise network—if they cannot do that, they will not be able to sell their developed product to anyone—they are probably in with a semi-decent shout of getting some seedcorn money to get on with the job.

In the middle, frankly, there is a muddle. Scotland is far from alone in that. There are successful entrepreneurs who make their way through that muddle; they might get access to funds informally, or they might be more successful in persuading people to take risks. There is not enough support for businesses in the middle. That is not because of a lack of venture capitalists, because they do not always suit all our enterprises. Too many of our ideas falter after the idea has been proven by use of seedcorn funding, but before it has developed into something that can be delivered. We must examine that area.

Alex Neil referred, properly, to the need to fail. Oil companies demonstrate that very well—they strike oil by drilling enough dry wells. In other words, we must follow through on the things that we do not know will succeed so that we can find some that do succeed. When I worked in banking for 30 years, one of the dreadful things that used to happen to my colleagues in the branch network was that inspectors would appear periodically to look at the branch's books. If there was no bad debt on the books, the branch manager was relieved of his post immediately. If he had no bad debt, he was not taking sufficient risk in supporting his customers. The same must be true of us. We must have courage and ambition, and we must be prepared to allow for failure, but we must also be geared to learning from failure.

One of the interesting things about life sciences is that, compared with other scientific areas, the discipline is comparatively accessible to the broader non-scientific public. People can see the benefit that the life sciences deliver to human beings, whereas it is difficult for them to see the

benefits of sub-atomic research with its quarks, mesons, charm, spin, charge and mass, all of which are only mathematical concepts. It is very different with the life sciences.

I will highlight some of the areas of the Government's document that the minister might want to consider further. On page 14, there are six objectives; I like that. However, only indicators are shown rather than something that would enable us to measure and manage the way forward. On page 18, there are 11 milestones, which give the dates by which the tasks will be undertaken. However, if we do not say how we will measure or how we will know that we have achieved what we set out to achieve, we will find it difficult to help the minister to help Scotland in that area. I encourage the minister to consider the subject further.

Some money can be made from having ideas in Scotland. Some money can be made from manufacturing, consequent on our developing those ideas, but our future is not likely to be in mass market manufacture. Once the manufacturing process is established and understood, international competition is likely to undercut us—competition is very fierce. The key for us is to occupy the middle ground of turning ideas into intellectual property, which is the process by which manufacture can take place in the future. We must retain control of intellectual property. We may need to have hunters who travel the world to find other people's ideas that are under-exploited. We will then become a centre that is known for turning ideas into products and which will attract more people here. The trick is not to discover or invent—it is to discover again when the time is right.

16:11

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):

There is no doubt but that Scotland has a genuine claim to be a world leader in life sciences. Our small country has always provided a disproportionate number of scientists and engineers, who export knowledge and scientific enterprise around the world. Equally, there is no doubt that Scotland's economy benefits from activity in the sector. The Scottish Enterprise website lists the number of companies and employees in life sciences. More than 25,000 people are directly employed in the sector, and presumably there is a great deal more indirect employment.

The establishment of the ITI in life sciences in Dundee was a welcome initiative, not least because it spread the opportunities for huge potential economic benefit beyond the central belt. The institute has put Dundee on the world map as a centre of excellence in medical science, in particular. My daughter-in-law works in a small spin-out company that was developed from the

work of a group of scientists at the University of Dundee. It is an innovative project, which makes human liver enzymes for use in the pharmaceutical industry and provides a more focused system for testing new drugs, with the important added element of reducing the use of animals in such tests. The company markets its products around the world and is planning expansion from its present five-employee site. However, that expansion has been slowed considerably by the bureaucracy that has been imposed on the company. That situation is regrettable, because it does not send out the positive messages of support and assistance that we should aspire to give.

During the debate on science and the Parliament last November, my colleague Patrick Harvie stated that Greens are routinely portrayed as being anti-science. We are not anti-science—we seek to be informed by scientific evidence on a wide range of issues. However, perhaps our view is more holistic than is usual. It is understandable to want to encourage high-tech enterprises, which have much to offer. However, such support must not be given at the expense of more traditional, lower-tech alternatives. If organic farming received even a small fraction of the funding that is poured into agricultural biotechnology, the sector would be transformed.

There appear to be elements in the scientific community that believe that, because something is possible, it must be desirable—science for its own sake. We Greens will never take that view. We prefer to take into account the moral, ethical, social and cultural factors before approving a technology. That explains our opposition to genetically modified crops. The technology is very clever, but the costs to the environment and human health are currently far greater than the benefits. Consumers seem to agree with us. Our attitude to medical biotechnology is different. The potential benefits to human health and the controlled nature of the science make it a very different proposition from fields of GM oil-seed rape scattering pollen to the four winds.

However, life scientists must never lose sight of ethical considerations. In that respect, the news this morning that a committee of MPs has recommended the disbanding of the Human Fertility and Embryology Authority and its replacement with a weaker regulatory body is cause for concern. Although we welcome a debate about the increased use of life sciences in the treatment of fertility and other conditions, there is no case for a knee-jerk relaxation in the regulation of experiments on human embryos and other life forms. The message is one of balance. It is up to society to determine the extent to which life scientists should apply their science to people's lives. As Albert Einstein said:

“we should be on our guard not to overestimate science and scientific methods when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves”.

16:16

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): It is very fashionable to talk about the knowledge economy. Indeed, the nation's scribes, who have abandoned us today, have been known to deride us, the politicians, for using exactly that sort of jargon. Of course, life sciences are the pre-eminent example of the knowledge economy, because economic growth that is created through the exploitation of knowledge is what that economy is all about.

As Shiona Baird and many other members have mentioned, Scotland has a strong history in life sciences. Indeed, penicillin, antiseptics, anaesthesia and Dolly the sheep were all created here. Moreover, as Murdo Fraser—when he was in the chamber—pointed out, that inventiveness continues today. For example, a fifth of the 5* departments in Scotland's universities are in the life science field. The challenge in recent years has been how we play to that strength because, as others have pointed out, such inventiveness has in the past brought Scotland too little commercial benefit.

The Scottish Executive has scored some major successes in that respect and I pay tribute to it for creating that pipeline of support for companies. First, the proof of concept fund was introduced to allow academics to test their ideas; then, as the minister said, we had the small firms merit awards for research and technology and the support for products under research awards; and now there is the major success story of the co-investment fund, which allows groups of private angel investors such as the ArchAngel network to invest 40 per cent of their funds in the life science companies in their portfolio. Moreover, we heard today about new support for the fund of funds, which will provide up to £5 million of capital to finance the early-financing needs of life science companies before they need to move into the venture capital field. Of course, the ITI in life sciences is attracting global recognition for its work. That said, if it were all so simple, one wonders why it did not happen under a previous or different Administration.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Ms Alexander: Yes, indeed. I am happy to take an intervention.

Mr Monteith: Is it not the case that Scottish Enterprise has developed that train of measures over the past 10 or 15 years and enjoyed Conservative support even after the baton of power was handed over? Indeed, I worked as a

consultant with Scottish Enterprise on the very commercialisation projects that led to some of the initiatives that the member has mentioned.

Ms Alexander: It is fair to say that the proof of concept fund was being thought about in 1997. However, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that the ITIs, the co-investment fund and the fund of funds were not being developed when the Conservatives were in power. Indeed, I find it all the more extraordinary that their current manifesto pledges to cut the Scottish Enterprise budget by £250 million, which would more than halve it.

Cash is not the key to the future in life sciences. Scotland has long had the ideas for success, and the Executive has made huge strides in creating the infrastructure for such success. However, the challenge is how we help to create a society in which the life sciences can flourish.

I want to pick up on some things that Shiona Baird said from a rather different perspective. She was right to say that we need look no further than today's headlines on the disputed report on fertility regulations to feel the fear that exists out there. Creating a society in which success in the life sciences is possible is the next challenge for Scotland, and that challenge is much more important than the more pedestrian recipes that we have heard about today.

I turn to Shiona Baird's theme of ethics and morals. The big picture in life sciences is that biotechnology is democratising in exactly the same way that computing technology has democratised over the past 30 years. In the United States, a DNA testing kit can be bought for \$70. Such democratisation compels us to think through how we should handle a science that has been developed not to do bad things to people, but to do good things to them—indeed, it has been developed to enhance the human potential.

We should consider what is happening in the world of sport or what happens when elderly people want to hang on to their youth. There is an infinite and near-reckless demand for things that will make us better and smarter and for things that will make us live longer. Today's row about fertility regulations highlights what lies ahead in our having to decide what it means to be human. Enormous ethical issues are involved and the limits that we might put on developments must be decided, but dealing with science's dilemmas will determine where life sciences companies will invest and grow in the future. In the past 12 months, there have been attacks on scientists elsewhere in the UK from some of the Greens' fellow travellers, a ban on stem cell research in the United States and today's splits at Westminster. We must think differently about what constitutes a society in which life sciences can prosper in the future.

Scotland has much to offer to the debate. It could accommodate the best civil dialogue on the ethics of the new science. What happens in the field in the next decade will define which areas of the world are at the cutting edge of tomorrow's knowledge economy. Scotland has a real contribution to make in leading a dialogue about the place of the life sciences in our society. That debate is a debate for politicians because, contrary to what Shiona Baird said, the decision that was advocated by the Westminster committee was about separating the technical regulation of fertility clinics from the much more fundamental societal choices about what is, and is not, appropriate for enhancing the human potential. Those are questions not only for politicians at Westminster, but for politicians in the Scottish Parliament and for people in this society. We have led on inventiveness for a long time and the Executive has led on creating the right environment for support for a decade. It is now time for us to lead a civic dialogue on the place of life sciences in the future.

16:23

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): There have been points at which I thought that this first debate in Parliament on the life sciences was in danger of becoming the Dundee debate. There have been constant references to Dundee—even Alex Neil claimed a tenuous link with Dundee, not so much through the life sciences as through counting and adding up big sums.

I was born and brought up across the River Tay. When I was young, I was told that Dundee was the city of jam, jute and journalism. Kate Maclean, Shiona Baird and other members talked about the scale of the former industrial city's transformation, which we should not only welcome, but learn from. We should learn that the main trigger for the change was the academic base that put life sciences at the top of the agenda in Dundee.

We found out that Dundee attracts world-class scientists who, in turn, attract top research workers. Research work is then spun out to businesses, which get support from Government. As the minister pointed out in his opening speech, it is all about partnership, which is how Dundee has been successful. Dundee is not the only place where there are such clusters; there are similar clusters close to our other universities. The Pentland science park, where Dolly the sheep was created, is part of such a cluster.

Alex Neil was right to stress the dangers of the vulture culture, whereby the carrion gather whenever a company goes belly up. The unfortunate reality is that cutting-edge companies are high risk. I am pleased that the SNP will not be

among the crows in the trees when such an event happens next.

Life was not easy for scientists in the UK in the final decades of the 20th century. As several members mentioned, scientists faced pressure from increased regulation and they continue to face pressure from groups that do not believe in the progress of science. I include in that category the Greens who, in general, have a luddite attitude to science. We should not unthinkingly support all science, but we need to create a socioeconomic situation in which we can ensure that Scotland is again at the forefront of innovation. I think that Parliament has spoken in favour of that today.

Three months ago, I found it interesting to read in the *Financial Times* "fDi" magazine that Scotland had been named as the European region of the future. The citation for the award specifically mentioned how Scotland had

"successfully targeted high-value-added sectors, such as microelectronics, financial services and life sciences."

That is a wonderfully positive note on which to end what has been a harmonious debate, in spite of the fact that Murdo Fraser insisted on bringing up local income tax. I do not know why he did that; he must have been filling in a gap.

16:27

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I had not intended to participate in the debate; therefore, in doing so I am on a learning curve.

The debate has been most enlightening and the degree of consensus among all parties is a credit to Parliament. Many of the points that have been made—some of which have been contrasting—are worthy of future consideration. I welcome Shiona Baird's thoughtful comments, which contrasted well with those of Wendy Alexander. Their speeches allowed us to hear two sides of the argument. Of course it is important to consider the ethical and moral issues, but at the same time we should not put brakes on our scientists, who have achieved so much for our society over many years. Shiona Baird took a balanced approach, which I go along with. Today's debate is unique in that Shiona Baird and I agree almost all the way along the line.

The debate has been buoyant because Scotland has done well in the life sciences. There is much that we can be proud of and that we can boast about and I am not talking only about the past five or six years; I am going back much further than that. We should all be proud of our country's achievements.

However, we must take as warnings some of the issues that have been raised today. I think that it was Fiona Hyslop who raised Professor Black's

concerns about youngsters who go through university. The percentage of graduates in Scotland is very high in UK terms, but not enough of them are following the science trail. As Murdo Fraser demonstrated, although the position of Scotland in that regard compares well with that of the UK as a whole, if we look further afield to western Europe and the USA, we find that the minister might have to address the issue in the future. The matter is one in which the Government can offer input but, that said, members throughout the chamber recognise that the private sector is all important in the life sciences.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member share my concern about the dramatically reducing number of mathematics teachers in our secondary schools? Science in all its forms is difficult to understand unless one has the necessary skills of arithmetic, mathematics and statistical analysis.

Phil Gallie: Yes—there is no doubt that there is a problem in that respect. One of my concerns about the education system is that fewer students are studying maths these days.

Shiona Baird introduced an important word—"engineer"—into the debate, although I may be biased on the issue. We need to face the fact that engineers play an all-important role in the world of science. Engineers back up scientists and provide the hardware without which scientists could not undertake experiments or other processes that they wish to carry out.

Fiona Hyslop: Does Phil Gallie acknowledge that the study of technology may be the vital bridge between science and maths education at school and the study of engineering at university and which would encourage engineering students in the future?

Phil Gallie: Yes—I certainly acknowledge that. As far as I am aware, the idea is one that my party is concerned to support. We want far more people to study technology than is the case today: we want them to choose technology over the other subjects that seem to prevail in our education system.

I have made sufficient points on the subject of education, so I will not continue further down that road. Given the number of comments that were made about Dundee today and some of the other parochial remarks that have been made, I ask Parliament to forgive me for raising an issue that is dear to my heart; of course, it is the Hannah Research Institute in Ayrshire, which has been a centre of agricultural research excellence for 70 years and more. Nowadays, the institute is under pressure because of different requirements in agriculture. High-calibre research scientists are leaving the site because there is no funding to support them.

We have talked a lot today about the need to take a joined-up approach to the life sciences. I agree entirely with that, but there seems to be a lack of joined-up thinking in respect of the Hannah institute. The point that I want to make is that there are aspects of its research programme that could be of benefit to the life sciences industry. The level of research expertise at the Hannah in diabetes, obesity and breast cancer, for example, could have a major impact. Because the Hannah Research Institute was established in the agricultural landscape of the country and is funded under SEERAD, it seems that there is no way of linking its work to other health research. We need joined-up thinking.

Alex Neil: I draw the member's attention to a report that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee produced two years ago when the idea was floated that the Hannah Research Institute and other such bodies in the agricultural sector should be brought within the remit of the funding councils instead of being funded directly by SEERAD. If that had happened, the threat to the Hannah would not be as great as it is today.

Phil Gallie: Once again, I agree. The present short-term funding options are not suitable for the type of research that the Hannah Research Institute undertakes.

Having mentioned the Hannah and knowing that Cathy Jamieson has also mentioned it on behalf of her constituents, I have great hopes that ministers will take on board the representations that have been made and that they will consider making changes in the future.

I turn to a point that Jim Wallace made on drug development and I point to the great success of the Scottish pharmaceutical industry over the years. All too often, that industry is subjected to unfair comment with respect to the price of drugs. We all forget just how much research goes into the development of drugs. We also forget that, for every drug that is seen to be a success, time has probably been spent on another 20 that have ended up in the bin.

I would have liked to speak about the comments of other members—one point that Alex Neil made is worthy of comment in particular. His initial point—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Could you hurry please, Mr Gallie?

Phil Gallie: I will. Alex Neil spoke about risk and failure. It is important that we acknowledge that the life sciences are a risk industry, so we should not regard it as a failure every time a product goes down the tubes.

Fiona Hyslop: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Could you take the opportunity to remind

members, perhaps at decision time, that it is appropriate for members to remain in the chamber to hear the closing speeches in a debate? I know that Mike Pringle gave notice of the reason why he could not be here now, but at least three other members who participated in the debate are no longer here for the final speeches. Although we cannot all be life sciences anoraks, I think that it would be respectful if members returned to the chamber for the close of the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As members are aware, we monitor the absence of members during closing speeches. We tend to have a word, rather than make announcements from the chair. I accept your point.

I call Jim Mather to close for the SNP. Mr Mather, you are due seven minutes, but you have a couple of minutes' latitude—although perhaps not as much as before Ms Hyslop's point of order.

16:36

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Jim Wallace started by painting a positive picture, which I recognise and applaud, and the debate has been useful and informative. It has shown and showcased real strength in the life sciences in Scotland. The fact that we have a strong life sciences sector is a given, but we need to ensure that it remains really strong. Although there are other wonderful strong sectors in the Scottish portfolio, they exist in quite a narrow range. Beyond oil and gas, banking, financial services, electricity, transport and beverages, there is not a lot. Our strong life sciences sector, with its good track record, is very welcome, especially if it can lever in its strong academic reputation. If Scotland's reputation for integrity can be levered into the life sciences, that could play very strongly and would be a real ace in our hands in the years to come.

I was taken by Brian Monteith's comments about the investment at SMI in Stirling and I sympathise with some of his concerns. We must monitor that situation and investment there must be part and parcel of an on-going process. In the past, there has been what I would describe as lean foreign direct inward investment in manufacturing, so it would be a source of genuine regret if we also ended up with lean research and development, with Scotland not getting as much residual benefit as might otherwise be the case.

I am keen that we monitor the cost of investments that are made and that we monitor intellectual property rights and ownership and the royalty income that emanates from that over time. We should also focus on helping to create small Scottish companies in our universities. They could start as little nuclei of research and development,

but they will be in a good position to make deals with the big players.

We should consider what is happening in other parts of the world. In Utah, the problem of investment being mobile and leaving the state is being overcome through a not-for-profit approach, which allows investment to remain and to be rooted, perhaps with profit-making entities downstream. At least there is a root in place.

Our party recognises the positive need to work with the big players; there is acknowledged benefit in that. The lack of independent big players in Scotland is the stuff of our amendment, and we need to address that issue in the longer term. Having big allies is key to getting to the market, and to moving on. Much more important, that would break the cycle that we have seen in Scotland in the past. In the absence of big allies, we have typically built and designed technologies and then attempted to sell them, but that approach can be difficult. Now, we have the ability to turn that polarity around and get into a position to sell and design technologies with the big players, with products being built and sold in Scotland.

That leads me on to Brian Monteith's concern about the lack of manufacturing jobs. That is a legitimate concern that we need to monitor because, in the absence of a virtuous circle in which the tax revenues from such employees and the value added tax from the companies come to a Scottish exchequer, we need to be very careful with the pennies.

We also need to monitor what we are doing with great care and openness because that feeds into the benchmarking process. I want us to monitor the cost of investment per R and D job and per manufacturing job. I would like us to benchmark what we are paying against what is paid in other jurisdictions because we are not alone in our aspirations to move towards the life sciences—everyone wants to do that.

That leads me back again to the SNP amendment, which is practical and sensible and aims to retain and to root for the long term much more of our wealth. The constraints that we currently face on investment in the lower levels of research and development and on spending are clearly connected to the lack of headquarters in Scotland and to the lack of critical mass of venture capitalists. As members know from my repeated speeches, I believe fundamentally that a different tax regime in Scotland would make all the difference and would give us that rooting compound, along with other things that we could do in the short term on business and water rates, as well as the not-for-profit organisations that I mentioned.

It was a delight to hear Murdo Fraser echo the need for tax breaks and the recognition of the positive impact of a lower rate of corporation tax that is not relative to the rest of the UK. However, Murdo Fraser is not yet in a total state of grace.

Murdo Fraser: We have heard a lot from Jim Mather about corporation tax, which is very interesting. Will he share with us the SNP's proposals for personal taxation?

Jim Mather: We cannot build Rome in a day, but the idea is this: we are going to have a competitive Scotland and the SNP is committed to doing all that is required to create a competitive Scotland. We need to be competitive.

We have heard positive announcements today that will push us in a good direction. However, not only are neighbours far and wide—Norway, Singapore and America—involved in the life sciences, our neighbours in Ireland are, too. They have been in the slow lane until now with not such a strong academic base or track record in the life sciences, and with fewer skills and less momentum than we have. We have to remember that their international financial services centre was not even on the radar of our financial services sector just 10 or 12 years ago, but now they are moving forward. We have to consider what they are doing and what they are doing differently. I could focus on the fact that the Irish are able to offer people 12.5 per cent corporation tax, but I will not dwell on that today.

The Irish have taken a much more objective view of eight key conditions, not all of which they or we currently meet fully, but the objectivity and focus that they apply are admirable. I encourage the minister to emulate that approach; I will happily copy to him the material that we have on that subject.

I want us to do as much as we can as meaningfully as possible. I want us to monitor and undertake the annual reporting that is referred to on page 14 of the strategy document and it must be adopted in a structured way with much better measurements. One measurement that was referred to almost offended me: we are to monitor the number and quality of foreign direct inward investments. I would rather have us manage and monitor the number and value of foreign direct inward investments year on year.

I would also like us to monitor better the graduates and talent that Scotland produces, including indigenous talent and people who come here to learn their skills. One of the successes of Ireland was that when it won the Intel deal, it did so with virtually no electronics engineers. Instead, they put the word out through a database and in that way got in the engineers to meet their requirements. If we produce such skills and do not

retain that talent in the short term, we must have their postcodes so that we can follow them up in the long term.

Through our amendment, we aim to create a climate in which the life sciences can prosper and become rooted firmly in Scotland and we aim to enhance our potential and our contribution to the worldwide common good. All other countries are trying to achieve those objectives. However, every other country that competes with us has the full range of powers that mean that their contribution can be infinitely open-ended and more likely to encourage retention of skills and wealth. We need to learn those lessons. I support the SNP amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Allan Wilson to wind up the debate. You can have about 14 minutes, minister.

16:45

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): Excellent stuff.

We have had an excellent debate on a subject that probably all members agree will play a key role in determining Scotland's economic and social future. Our smart, successful Scotland strategy highlights the need to raise our long-term growth rate if we are to achieve our broader economic and social objectives. Again, I think that all members would agree that the life sciences sector is one of the key sectors that can help us to deliver on that ambition.

As we heard, principally from Jim Wallace but also from other members, we have an impressive track record. We have an internationally recognised science base from which world-class research is being developed through the creativity and enterprise of our people—a subject that we debated in Parliament only yesterday. Our research base provides the foundation for commercial success through new and established businesses, helps to attract leading international skills and investment, including international investment, as we heard, and puts Scotland firmly on the life sciences global map, in the global economy in which we compete.

As the life sciences strategy says, we must be “ambitious yet realistic” and we must

“capitalise to the full on the spirit of co-operation, networking and partnership”

that makes Scotland stand out from the rest of the global competition. In that context, we have real benefits of scale and connectivity, which we must use to our advantage. The strategy seeks to do that.

However, growing the economy is like growing a business—if Brian Monteith were still in the

chamber I would debate the point with him. It is not just about whether the statistical indicators point in the right direction; it is about focus, building on our strengths, people—as Kate Maclean said—jobs in a real, not imagined, economy and the overall contribution of businesses to growth. The strategy mentions those factors under the heading, “Achieving Critical Mass for Sustainable Growth”.

In response to Brian Monteith's direct questions, I acknowledge that there is an understandable need to balance resources against opportunity and to take account of risk, to ensure that we can capitalise on the opportunities that we all acknowledge exist. The strategy identifies four vital and interrelated factors on which achieving critical mass depends: the right people; the right resources; focus; and—I suspect, most important—collaboration across the sector.

Contrary to what Jim Mather said, we can draw advantages from our position in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Executive does not control the global factors that have such a bearing on the open, trading, global economy; neither does it control the key fiscal and monetary macroeconomic levers by which Jim Mather puts so much store. However, we benefit from those levers.

Jim Mather: It was pointed out that 17 per cent of UK patents are raised in Scotland, whereas only 5 per cent are commercialised here. Why does the minister think that that gap exists?

Allan Wilson: There will be a plethora of reasons why an individual patent might never reach commercialisation. My good friend Murdo Fraser referred to venture capitalism and access to funds to let good ideas develop and become commercial. Such funding can help, but he failed to welcome our announcement of £40 million of further co-investment finance to encourage the private sector to take the risks that we would want it to take in areas of development.

Murdo Fraser: Does the minister agree that nothing would do more to deter venture capitalists than to increase the top rate of tax by 10 per cent?

Allan Wilson: I can think of a range of things that would deter venture capitalists from investing in this economy. The principal one is probably the return of a Tory Government. Thankfully, that is not on the cards.

We benefit from the stable macroeconomic environment in the UK. Mr Mather again mentioned Ireland in support of his contentions but, as I said only yesterday, figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that the UK business tax burden is below that of Ireland. Therefore, Mr Mather's argument is unsustainable.

We have had a sustained period of low inflation that supports business competitiveness and allows greater certainty for the range of business decisions. That would be at risk were a Conservative Government to return. We provide low levels of interest rates—half the level that prevailed during the period of Tory government—which reduces the cost of borrowing in the business and personal sectors. The cost of borrowing is half the level that prevailed during the Tory years.

As I have said, we provide favourable levels of corporate taxation. We also provide well-defined fiscal rules. The nationalists do not even have a fiscal or monetary policy so that we might compare it to ours.

Phil Gallie: The minister refers to the economic position during the period of Conservative government. Does he recall Mr Blair going to the Council of Ministers in Amsterdam in 1997 and boasting of the strongest economy in Europe? Does the minister think that that will still be the case in a few years' time, given the high percentage of public expenditure against GDP that is being encouraged by this Government?

Allan Wilson: I believe that Mr Blair will be the Prime Minister for the foreseeable future and, yes, that the economy will continue to grow and prosper under the astute stewardship of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The chancellor's budget builds on our strengths and ensures that we can base our microeconomic policies on a robust macroeconomic foundation.

The Scottish economy has performed well recently. We have GDP growth over the year to the third quarter of 2004 of 1.8 per cent, and our most recent quarterly growth rate of 0.9 per cent is above that of the UK as a whole.

Alex Neil: Will the minister take an intervention?

Allan Wilson: If Alex Neil does not mind, I want to make some more references to what has been said in the debate, rather than go back over yesterday's territory.

Murdo Fraser made some criticisms—as does his amendment—of the financial contribution to the sector. However, we heard from Wendy Alexander—very succinctly—about investment over the years. We have had the proof of concept fund, the SMART scheme, SPUR, SPUR plus and, of course, the Scottish co-investment fund to which I have referred. All of those have been crucial in stimulating and supporting a wide range of early-stage life science investments of up to £2 million. Of the 62 investments concluded to date, 16 have been in life sciences, leveraging in more than £9 million for those companies.

Murdo Fraser quoted an anonymous source—I have no idea who it was—saying that the consultation was too rushed and not comprehensive enough. I am reliably informed by my colleague Jim Wallace, who was in charge of the process, that he was being told by the industry at the time not that we were being too hasty in developing our strategy but that we were not being hasty enough. Furthermore, I have seen a list of those who were invited to participate in the consultation and I do not see any prominent academics in the life sciences industry missing from that list.

As Wendy Alexander correctly commented, we are being successful in accessing UK funding. Stem Cell Sciences, for example, led a winning bid to the Department of Trade and Industry's competitive technology strategy fund and secured £1.75 million for a project to develop a resource for high-throughput screening. That is a classic example of the benefits that are to be gleaned from a UK-wide approach.

I do not agree with Phil Gallie's assessment of Shiona Baird's contribution, which I thought was anti-science in some respects in its prejudice against a particular form of technology. We support the science base and we cannot pick and choose from within it. The longer-term potential of GM technology should not be dismissed out of hand. We recognise that people have strong views about GM crops, and about the technology as a whole. We recognise that it is not solely a scientific issue. However, most people support the development of GM medical applications because they can see the benefit that those applications could bring. I ask Phil Gallie, and any other member who poses the question, why we should undermine our future competitiveness by closing the door to the potential benefits of that technology.

Fiona Hyslop: Does the minister agree that if we are to have a public that understands the challenges facing us, such as ethics in life sciences, technology education must be taught and supported in our schools?

Allan Wilson: I do indeed, and I take the member's point about resource and the claim that science lessons are being cancelled due to a lack of equipment. I do not know whether that is true—I am sure that the Minister for Education and Young People would wish to look into it. What I do know to be true is that the Executive has provided an extra £16 million of resources for additional science equipment since 2002, and that we are providing a further £2 million next month for that development. I hasten to add that all of that investment would be put seriously at risk were the nationalists ever to stand where I am standing and have to account for the black hole in their finances.

that is so obvious from their economic strategy—or lack of it.

Alex Neil: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: I am in the process of winding up.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Another minute would be helpful, Mr Wilson. [Laughter.]

Alex Neil: Currently, 0.7 per cent of our GDP is spent on research and development. In his budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set a UK target of 2.5 per cent of GDP. What will the minister do to close the gap between 0.7 per cent in Scotland and the target of 2.5 per cent for the whole of the UK?

Allan Wilson: That will be achieved through the progress and development that we are hoping for in critical sectors such as the life sciences sector. The Parliament has debated the matter. The Executive has set targets and we are improving on our record. The level of public sector investment must be matched by private investment. As Mr Neil readily accepted, collaboration between the public and private sectors is critical to that process. The co-investment fund is a key instrument by which we might lever in more private sector investment.

I welcome the contributions from Kate Maclean and Alex Neil, although Alex's contribution bore no relation to the amendment. However, his point about the University of Dundee was well made. He was no doubt too modest to tell the chamber that the reference to the production of leading economic graduates was a personal one, but I recall that he was a member of the Labour Party at the time. As Kate Maclean said, contemporary Dundee is at the centre of the successful development of the biotechnology industry.

When I was in Dundee a couple of weekends ago, I was told by a pre-eminent Cambridge academic that, if somebody wants to study biotechnology, they go not to Cambridge, but to Dundee. Yesterday, we heard—albeit grudgingly—from Alex Neil's colleague, Brian Adam, that Aberdeen is a smart, successful city. It is great to have the SNP enterprise spokesman's endorsement of the fact that Dundee is also a smart, successful city under the Executive's direction. I am sure that everybody would agree that it is good to see the north-east prosper under the Executive. It is good for Stirling, Glasgow—

Phil Gallie: What about the south-west?

Allan Wilson: It is good for Ayrshire too.

The life sciences are, in general, a success story. Scotland will prosper as the life sciences prosper, and the life sciences will prosper under the Executive's strategy.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2642, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 13 April 2005

9.30 am Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Independents' Group Debate: Meeting the Needs and Aspirations of people in Scotland

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate: Women in Prison

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 April 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish National Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport; Justice and Law Officers

2.55 pm Executive Debate: Skills

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 April 2005

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 April 2005

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Health Committee Debate: Access to

	Dental Health Services in Scotland
11.40 am	General Question Time
12 noon	First Minister's Question Time
2.15 pm	Themed Question Time— Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport; Finance and Public Services and Communities
2.55 pm	Stage 3 Proceedings: Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business.—[<i>Ms Margaret Curran.</i>]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2624, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 8 April 2005 on the Police Grant (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/107);

(b) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 15 April 2005 on the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/113);

(c) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 22 May 2005 on the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Solicitors and Witnesses in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2005 (SSI 2005/149);

(d) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 22 May 2005 on the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Shorthand Writers in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2005 (SSI 2005/150)

(e) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 8 April 2005 on the Antisocial Behaviour (Fixed Penalty Offence) (Prescribed Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/106);

(f) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 8 April 2005 on the Antisocial Behaviour (Amount of Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/110);

(g) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 15 April 2005 on the Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/111);

(h) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 15 April 2005 on the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/112); and

(i) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 15 April 2005 on the Intensive Support and Monitoring (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/129).—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2625, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that consideration of the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 6 May 2005;

(b) that consideration of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 24 June 2005;

(c) that consideration of the Management of Offenders etc. (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 17 June 2005; and

(d) that consideration of the Licensing (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 24 June 2005.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motion S2M-2623 on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument and motions S2M-2626 to S2M-2634 inclusive on designations of lead committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Valuation of Utilities) (Scotland) Revocation Order 2005 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Police Grant (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/107).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/113).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Prescribed Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/106).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour (Amount of Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/110).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/111).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/112).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Intensive Support and Monitoring (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/129).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Solicitors and Witnesses in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2005 (SSI 2005/149).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Shorthand Writers in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2005 (SSI 2005/150).—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Point of Order

17:02

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I raise a point of order under rule 13.5.2 of the standing orders with reference to written answer S2W-15620, in which Nicol Stephen indicated that he will ignore the rejection of the M74 extension by a public inquiry, which concluded that the proposal will damage the environment, undermine community cohesion, fail to meet the area's transport needs and offer no long-term economic benefit to speak of. Is it acceptable for a minister to make such an announcement by means of a written answer, indicating flagrant disregard for accountability, the Executive's own planning system and the people of Glasgow?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I am grateful to Mr Harvie for advance notice of that point of order. All that I can say at this point is that, having looked into the matter, I am satisfied that the way in which the announcement was made has not broken the rules in any way.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in your gift to give us guidance on whether that announcement opens the Executive, and indeed the Parliament, to judicial review, given that the Executive is ignoring the independent inquiry's result? Will it commit the Executive and the Parliament to expenditure over and above the expenditure that has already been wastefully committed to?

The Presiding Officer: I would have thought that that was a legal matter for the Executive. It is not something on which I can rule at this point in time.

Decision Time

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are 12 questions to be put as a result of today's business.

In relation to this morning's debate on nuclear weapons, if the amendment in the name of Scott Barrie is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Robert Brown and Chris Ballance will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-2622.2, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2622, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on firearms legislation, 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)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 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 (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (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)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 72, Against 28, Abstentions 10.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Members will recall that amendment S2M-2622.1, in the name of Annabel Goldie, was not moved.

The next question is, that motion S2M-2622, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on firearms legislation, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 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)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (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)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (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)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 73, Against 25, Abstentions 12.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament extends its sympathies to those affected by recent tragedies involving firearms; acknowledges that following the Dunblane tragedy in 1996 UK governments have considerably tightened firearms legislation so that the UK now has some of the toughest firearms laws in the world; welcomes additional action

taken by the Scottish Executive to encourage people to hand in air weapons to the police; reaffirms the benefits of a UK-wide legal framework and system of gun control, and supports the Executive in its continuing engagement with the UK Government on the current wide-ranging and comprehensive review of firearms provisions.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-2640.4, in the name of Scott Barrie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2640, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on nuclear weapons, 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)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 50, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: In consequence of the agreement to amendment S2M-2640.4, the amendments in the names of Robert Brown and Chris Ballance fall.

The next question is, that motion S2M-2640, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on nuclear weapons, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 49, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament acknowledges that defence and national security are matters reserved to the UK Parliament and acknowledges, in the words of the Government's Strategic Defence Review, "the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons"; welcomes the many moves taken to reduce the number of weapons in the world including UK support for the convention to ban anti-personnel landmines, end-user certificates and other restrictions on the arms trade and the significant reductions in the UK's nuclear weapons stockpile; notes the position of the Scottish National Party, in favour of withdrawal from the

United Kingdom and NATO; recognises that withdrawal from the United Kingdom and from NATO would put at risk 25,000 direct MoD jobs in Scotland, 6,000 more dependent on MoD contracts and 12,000 more jobs supported by the military presence, and notes that between 2000 and 2004 the MoD placed 2,500 contracts in Scotland worth around £2 billion, all of which would be at risk under the SNP.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-2644.1, in the name of Jim Mather, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2644, in the name of Jim Wallace, on life sciences, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (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)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 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 (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 26, Against 75, Abstentions 7.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-2644.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2644, in the name of Mr Jim Wallace, on life sciences, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (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)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 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)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 37, Against 64, Abstentions 8.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-2644, in the name of Jim Wallace, on life sciences, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (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) (Ind)

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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

Against

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 4, Abstentions 43.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the important role of life sciences in Scottish society and the contribution they make to economic prosperity, wealth creation and improving the health and quality of life of millions of people; believes that the sector harnesses Scotland's world-class scientific excellence and fosters greater entrepreneurial spirit; endorses the Scottish Executive's support to the sector, notably through successful, innovative initiatives such as the Scottish Co-investment Fund and the Life Sciences Intermediary Technology Institute; welcomes the Executive's commitment to the Life Sciences Strategy, working in partnership with industry, academia, the investment community, NHS Scotland and all the other stakeholders to create a stable infrastructure in which the life sciences sector can flourish, and supports the firm intention to work in partnership to deliver the 15-year vision for 2020.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-2623, in the name of Margaret Curran, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Valuation of Utilities) (Scotland) Revocation Order 2005 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motions S2M-2626 to S2M-2634, in the name of Margaret Curran, on designations of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Police Grant (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/107).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/113).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Prescribed Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/106).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Antisocial Behaviour (Amount of Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/110).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/111).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/112).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Intensive Support and Monitoring (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/129).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Solicitors and Witnesses in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2005 (SSI 2005/149).

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Shorthand Writers in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2005 (SSI 2005/150).

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. Have a nice Easter break.

Co-operative Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2411, in the name of Bill Butler, on co-operative education. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends the work being undertaken by the Co-operative Group in Scotland to work in partnership with the Scottish Executive and local authorities to introduce knowledge and experience of co-operative principles into the mainstream curriculum of Scottish education; recognises that co-operatives offer a unique and valuable form of business structure from which Scotland can derive economic and social benefit and recognises the need to make more Scots aware of the value of co-operation; supports the establishment of the Co-operative Education Trust Scotland which will involve the wider co-operative movement in education, and believes that the Scottish Executive, Careers Scotland, Learning and Teaching Scotland and local authorities should continue to work with the co-operative movement to ensure the distribution of co-operative resource materials for use in schools, support for teacher placements in the co-operative business environment and support for the involvement of the young co-operatives in schools.

17:14

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of the Co-operative Party. I thank all members who signed my motion and those who have stayed behind this evening to hear the debate. Before I go any further, I commend my colleagues Elaine Smith and Susan Deacon who, during yesterday's debate on growing an enterprise culture, were the only members to mention the important role that the co-operative and mutual sector plays in Scotland's economy. Sometimes it is too easy for the role of co-ops and the value that they bring to Scotland's economy to be overlooked. Our two largest co-op retailers, the Co-operative Group and the Scottish Midland Co-operative Society employ nearly 10,000 Scots between them and the co-op sector generates more than £500 million of economic activity in Scotland. As convener of the Co-operative Party group of MSPs, I am delighted to have secured the debate.

Education is one of the founding principles of the modern co-operative movement, which has a proud record, with thousands of members and employees benefiting from the many and varied educational programmes open to them. The Rochdale pioneers quite rightly placed the education of their members and their members' children at the heart of their aspirations. For Robert Owen, education was a force for social reform and his pioneering educational venture at New Lanark was an early example of what we would now all regard as community schooling.

The co-op movement's history shows that its commitment to education is beyond question and I believe firmly that there is a strong case for allowing co-op education to play an integral role in the curriculum of all Scottish schools. That would give pupils in Scotland the opportunity to learn about the social and democratic values of the co-op movement as well as about how to develop and run a successful financial enterprise. By giving young people a grounding in the principles and values of the co-op movement we will be helping to develop a generation of young people with an awareness of the impact, both positive and negative, that business can have on individuals, communities and entire nations.

Morality and ethics are missing from the current economic and business education that young people receive. In the current climate, in which people are increasingly aware of the devastating problems that the current economic system can cause for those living in the developing world, I believe that there is enthusiasm for the democratic, progressive and egalitarian values of co-operation.

However, co-operation is about more than just values and ethics; it is about practical assistance. The make poverty history campaign, pressing for action by Governments of the world's richest countries to tackle poverty in the developing world, has been embraced by the co-op movement as well as by thousands of members of the public. The campaign provides opportunities for co-operators to get involved and support development, lifting and keeping people out of poverty. Co-ops will surely play a key role in providing practical support for workers and farmers in the developing world to improve their standards of living and take control of their lives, which is at the heart of the co-op movement's self-help ethic.

Let there be no doubt but that the co-op sector is based on successful, profitable businesses. However, co-operative and mutually run businesses differ from the purely profit-based models of enterprise that are currently presented to young people. Those businesses provide concrete examples that illustrate that it is possible to balance the interests of staff, workers' rights and the environment with the need to make a profit in order to invest. The conventional way of teaching economics in our education system removes the ethical dimension and ignores the damage and negative impact that untrammelled business can have. By providing young people with knowledge of the principles of the co-op movement, we might show them that businesses, while maintaining a healthy level of profit to reinvest, can and should act responsibly and ethically to protect all those who are affected by their operations.

I stress that co-op education could easily extend beyond being just another classroom subject. In the early 1990s, there were successful pilots promoting teen co-ops in schools in Glasgow and Lanarkshire. Many schools encourage pupils to undertake enterprise projects as part of their enterprise education, so there is no reason why schools should not encourage their pupils to set up and run their own co-op enterprises. The many and varied business activities that are run on co-op principles throughout Scotland, from farmers' markets and financial services to retail co-ops, should be offered as concrete examples for teachers and pupils to draw on.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): My heart is cheering at what Bill Butler is saying, but I wonder whether he finds the same dichotomy in what he is talking about as there was in what was discussed in the chamber yesterday, in the debate on growing an enterprise culture. There seem to be two philosophies at work but, if we have to choose, I will choose his.

Bill Butler: I would not claim to be a philosopher, but I am a student of philosophy. The struggle to evolve a way of running society that benefits people is something that every member of the Parliament is involved in. The co-operative model is one way in which we can progress matters and I am grateful for Margo MacDonald's commendation.

I hope that, in responding to the debate, the minister will give assurances that the Executive will continue to engage with the co-operative education trust Scotland, as well as with the wider co-op movement in Scotland, to address the issues that I have touched on so far with the other stakeholders, including local authority education departments, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Careers Scotland and the proposed co-op development agency, of which I hope to hear much more from the ministerial team in the near future.

If the Executive is serious about giving co-op education a role in our education system, I ask the minister to consider the following: the need to formalise teaching on co-op and mutual principles in enterprise and economics education in our schools; the need to introduce the relevant modules to Scottish teacher training courses, giving teachers the required knowledge on the work of co-operatives to pass on to their pupils, which is a prerequisite for this to be successful; the need to increase the possibility of work placement opportunities for teaching staff, allowing them to gain practical knowledge about the co-op sector; and, finally, the need for the Executive to work with local authorities to develop and co-ordinate young co-op projects as alternatives to traditional enterprise projects in schools. By

encouraging young people to learn about co-op enterprise, we will help to create a new generation of entrepreneurs who are socially aware and whose outlook is not dominated by the motive of profit for profit's sake.

17:22

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Bill Butler on bringing the debate to Parliament and on the content of his speech, which I am sure was appreciated by all members present. That includes the philosophy in his speech. The initiative that he described fits well with the Executive's agenda for enterprise in education. A co-operative model would be an appropriate model to adopt for young people who are interested in participating in enterprise activities. Of course, co-operatives can be just as entrepreneurial as any other form of business.

As well as learning about business, youngsters will be made more aware of the benefits of co-operation and that getting ahead in life does not mean trampling over other people. They will learn that success might be better achieved by working together productively with other people to achieve collective as well as individual goals. There is a great deal of added value to be gained for our communities—both local and national—in widening and deepening young people's appreciation of democratic principles and practices. That is a good way in which to encourage active citizenship.

I note, also, that existing young co-operatives have a third string to their bow. In addition to learning about business skills and co-operative working, the youngsters learn about fair trade. They learn to appreciate the importance of fair trade by finding out about the lives of producers and growers in the developing world. They see the direct relationship between the products that they are selling and the lives of the families and individuals who benefit from fair trade. I hope that that will remain a feature of young co-operatives in our schools.

The briefing note that Bill Butler helpfully arranged for the debate highlights the unique selling proposition of the co-operative movement as a combination of the three Es—education, enterprise and ethics. It is entirely appropriate that the Parliament supports the establishment of the co-operative education trust Scotland and the progressive values that it will promote. I support the motion.

17:25

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I begin by commending Bill Butler for his motion and for the speech that he made in support of it. As I have

said before, I have long been a supporter of co-operative and mutual principles and I welcome the revival of interest in co-operative forms in recent years, not least in housing and in matters as diverse as organic produce, credit unions, agriculture and farmers' markets.

Most of us who are slightly older than others think of co-operatives in terms of the Co-operative Workers Society and the divvy. I certainly remember with fondness the huge selection of products to be found in the impressive co-op headquarters in Newgate Street in Newcastle, where my grandmother was a member. Changes in commercial fashion and practice have wiped out a large part of the CWS network, but it has been replaced by new shoots of co-operative growth in other areas. Like Bill Butler, I look forward to the fruits of the new co-operative development agency in due course.

I welcome the proposed co-operative education trust Scotland, which complements the Executive's work through "Determined to Succeed" in supporting enterprise in schools. However, I do that with two caveats and one observation. The trust must work with the grain of the education system. If teachers feel that it is just another burden on them, it will fail. The teacher placement pilot is worth while, but there have been several projects where education materials that have been produced outwith the system have ended up unused and on shelves. It is very important to involve teachers and educators proactively.

The first caveat is that I think it would be a mistake if there is any suggestion of viewing co-operative principles as being opposed to enterprise principles. They are parallel and often go in the same direction. The social economy often operates in the same market as small businesses and it can be mere chance whether one form of organisation rather than another is chosen. Small businesses, co-operatives and other social economy groups should be partners, not opponents.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): As we heard yesterday, soft skills such as the ability to get on with others, to turn up to work on time and so on, are very important in enterprise as well as in society. Does the member agree that co-operative education is just the sort of programme that we need to help to teach those soft skills and that it will be complementary to what is being done in schools?

Robert Brown: That is absolutely right and that is the connection that I was trying to make. I was also making the point that the fate of the old CWS shows how a co-operative body with an inadequate feel for enterprise can be swept aside and might not keep up to date.

The second caveat is one that will not find favour in a certain part of the chamber. It is time to break the political connection between certain parts of the co-operative movement and the Labour Party. That exclusive connection has long since ceased to be in the interests of co-operators and, if anything, it can hinder the growth of the sector. It is bad for the principles of co-operation. Liberal Democrats have always viewed co-operative and mutual principles as being entirely central to our view of life and many other members in all parts of the chamber also support co-operative principles. I mention that because the briefing paper that Bill Butler was kind enough to circulate comes from the Scottish Co-operative Party and purports to be brought forward by Bill Butler in his capacity as chair of the Labour Co-operative group of MSPs. I do not think that that is a terribly good basis on which to attract broad support for the proposal.

That said, the Co-operative Group—not the party—is committing £225,000 to the project and it hopes for a long-term engagement with the Scottish education system. It is right that young people should be acquainted with forms of economic enterprise that stress co-operation and partnership, inclusiveness and social awareness as well as competition and enterprise. Those values fit well with the ethos of most schools and the parallel idea of corporate social responsibility is coming in from the other side and the best businesses. With those comments, I support the motion.

17:29

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Bill Butler is absolutely right to highlight the enlightened example of Robert Owen at New Lanark. I can confirm that his descendants are all thriving in North America; I have met them there.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this members' business debate on the topic of co-operative education. However, I must mention a past interest that is certainly not current. As a young advocate, 33 years ago, I was appointed as a commissioner to gather evidence from some records and files belonging to the Co-operative Group, if my memory serves me correctly. Even if my memory had not been dimmed by the passage of time, the highest standards of professionalism would prevent me from divulging whatever evidence was obtained. All that I will say is that I took my duties seriously.

I am well aware of the Co-operative Group's genuine and admirable commitment to ethical business, sustainability and social benefit. I am also aware that the co-operative education trust Scotland has developed materials that schools can use in project work and that help pupils to

learn about the principles of co-operative business. One of those principles is social benefit, which involves consideration of the wider aims of the community in which the business is located. Another is democratic control and the principle of one member, one vote. Everyone has an equal say, regardless of seniority or the amount of investment that they have made in the business. That is altogether worthy.

I join Mr Butler in commending the aims of the Co-operative Group in Scotland. I believe that we all support its aims of education, enterprise and ethics. In my opinion, more businesses should be encouraged to make an active contribution to Scottish education. All members would agree that schools should remain objective. The co-operative education trust Scotland is to be congratulated on its efforts to provide resource materials for schools and support for teacher placements.

Opportunities for alternative involvement with enterprise and industry sectors should also be supported and encouraged by local authorities and schools. For example, since September last year, pupils at Peebles High School have been involved with a business partnership of 50 local businesses, the aim of which is to offer pupils a series of progressive business and enterprise activities, from secondary 1 to secondary 6, and to focus on core skills by preparing pupils in real-life situations. Some pupils were involved in a marketing project with eight local businesses to design and produce carrier bags that advertised the local Beltane festival. Others worked with a local builder on all aspects of planning to build a house.

Businesses can contribute to the local community and can simultaneously form the basis of a strong entrepreneurial future for the local economy by equipping young people with skills for work. Local businesses should be encouraged to work with schools to train pupils in the necessary skills for work and to provide young people with appropriate work experience. The increased curricular flexibility that such projects offer, along with their obvious relevance to life well beyond school, make them enterprise schemes that are to be greatly welcomed. It is to be hoped that different learning styles and contexts will increase pupil motivation and raise attainment.

I conclude by congratulating Mr Butler warmly on lodging a very relevant and important motion, which I support.

17:33

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Like other members, I start by congratulating Bill Butler on bringing the debate to the Parliament. Co-operative education is a really important issue. A

proper discussion of a wider vision of the role of enterprise in education is crucial as the enterprise education programmes in our schools develop.

Robert Brown was absolutely correct to stress that there is no contradiction between enterprise and co-operation. If co-ops and other forms of socially responsible enterprise are to thrive, they must recognise that they operate in the enterprise field—they are enterprises, not charities or voluntary sector organisations.

I welcome the fact that there is more enterprise education in schools. We must teach young people about how the world works—how markets work and how to be enterprising in their lives and economic operations. However, we need to teach more ethics at school alongside that. Enterprise must be about more than personal benefit. We need to consider the wider social and environmental benefits of enterprise.

Ethical education is the necessary counterpart of enterprise education, but we must avoid simply imposing a set of ethical values on our young people. We must not tell young people that certain values are correct and that they must follow them. The central part of ethical education must be discussion and exploration. Young people must decide what ethical imperatives are appropriate for their lives, enterprises and school enterprise projects.

That is why we must consider different ways of running our enterprises. Bill Butler was right to say that co-ops are one—albeit very central—way of progressing matters, but other members such as Lord James Douglas-Hamilton have recognised that we should encourage our young people to explore community enterprises and to consider the triple bottom line that is so central to corporate social responsibility. They should consider the whole of the social enterprise field, which means looking not just at profit but at social and environmental implications, and thinking about opening up enterprise education in our schools to social enterprise and, for example, the wider issues around fair trade that Bill Butler referred to. After all, implicit in fair trade is a critique of our free trade system. Young people must have a chance to discuss what fair trade means in practice rather than simply accepting that it is a good thing in itself.

As I have said, we should explore a wide variety of models. As co-ops are central to that, I welcome the co-operative development agency and the co-operative education trust Scotland. They are great initiatives, but I agree with Robert Brown that co-operation and co-operative principles cannot be seen as the prerogative of any one political party. They are for everyone in Scotland, whatever their political affiliation.

I conclude by mentioning one project that I came across through the cross-party group on the Scottish economy. The enterprising global citizenship project, which is supported by the United Nations Children's Fund—UNICEF—Learning and Teaching Scotland and Careers Scotland, tries to encourage young people in enterprise education to think about themselves as members of a global community; to explore the different models of enterprise that are open to them; to have a proper discussion about the products that they will produce; and to apply an ethical test to consider the product's implications for wider society and the environment. When the product is up and running, they need to think about whether the money should go to the leaders of the project or whether the pupils should use it to make a contribution to wider society and their community. If they decide to make a contribution to society, they need to find out how that will be organised. The project offers a real chance to discuss the ethics of enterprise.

Margo MacDonald: I apologise for intervening at this point in the member's speech. How would he explain to young people in school about the choice that they will have to make if they discover that they can produce their product more cheaply than a poorer society elsewhere in the world could?

Mark Ballard: That is the key debate that we in Scotland will be faced with. We must expose our children to such real discussions and situations. I have to say that I think that poor countries with lower environmental and labour standards will produce things more cheaply than we can here, but I thank Margo MacDonald for highlighting that key element of the debate.

I welcome the debate and the opportunity that it has given for more discussion of co-operative education in enterprise education. However, we need to broaden things out and think about socially responsible enterprise models. In particular, I congratulate everyone who has worked with the enterprising global citizenship project to take forward one aspect of that matter in the curriculum.

17:39

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I join other members in thanking the ubiquitous Bill Butler for securing this debate and I welcome the sentiments that are expressed in his motion. As an aside, I see no contradiction, distinction or difference in the motion being lodged by Bill Butler, his colleagues in the Co-operative Party, the Labour movement more generally or any other source. Members of any political affiliation or none are at liberty to support or oppose what is said. I, for one,

welcome the sentiments and have been interested to hear the excellent points that have been made during the debate.

Co-operatives were, of course, founded in the late 18th century in places such as Fenwick and Govan, which are not far from where I live. They have since become a part of the fabric of Scottish society, to the extent that we have learned that by virtue of his involvement with the movement, James Douglas-Hamilton has a dark secret that he refuses to divulge to members.

The Executive recognises the importance of co-operative and mutual organisations in the modern world. Such organisations contribute to the growth of our economy, provide jobs and offer economic and social benefits to communities. We are therefore committed to improving the provision of advice on co-operative development, which lies at the heart of our current work to establish a co-operative development agency. We hope that that agency will play a key role in promotion, creation and development of dynamic and sustainable co-operatives in Scotland.

It has been said that co-operatives are based on the values or principles of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, which we all cherish and to which we all subscribe. Co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Such principles and values must underpin a Scottish co-operative agency, which should provide a first-stop shop for people who seek the expertise, advice, training and resources that are necessary to encourage and allow the pursuit of the co-operative option.

The agency should be able to help to improve the growth of individual co-operatives that have good commercial prospects. I cannot give a firm commitment today on the activities that the agency would undertake, but it should take account of work that is under way and it should avoid duplication of existing support mechanisms that work well. I envisage that internal consultation will conclude perhaps this month and I hope that my colleague will make a more definitive statement in mid-May. I am sure that that date will not be lost in the bigger picture.

The motion acknowledges that our schools are the places to start—Bill Butler's speech was apposite in that regard. The curriculum review provides a new context for co-operative education. The response to "A Curriculum for Excellence" outlines how we will deliver a single and coherent Scottish curriculum for people aged from three to 18. We will provide schools with flexibility to use a range of approaches, which could include co-operative education to allow all young people to

become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

To answer Robert Brown, I am not talking about compelling, but about including—that is an important distinction. To do what I have said we will do, we will work in partnership with the widest range of stakeholders that we can engage in the next phase of the curriculum review. One stakeholder might be the co-operative education trust Scotland, which was established in response to our determined to succeed strategy. The trust brings together representations from across the co-operative movement.

The Co-operative Group and Co-operative Action have committed an initial £225,000 to make things happen. Incidentally, I say to Margo MacDonald that I do not see any inherent contradiction in that respect. Learning about the market is not incompatible with learning about co-operation or its position in that market—indeed, Co-op retail is a classic example of the genre.

Margo MacDonald: I was referring to yesterday's debate in particular, in which the words "co-operation" and "co-operative business" never occurred once. I listened to the debate and was tempted to mention co-operatives in Portugal, which are modern and entrepreneurial, as examples, but that would have been so much out of kilter with everything else that was being said that I did not mention them.

Allan Wilson: As Margo MacDonald knows, I was present throughout the debate and had the privilege of summing up. I assure her that one of my colleagues—Elaine Smith—made comprehensive and extensive reference to the roles of co-operation, the co-operative movement and co-operatives in building the wider social economy. There is never enough time to respond to every point in a debate, but that point was well made by Elaine Smith yesterday.

The co-operative education trust is more than a one-off response to an Executive initiative. It will enhance long-term engagement between the movement and all aspects of education here in Scotland. It recognises the importance of teachers getting out of school and into business. That is the sort of opportunity that excellence in education through business links—our teacher placement programme—offers. By spending a week working alongside business colleagues, teachers can enhance their knowledge of the world of work and then impart it to the pupils who are in their care. They can take back a wider perspective to their classrooms and, as enterprising teachers, they can give young people the skills, knowledge and positive attitudes that they will need to make their way in life.

Careers Scotland and Employee Ownership Scotland are working together to use that model. Over a three-day period, 10 teachers from six local authority areas will visit co-operatives such as the John Lewis Partnership and the Co-op to gain an insight into the benefits of employee ownership in a business environment. All that is good work, which augurs well for the future.

Again, I thank Bill Butler for lodging his motion, which rightly commends the work that we are doing and highlights the need for us to think about our young people in particular as we take forward Scotland's proud tradition of co-operation into the decades to come.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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