

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 29 March 2007

Session 2

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Col.

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## Scottish Parliament

*Thursday 29 March 2007*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

### The Future of Scotland

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on the future of Scotland.

09:15

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** There is a particular resonance to debating the future of a nation when one is that nation's First Minister. Like every Scot, I grew up proud of my country—of its history, its traditions, its culture, its sporting prowess, its language and, most of all, its people. I never for one moment forget what a privilege it is to serve my country as its leader.

My reason for being in politics is all about Scotland and its future. It is no secret that, as a teenager, I thought that the political creed of nationalism might offer that future. I also believed in Santa Claus. I decided then that the values and the vision of the Labour Party best suited the future that I wanted for Scotland. I have never regretted that choice and I do not regret it now. For the Parliament's third session and for the future of our country, I believe that the people of Scotland should make the same choice. They should reject division, bitterness and grievance and choose the values of fairness, solidarity, tolerance and respect.

We know that political debate can occasionally be rough and ready, but we really have heard some nonsense from the Opposition recently. It constantly runs Scotland down. Today, on the last day of the Parliament's second session, let us record that there are more people in work than there have been since employment records began; population decline is in reverse; average earnings are rising faster in Scotland than in any other part of the United Kingdom; Scots are educated to higher levels than ever; the national health service is improving; and crime is falling. In these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with Labour and with devolution, Scotland is succeeding.

The people who built the Scottish Parliament in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not do so to break up Britain; they did so to build a better, fairer Scotland. That is what my party has been doing and what it will keep doing, by building the best education system in the world; building the skills capital of Britain; building a Scotland that is free from racism and sectarianism; and, by 2020,

building a Scotland where no child lives in poverty. Building Scotland is not easy; it takes time and effort, and has to be done brick by brick, school by school, hospital by hospital. Building Scotland requires tough, hard choices to be made. It also requires the right choices to be made.

The second piece of nonsense that the Opposition will no doubt parrot today is that Labour has nothing positive to say. If it wants positive reasons to vote Labour, I will give it some. We believe in building education through the creation of 100 skills academies and six regional science centres of excellence. Every school in the country that needs to be rebuilt will be rebuilt.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Order. Is Mr McConnell speaking as the First Minister or as the leader of the Labour Party? He has been billed to speak as the First Minister, but he is speaking as the leader of the Labour Party.

**The First Minister:** The Scottish National Party calls for debates, but it does not like them when they happen.

We will make leaving school at the ages of 16 and 17 conditional on a young person being in education, training or full-time volunteering; we will create a national citizenship award for school pupils; and we will give youngsters who want to learn about respect and responsibility in the best volunteer Army training camps in the world the opportunity to do so.

A full employment agency will be tasked with getting a further 100,000 Scots into work within eight years. There will be 50,000 modern apprenticeships. We will lift 120,000 more children from poverty by 2010, on the way to ending child poverty within a generation.

We will double the number of community wardens and there will be new disclosure arrangements for predatory sex offenders. The DNA and fingerprint samples of all crime suspects will be retained.

There will be new walk-in treatment centres in Scotland's main commuter hubs and health checks for men. Scotland will be the first nation in the world to offer free vaccination against cervical cancer for all young women.

There will be new targets for developing renewable energy. All new houses will be built to higher energy efficiency standards and will incorporate microgeneration technologies as standard.

There will be no council tax rises above inflation for the next four years.

A vote for Labour on 3 May will be a positive vote to build up Scotland. The choice will be to

build up Scotland or break up Britain. For the Scottish National Party to complain about negative campaigning takes pots and kettles to a new dimension.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** The First Minister mentioned the child poverty statistics and his ambition to relieve child poverty by 2020. Has the journey towards achieving that ambition been advanced by the stalling of the attack on child poverty this year and by the fact that the number of children in poverty has not declined? Has the pace accelerated or slowed down as a result of the measures that the Government has taken?

**The First Minister:** The child poverty figures that were published this week should encourage us to redouble our efforts. Tackling child poverty should be a priority for the Scottish Parliament and for the whole of the United Kingdom.

I saw Mr Swinney being interviewed on television about child poverty the other night. He did not have one policy or idea and he did not make one promise or pledge that would help to tackle child poverty. The one policy that the SNP has announced for the elections on 3 May is to tax Scotland's lowest-paid workers. Scotland would become the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. The SNP's proposals would increase child poverty and the number of families in poverty, which would be a disgrace to Scotland. That is why the voters will reject the SNP.

When a political party such as the SNP complains of negativity, it is a sure sign that it does not like the scrutiny that it is under. The job of political parties is to point out the weaknesses in their opponents' cases. The SNP has weaknesses to spare. It knows that one enormous and immovable block to its progress is at the heart of its weaknesses: the people do not want to buy the product that it is selling—a separate Scottish state. However well packaged, branded, made over or hidden that product is, the people will not buy it because of its cost. The SNP has made the most expensive election pledge that is on offer in the election—£5,000 for every family in the country. The people of Scotland are right to be nervous about Alex Salmond's gamble. We have seen a bit of window shopping in the polls, but that is not the same as the people making a purchase. The SNP does not come without independence and independence does not come without a cost.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** On independence, will the First Minister join me in congratulating the organisers of last Saturday's march for the union in Edinburgh? Some 12,000 people marched and more looked on. There was no trouble—there was only a celebration of the union. Will he endorse that march?

**The First Minister:** It might be unwise for me to comment on the entire occasion, but I welcome the fact that there was no trouble, for which I congratulate the organisers of the march.

It is no surprise that the SNP wants to pretend that it is about something other than separation but, when it does, its policies fall apart at the slightest scrutiny. On a Scottish currency—with three policies in a week—on student finance and on income tax, it has ducked and dived, but it cannot hide. It certainly cannot hide from its plans to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK. Its plans for an extra income tax ran at 6p in the pound, so it capped them at 3p in the pound. That left a black hole in spending, so it told local authorities that they will lose their right to set a rate, which would be a fettering of local democracy that even Margaret Thatcher never dared to contemplate. There is nothing local left in the SNP's income tax plans—it simply proposes 3p in the pound extra income tax for every Scot, which would make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom.

When we ask questions, the SNP accuses us of scaremongering, but the people of Scotland are entitled to ask about borders, citizenship, the currency, European Union membership, pension funds and broadcasting, because all those would need to be resolved in the nationalists' plans for separation.

Scotland faces a choice. There are two possible periods of 100 days starting on 4 May. The first 100 days, as the nationalists confirmed again last week, would see uncertainty, chaos, tax and turmoil. The alternative 100 days will see work begin again to give Scotland the best education system in the world; a legislative programme to tackle climate change, improve sentencing in our courts, and give every Scot an entitlement to culture; and a future of constructive partnership in the United Kingdom.

The future of Scotland is a matter that is close to my heart because I am a patriot. However, I deny that, to be a patriot, one has to be a separatist. When I sit at Hampden park, as I did last Saturday, or when I go abroad and see the saltire flying, my heart is moved and my emotions are stirred because of the country that I love. It is my profound concern for Scotland's future that causes me to urge the people of Scotland against choosing separation on 3 May.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can continue to atomise our world into more and more states so that every one of the hundreds of peoples in the world has its own state, or we can say that it is both legitimate and desirable for peoples to co-exist and work together. Scotland's partnership with the UK does not mean that we are left behind by history—far from it. It makes us a model for the future of the

world. Today, we lead the UK, not just with the smoking ban, which we celebrated this week, but in employment, in our economic progress and in our education system.

I might not agree with every member who is sitting in the Parliament today, but I respect them for the fact that they are here. I respect their courage in staying here and sticking at the job rather than walking out on Scotland when the going got tough. I will not stand here—or campaign throughout Scotland for the next five weeks—and let someone who did not stay here destroy the work of those of us who had the guts to stay here and build a better Scotland. I am proud of what the Parliament has achieved and I will not allow our work to be undone by someone who chose to turn their back on it. The Parliament has saved lives by introducing a smoking ban, built hundreds more schools and created 200,000 jobs. In the next five weeks, we will be fighting not for our jobs but for those jobs, for the people we represent, for the people of Scotland.

Today, we stop the formal process of governing Scotland and start to campaign for the right to govern Scotland again. For four years, I and all of us in the Parliament have been doing the difficult work of making Scotland a better place. On the opening day of the new building at Holyrood, we said that it had to be more than a building. It had to be a place to build Scotland. I believe that we have been doing that—building education, building our national health service, building our economy, building our justice system to tackle crime, building a more tolerant and inclusive society, and building a bigger population for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As we take our case to the people of Scotland in the next five weeks, I will fight with all that I have to protect what we have achieved and to win the chance to achieve yet more for Scotland. I believe in a Scotland that is cleaner, greener, fairer and more prosperous for more families, where partnership, tolerance, respect, and working together matter more than grievance, bitterness and dispute. I believe in a Scotland where the Parliament makes its contribution to economic growth but also to improving the public services on which our people rely. I believe that changing people's lives is about doing, not talking; about hard work, not easy words; and about being here, not quitting.

The fight for Scotland in the next five weeks is a fight that I will relish. Scotland is a country that is more successful than it has been for decades and a country that can be built up even further. That is what our challenge should be in the third session beginning in May.

09:29

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Jack McConnell makes cheap jibes about Alex Salmond, but when Alex Salmond is First Minister, no one will forget his name. We relish the debate about Scotland's future, which is being led throughout the country by the SNP. As Labour descends deeper and deeper into the mire of negative campaigning, the SNP offers new ideas, fresh thinking and real ambition for our country.

It is the SNP that is setting the positive agenda in this campaign. Anyone who doubts that should log on to Labour's election website and see for themselves. It advertises eight election leaflets, no fewer than seven of which are about the SNP and are negative, hysterical rants, full of fears and smears. They are seven different ways of Labour talking Scotland down—proof, if proof were needed, that Labour has nothing positive to say about the future of Scotland. The only promises that it makes in this election are the promises that it broke last time round. Do not just take my word for it; negative, extreme and London-based is how Henry McLeish described Labour's campaign and how right he was.

Labour's negative campaigning says much more about it than it does about us. It is the last desperate refuge of a party that is ashamed of its record and which lacks any new ideas for the future of Scotland.

Here is a message for Labour and the First Minister: if they want to keep the SNP at the heart of this campaign, that is great, because so do we. Our campaign is all about Scotland's future and what an SNP Government will do better and differently. We have policies to be proud of in this election—policies that will make a difference and give people in Scotland the help that they need to enjoy the same independence in their lives that we want for our country.

I will outline exactly what Scotland can expect from its new SNP Government in May. We will deliver fairer and lower local tax. Unlike Labour, we will not defend the unfair council tax. An SNP Government will abolish the unfair council tax. We will cut bills for nine out of 10 taxpayers. That is a real tax cut from the SNP, not a tax con from Labour.

We will take real action to give children the best start in life. We will not spend our last few days in office trying to explain why a quarter of a million Scottish children are still living in poverty. We will spend our first 100 days working to increase nursery provision and cut class sizes in our primary schools. An SNP Government will also ensure that access to education is based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. We will not force students into deeper and deeper debt. We

will restore grants, abolish tuition fees and meet the debt repayments of Scottish graduates living in Scotland. That is a real investment in Scotland's future.

We will treat patients as human beings, not dump them on hidden waiting lists and pretend that they do not exist. We will introduce a patients rights bill to give every patient an individual waiting time guarantee based on need. We will keep accident and emergency services at Ayr and Monklands open, because we believe that emergency services should be local services.

When we say that economic growth is our top priority, we will back that up with policies that will help, not hinder, our economy. Labour's policy to keep business rates higher than in England for most of the time since the Parliament was established has, by its own admission, cost Scottish business £900 million. An SNP Government will abolish business rates for 120,000 small businesses and cut them for 30,000 more.

Those are our policy priorities and we are proud to campaign on them. We will campaign on them for every one of the next 35 days.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind):** If the SNP is so committed to reducing business rates, why, on the two occasions on which I sought an annulment of the increase in business rates, did the SNP vote against those attempts?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The SNP's commitment not only to cutting business rates but to abolishing them for 120,000 small businesses is well known and will make a huge difference.

Those are our policy priorities, but any Government worth its salt is more than just the sum of its policies; it is also the voice of the nation. Judged by that standard, this Government has failed. On the illegal war in Iraq, on nuclear power and nuclear weapons and on the question of more powers for our Parliament, this Government has failed time and again to speak up for Scotland. However, let me make it clear that an SNP Government will stand up for Scotland. We will make Scotland's voice heard. We will not sit on the fence on the issue of new nuclear power stations. We will say that it is time to bring our troops home from Iraq. We will never back the decision to put a new generation of Trident nuclear weapons on the Clyde. Further, we will trust the Scottish people to decide Scotland's future. A democratic referendum will put the decision on independence firmly where it belongs—in the hands not of politicians but of the Scottish people.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** If the SNP wins the election, we will have a referendum in

2010. What happens if the people of Scotland say no?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The difference between Karen Gillon and me is that I want to give the Scottish people the right to choose and she wants to deny them that right. If she wants to put her point to the test, she should back the right of the Scottish people to a referendum. Let me make this promise: when the time comes, my party will win the argument for independence by building the confidence of the Scottish people, not by trying to scare them into submission like Labour.

I have to admit, however, that some of Labour's scare tactics make a very convincing case—for independence. What other Government anywhere in the world would go to great lengths to prove that, while it had been in charge, its country had amassed a huge economic deficit and was incapable of running its own affairs and then give that as the main reason to vote for it? That is pathetic. If Labour were right—it is not, but if it were—and a huge economic deficit is really what Scotland has to show for 10 years of Labour government and 300 years of the union, the lesson for Scotland is clear: it is time to get rid of Labour and win back our country's independence.

I agree with the First Minister that Scotland has a choice at this election. It is a choice between a Labour Party that peddles fear and an SNP that will build confidence; between a Labour Party that is stuck in the past and an SNP that is looking to the future; and between a Labour Party that preaches dependence and an SNP that will put the people of Scotland in charge. Above all, it is a choice between a Labour Party that has failed to deliver and an SNP that is fit and ready to govern.

We are ahead in the polls, we are winning new converts every day and we are winning the argument. Our job now is to win the election. For every one of the next 35 days, we will work hard to earn the trust of the Scottish people and persuade them that it is time to put Scotland first, that it is time for a new Government and that it is time for the SNP. We are looking forward immensely to that challenge.

09:39

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** The future of Scotland is indeed now in the hands of the Scottish people. There are two stark choices: devolution or isolation. Those are the only two games in town.

I believe that the best future for Scotland is within the union of the United Kingdom, and there is no stronger supporter of the union than the Conservatives. "Unionist" is in our name; it is in our DNA. What the isolationists have totally failed to demonstrate is this: why losing influence in



Europe is better for Scotland, why losing influence in the United Nations is better for Scotland, why weakening our defence facility is better for Scotland and why turning our closest neighbour into our biggest competitor is better for Scotland.

Those are not the imagined consequences of isolation; they are the stark realities. The Scottish National Party has failed lamentably to prove its case. What is becoming increasingly clear is that the voters do not want to court independence. They want devolution to work better and politicians to get to grips with the bread-and-butter issues of crime and drugs, the provision of affordable housing and standing up for families in areas such as health care and child care.

What about the Lib-Lab pact's failure? That pact has failed devolution and those parties have failed the people whom they claim to care about the most. The gap between the poor and the rich is widening, waiting times are going up and the numbers of crimes and offences are higher than they were in 1999. Council tax has increased by 63 per cent, economic growth is lagging behind England and 100,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1997 and 2005.

What about drug abuse and cutting crime? Our drug problem is escalating out of control. There is a drug death in Scotland almost every day, 37 new patients ask for drug addiction treatment every day and more than 1,200 methadone prescriptions are handed out every day. The Scottish Conservatives have promised to invest an extra £100 million a year in drug rehabilitation, which will save an estimated £1 billion a year in policing, health care and other social costs. To cut crime, we will hire 1,500 extra police officers and get them out on the beat. We will restore the balance of our criminal justice system to one that stands up for the victim and punishes the criminal.

The Lib-Lab pact may say that it has ended automatic early release, but it has not. No prisoner will serve their full sentence in custody. The Scottish Conservatives will stand up for victims. We will ensure that anyone who is sentenced to custody on three or more occasions will have an additional tariff imposed that is proportionate to the previous three sentences.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Miss Goldie has repeatedly said that, under the Conservatives, people would serve the entire length of their sentence. Why is it that, under Conservative party policy, someone who was sentenced to six months would actually be released after five months?

**Miss Goldie:** It is predictable that Mr Purvis, a representative of the desperately failed pact that has presided for eight years over the disintegration of our criminal justice system, would seek to raise

a smokescreen. He well knows that my party's proposals are about robust sentencing and ensuring that people who are sentenced to jail stay there.

What about affordable homes? The future for aspiring home owners in Scotland is bleak, which is why addressing the need for affordable housing is among my party's highest priorities. We already know that home ownership is too expensive for many people, including key workers such as teachers and nurses. We need to ensure that they are given help to climb on to the housing ladder. Indeed, the Executive's own economic report from 2006 reveals:

"In the past year, first time buyer activity reached its lowest level in 25 years."

We support the shared ownership housing schemes, but they are too narrow and they do not benefit enough people. That is why the Scottish Conservatives will form affordable homes trusts, which will be worth £100 million every year and will be run by trustees who are independent of the state, to which would-be home owners will be able to apply for assistance in the local areas in which they seek to live.

We will ensure that our older people can stay in their homes, with a 50 per cent council tax discount for pensioner households aged 65 and over. That is better than an empty plea about a local income tax that will mortgage hard-pressed families at the most critical time of their lives and for the rest of their lives.

The future of Scotland depends on its families. The family is the most important institution in Scotland, and it comes in many forms in the Scotland of 2007. The Scottish Conservatives will stand up for those families. We will help them with their child care, their health care and their wealth care. We will encourage parents to have more choice over who cares for their children and where they receive their nursery education. We will support local health and dental services and offer closer, faster, better health care. We will retain local emergency and maternity services and we will improve the system for elective treatments by allowing patients to choose which hospital will perform their operation. As increasing numbers of people become ill, Scotland needs a stronger focus on mental health care. My party will begin with a £10 million investment to improve care for patients and support for their families.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Miss Goldie:** I want to make progress.

The Executive has also failed in its stewardship of the economy and our transport infrastructure. I

cannot help noticing that those two policy areas have been the responsibility of successive Liberal Democrat ministers over the past four years—maybe that is a coincidence; maybe it is not. Economic growth and new business start-ups have trailed the UK as a whole. What about regulation? The Scottish Liberal Democrats are new-found converts to the cause of doing something about regulation. It is a shame that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning over the past two years—a Liberal Democrat—has done nothing about that.

**Mike Rumbles** rose—

**Miss Goldie:** My party has a comprehensive manifesto of fully costed proposals to revitalise the economy, including an imaginative and positive scheme for business rates relief. We will allocate an extra £20 million a year to town centre regeneration. We will deal with regulation. We will reform public procurement.

On education, in the eight years of the Lib-Lab pact, strategies, initiatives and targets have been produced. We have seen the Lib-Lab pact interfere with the work of hard-pressed professionals in our educational sector and we have seen it challenge the ability of those dedicated professionals to deliver the service that Scotland needs. That is why my party will propose a new education act to enhance the powers of head teachers. We will strengthen parent power by restoring school boards—a popular Conservative concept that proved too much for Lib-Lab ideology.

Turning to the Scottish National Party, I will not use the bone-chilling rhetoric of Labour. I believe in Scotland every bit as much as Alex Salmond does. What I do not believe in is the sterile destination of isolation that is the founding platform of SNP policy. What alternative does that party bring to Scotland? Is it the voice of the people? Opposing eight Executive bills in eight years is not a voice, it is an echo. This morning, Nicola Sturgeon said that we should judge a party by the sum of its policies.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** No, I said that we should not just judge a party by the sum of its policies.

**Miss Goldie:** Ah well—a revised view from the SNP benches. Either way, the SNP's sums still do not add up, and there is nothing it can do to hide that.

People in Scotland do not need to take a risk to make a change. They do not need to vote for the nationalists to make the Scottish Parliament deliver for them. My party may have had a smaller presence in the Parliament than Labour and the nationalists, but we have led the debate on issues such as business rates, early release, drug abuse, police numbers, violence in schools and free

personal care—and we have made a difference. We will continue to focus on the areas in which the Scottish Parliament has failed to deliver: affordable homes, standing up for Scotland's families, and crime and drugs. Those issues are Scotland's issues, and my party will bring delivery, not divorce.

09:49

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** It has been an interesting debate thus far. As I look around the chamber, I wonder who the floating voters are whom we are trying to influence. It is more a question of spotting who the best cheerleader is for the main speaker. I will study the tapes carefully after the debate.

The SNP seems to be running auditions for promotion. Alex Neil has already been particularly keen this morning. For the Tories, after last Monday, there is just a sense of relief that Ms Goldie's megaphone was switched on so that the voice of Scotland could be heard.

We had a similar debate at the end of the previous session in 2003, and there was a great sense that everybody was anxious to get out of the chamber and get on with the campaign. Before we do that, it is worth looking at Scotland's place in the world. Who could have imagined that, in 2007, on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Act of Union, we would be about to start the third session of restored home rule in Scotland? The prospect seemed distant and unlikely for so long, even in our lifetimes.

We should look, too, at the changes that we have seen around the planet since I was first elected, more than 20 years ago, as a young Grampian regional councillor. Who would have believed the changes that have taken place? The iron curtain came down and the cold war ended. Lech Walesa became the President of Poland. The liberal Václav Havel, who was imprisoned under the communists, became the President of Czechoslovakia. Nelson Mandela became the President of South Africa. The home of the Warsaw pact is now in NATO, and Romania and Bulgaria are part of the European Union. Finally, just a short distance across the water from Scotland, Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams have jointly announced a devolved Government in Northern Ireland. They have shaken off the negativity of much of their past and they are building a great future for their countries.

**Phil Gallie:** Following Nicol Stephen's comments about the collapse of the eastern bloc, will he join me in congratulating Margaret Thatcher and her Governments on playing a major part in bringing that about?

**Nicol Stephen:** I congratulate those nations and peoples on the success and power of their democracies for the future of those countries.

Scotland's past has not been as desperate, but our future can be even more exciting. Our place in the world is to ensure that we take the opportunity, in the third session of the Scottish Parliament, to look always to the future—the future of our communities, our country and our planet. We should go forward into our next four years with bold ambitions for that future. Our eyes and minds should be on the future, and we should take far greater notice of the people who have the biggest stake in it—the million young people in Scotland. We should have a Parliament that is ready to focus on young people, on the environment and on creating a dynamic Scottish economy.

Home rule is here and it is very solid. Only 6 per cent of the Scottish electorate would go back eight years to a Scotland run from London. However, we are not at an end point. Only 12 per cent of the Scottish electorate support the status quo, therefore devolution must develop. The Presiding Officer and I met the Scottish Youth Parliament last Saturday and heard about the plans of young people in Scotland for the future. Our task is to ensure that we have a Parliament that inspires young people to take part. That means that we must always show that we can get things done, that we can deliver and that voting really does make a difference to people in Scotland.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** I congratulate Nicol Stephen on not setting a rate of local income tax of 3p in the pound, which would result in devastating cuts in local government services. However, will he tell us at what higher rate the Liberal Democrats will set a local income tax? How will that help young people who are saving up to buy their own home or students who are exempt from council tax but who might have to pay a local income tax if they are in part-time employment?

**Nicol Stephen:** I am happy to confirm that the Liberal Democrats support the abolition of the unfair council tax and that we support a genuine local income tax, which is not like the national tax that the nationalists have announced. We will fund local services properly.

The first session of Parliament showed that we can invest in higher education without tuition fees and without higher and higher top-up fees, which we see in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Parliament also gave dignity and security to our pensioners in their old age. In our second session, we helped to lead the world with a smoking ban, which celebrated its anniversary on Monday. We provided free eye and dental checks for all, as well as major new railway projects that were delivered

on time, preceding a successful switch to greater investment in public transport.

My aim is to have a nation and economy that every talented, creative, innovative person, and every young person in the world, wants to be part of. We are already starting to see people being attracted to Scotland, and that gives our people in Scotland the drive, ambition and dynamism to create world-class and world-beating ideas. They need the support to turn those ideas into business reality, so I hope that the Parliament will soon endorse plans to create a new innovation agency based on an idea that I saw in Finland, where business investment is many times greater than in Scotland. Finland, I was pleased to note, already has a liberal Prime Minister, who was re-elected last week. An innovation agency will ensure that the brightest and best ideas in Scotland can have the biggest impact on business and the economy.

We are not short of great ideas in Scotland. A few weeks ago, I was pleased to announce that Ocean Power Delivery and Scottish Power, with the support of the Executive, will use their Pelamis wave machines in Scottish waters this year as part of the biggest wave power project in the world. It is great news that we have already met our 2010 renewable energy target years ahead of time, but I believe that we need to push on with bold plans. That is why the Liberal Democrats support 100 per cent renewable electricity in Scotland by 2050.

Renewable energy industries are not the only industries of the future in Scotland. We also have life sciences industries in the new Royal infirmary of Edinburgh development and the nearby school of medicine, centre for biomedical research and science park development. All of that adds up to £1 billion of investment that will create one of the top five life sciences centres in the entire world.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** In his party capacity, the Deputy First Minister has said that the Lib Dems are committed to scrapping red tape. Can he explain why representatives of his party voted just this week both for a new tenants tax—in the form of the business improvement district red tape—and for the closure of the Firth of Lorn, which will threaten the livelihoods of 30 to 40 fishermen in the west Highlands?

**Nicol Stephen:** The more important question is why the Scottish National Party voted to introduce a third-party right of appeal. Why did the SNP want to place that burden on business?

In the side columns of recent newspapers, members may have seen that a Scottish company has invented new artificial vein technology, which has the potential to transform the lives of millions of people around the world. I met representatives of that company last summer. A few weeks ago,

they learned that their clinical trials had proved 100 per cent successful. That company, which is a University of Dundee spin-out that was supported by the Scottish Executive, has the potential to create many new jobs.

Our financial services sector is going from strength to strength. The strong results that the Royal Bank of Scotland recently posted—profits that were shared with its workforce—have allowed the bank to continue its overseas expansion, including a first big breakthrough in China, which counts as a tremendous success. Those financial services skills mean that we can compete globally to attract new jobs and businesses, including JP Morgan, Barclays, First Data and more.

Our challenge is to create an ever stronger economy that is strong on new environmental industries, technology, life sciences and other industries of the future. Our strength in the financial services sector will mean that we can pay our way in the world for decades to come.

We should not delay the development of devolution, but nor should we disrupt or destroy it. That is why the majority of Scottish people—more than 50 per cent—reject both the status quo and independence, and instead support more powers for the Scottish Parliament. That is the policy of the Liberal Democrats.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Will the minister give way on that point?

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister cannot give way, as he is in his last minute.

**Nicol Stephen:** The Liberal Democrats will go into this election confident of strong successful support in constituencies and regions throughout Scotland—from Shetland to the Borders and from Glasgow to Gordon.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to open debate. I am anxious to include everyone if at all possible, so members will need to keep their speeches to six minutes unless they have been notified that they will have four minutes or less.

09:59

**Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab):** “The Future of Scotland” might sound a somewhat melodramatic title for a debate. After all, Governments come and go. For most people, when Governments change, life just goes on until the next change. That is normal democratic politics.

The truth is that this election is a little—no, not a little—a lot different. That is true for me even at a local level. Forgive me for being parochial, but as an election draws near it is difficult not to concentrate the mind on what a change would

mean to one’s own area—in my case Govan, which I live in and represent.

Large parts of Govan were deprived and underdeveloped. That legacy meant that there was a great deal to be done; indeed, there is still a great deal to do. However, I tell the chamber this: any honest, objective observer would say that the change along the entire south side of the Clyde in the past eight to 10 years has been remarkable.

Billions of pounds have been invested and there is still more to come. There are increased employment opportunities. A hospital is being developed that will be one of the most modern in Europe. A shipyard that was days from closure is in a healthier state than it has been for many years. And we have a realistic action plan that will continue the process of regenerating the area through new housing of all kinds and for all people. All of that is improvement. A great deal of that improvement would be at risk if we decided to change direction now.

I have asked this question repeatedly and no one has answered me: how will a shipyard that is largely and crucially dependent on United Kingdom Ministry of Defence orders survive, never mind prosper, under a Government that intends to produce an independent Scotland? Nicola Sturgeon said when she was in the chamber—she is away now that we are talking about Govan—that we are scaremongering and she calls what we say a negative rant. I do not think so. It is not scaremongering; the question calls for an honest, straightforward answer, but nothing is offered.

**Alex Neil:** I will deal with that bit of scaremongering. As the member knows, the policy of the UK Government is, and the policy of an independent Scotland and a London Government would be, to have a single market in shipbuilding. That is Gordon Jackson’s Government’s policy—if he does not know that, it is his problem. I tell Gordon Jackson that under an SNP Government our shipbuilders would be able to compete more effectively because they would pay corporation tax at a much lower rate than at present.

**Gordon Jackson:** That is simply not true. The truth of the matter is that no European Government gives its defence orders outside its own borders.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Gordon Jackson:** No, I am sorry, but I have to move on.

The prosperity of which I spoke is the key issue, not just for Govan but for the whole of Scotland. The question is, do we or do we not want to separate ourselves from our neighbours in the United Kingdom? [*Interruption.*] Is John Swinney

going to speak standing up or continue to speak sitting down?

People say to me that they are toying with the idea of voting SNP and then, in the next breath, they share their horror at the idea of independence. It will not do. I say to those people, "If you vote SNP or in one way or another help it to form a Government, you are not just tinkering with who runs the health service or Scotland; you are putting into the seat of Government and at the levers of power a party whose sole rationale and avowed intention is to break up a structure that has served us well and can continue to do so."

If people vote for the SNP, they will replace that structure with something that, quite apart from the cultural dislocation it would cause, would simply be bad for Scotland. People who believe in independence with a passion should vote for it. However, if, like me, people do not think that independence is a good thing for this country and believe instead that it would be a bad step and a retrograde action, they should not be vague about all this. We must ensure that we do not, without meaning to, carelessly wander towards something that we will live to regret. This election is about the future of Scotland.

10:05

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Addressing climate change must be the top priority policy driver for a sustainable Scotland. As the last generation that can act in time to prevent runaway climate change, we have an international obligation to our fellow human beings to play our part. Indeed, as small countries can act faster than large countries, we have an even greater duty in that respect than our larger neighbours.

We look forward to our Scottish Parliament and Scotland's local government assuming increasing relevance to Scotland, and we will work constructively to create a greener, fairer country wherever we are elected, with whatever powers are at our disposal and with whomever we can work. Our challenge to the other parties in the forthcoming election is that they match their green rhetoric with the actions that will be needed on the ground.

A great deal more needs to be done on renewables and energy efficiency. We need to start talking not about a few million pounds here and there but about significant investments of tens and hundreds of millions of pounds to ensure that energy efficiency and commercial-scale developments deliver the green jobs and the fuel security that our country so badly needs.

No matter who is in power, the Greens will seek to give real meaning to the commitments made in "A Curriculum for Excellence" and to give every

child in Scotland the opportunity to fulfil all their potential as human beings and creative people.

We will seek to grow a strong economy with a backbone of small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises, and will use public procurement to strengthen the kind of green mixed economy that Scotland needs. We will oppose any attempt to privatise public services such as water or the national health service. In our vision for a future Scotland, everyone will enjoy a good quality of life based on their fair share of the world's resources and our society will be committed to the principles of justice, equality and non-violence.

On 3 May, people will be able to share that vision by voting Green first. The case for more powers for the Scottish Parliament or for full independence should be decided in a referendum—of course people should have that choice—but I put it on record that our thinking is not based on narrow nationalism. Indeed, we share our European friends' suspicions of nationalism per se. Instead, we support democracy that is as close as possible to the people, and on that basis and that basis alone, we feel that it is time for the people of Scotland to be given the choice of the status quo, more powers for the Scottish Parliament or independence. That is our democratic right.

Whatever happens on 3 May, we need a Government that is prepared to tackle Scotland's real needs and to do so with a programme that will not only address climate change—which, after all, is the biggest issue that has ever faced the world, let alone Scotland—but give all our people, especially the very young, the very old and the most vulnerable, the best possible future that we can afford.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** Shona Robison has kindly allowed Margo MacDonald to speak before she does.

10:09

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** I thank you, Presiding Officer, and Ms Robison. I regret to say that I have to leave soon and I apologise to members who will speak after me.

I agree with Nicol Stephen that we should look forward, not back, but I ask my colleagues in all parties and none to look beyond the immediate future. During the election, policy differences will be emphasised and exaggerated and intentions will be questioned and misrepresented. It will be all good, clean fun or dirty-dog politicking—take your pick. However, after the parties have done their best to defend their corners, perhaps creating bitterness and division among themselves in doing so, the members elected to the new session of

Parliament must quickly find a collegiate way of working, for the sake of Scotland.

The fault line of the constitutional question is already dominating debate, but we must take heed of our fellow Scots' perceptions of what the election is about. If we, as professional politicians, and, in the main, members of political parties, judge that Scots' priorities are different from ours, we must be big enough to admit that and act on the mandates that electors give us, rather than claim to have won the argument on the basis of the votes of fewer than 40 per cent of the people who voted.

I think that members will find that there is a general desire on the part of people in Scotland for the Scottish Parliament to be proactive in improving and governing aspects of life in Scotland over which we have no control, such as broadcasting, or over which we have limited decision-making powers, such as drugs policy or the representation of our interests in the European Union. The details are not all that important at this stage; what is important is how we go about meeting the hopes and expectations of Scots, who, according to opinion polls, look to the Parliament for leadership and the strategies and policies that will make Scotland prosper.

That is my plea to the members who will return in the next session. I ask them to work on building on the common ground that is occupied by the electorate. This institution is the means by which we can advance the governance of Scotland, enhancing our statutory powers and ensuring stable administration and government while we do so—as our fellow countrymen and women would prefer.

There are any number of ways in which we could structure and operate a constitutional unit or convention. The important factor is the open-mindedness of those who take part and their appreciation of the need to reflect the wish among Scots that the Parliament should be the voice of the people, not the voice of any one political party.

During the next session of Parliament attempts will be made to introduce a new constitution for the EU, and this morning we learned about fundamental changes that are planned for the Home Office. Such issues will be for the Parliament to resolve and I think that the parties represented here will have much in common, rather than great differences between them.

Members know of my commitment to the Scottish Parliament assuming sovereign powers. However, for more than 30 years I have also advocated a new intergovernmental relationship between all the countries and regions of the UK and Ireland. I think that I first wrote about the social union of the UK as the union that would

survive the modernisation of the machinery of government in 1974. I see no reason to change that analysis. The ties that bind us are emotional. The Scottish Parliament offers a way of marrying the refinement of our powers with the maintenance of the social union. Whether Annabel Goldie is right or I am right in interpreting the wishes of Scots, this Parliament—rather than one party—is the institution that must determine the future of Scotland.

10:13

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** Scotland's future will be decided by Scotland's people. We look forward to their decision on 3 May.

Only Labour could call for a debate on Scotland's future in which its members have attempted to extol the virtues of the so-called union dividend in the same week that the party's inability at all levels of government to address the scourge of poverty and child poverty in Scotland has been exposed. Under the union dividend almost a million people in Scotland are living in relative poverty, according to the most recent figures, which show an increase of 20,000 people in poverty on the previous year. The statistics show that the number of working-age adults in relative poverty has gone up by 30,000 to a staggering 620,000 people.

Save the Children in Scotland was right to brand as "disgraceful" figures that showed a standstill in the number of children in relative poverty—250,000 children. Save the Children said:

"The Scottish Executive and UK Government strategies have not gone nearly far enough—the figures are disgraceful."

Behind the statistics are real people. The statistics are a shocking indictment of Labour's 10 years in power. The situation is made worse by the Brown bombshell for the lowest-paid families in our society. The doubling of taxation for low-paid families from 10 per cent to 20 per cent is a shameful attack on the poor. Gordon Brown's budget has backfired spectacularly. Low-paid and part-time workers in Scotland will be among the hardest hit by the budget, with a staggering 836,000 working Scots paying more tax under his proposals.

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** The member fails to point out that the chancellor also reviewed the working tax credit scheme, which is a successful scheme that allows people to work for good value and ensure that they earn appropriate amounts of money for their families. I ask her please not to take one part of the chancellor's statement and disconnect it from the increases that he made in the working tax

credit. Let us not forget that the party that promises high taxation is the SNP—it will increase taxation by 3p in the pound, at least.

**Shona Robison:** Of course, Mr Kerr does not mention that many people will not be eligible for working tax credit and will be much worse off under Gordon Brown's tax bombshell. We should contrast that with the SNP plans to scrap the unfair and iniquitous council tax and introduce a fair local taxation system under which nine out of 10 families will be better off. We should contrast that cut in taxation with Gordon Brown's tax rise. We have a Government that is more interested in spending tens of billions of pounds on a new Trident missile system while doubling the level of taxation on the poorest paid in our society. It is a Government that has lost its moral compass.

Gordon Brown has been exposed as the reverse Robin Hood chancellor: he robs the poor in an attempt to bolster his failing leadership campaign. It must be embarrassing for Labour members to have to trot out the same tired old arguments in the debate when they know that no one is listening and that they have already lost the argument and the trust of the Scottish people. Labour has nothing new to offer the people; just the same old fears and smears, which are being roundly rejected by the Scottish people, who want a fresh approach and new leadership. They do not want to be insulted by being accused of window shopping when they have the temerity not to vote Labour.

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** The member suggests that Labour has nothing new to offer. Does she support Labour's proposals to get 100,000 more Scots into employment, thereby creating full employment, which is an aim for which many of us have worked for many years?

**Shona Robison:** Everybody wants full employment, but the fact is that Labour has failed to address the needs of the Scottish economy. Labour has been in Government for 10 years—what has it been doing for those 10 years? It has failed.

**Cathy Jamieson** *rose*—

**Shona Robison:** No, thank you—I want to move on.

The people do not trust a party that tries to argue that Scotland is an economic basket case while simultaneously claiming good stewardship of the Scottish economy. That argument does not stack up and has been well and truly exposed in the past few months. The SNP is setting the agenda in the debate over Scotland's future, with a positive vision of what can be achieved with the right economic policies, the required economic powers and the ambition and new leadership to

take Scotland forward to a new prosperity that will lift those one million people out of poverty.

During the campaign so far, the SNP has talked about Scotland's future and has set out its vision. Meanwhile, Labour has talked about the SNP—we thank Labour for that, although I hope that we will not have to include the costs of that publicity in our election expenses. That is welcome additional publicity for the SNP, because the more Labour talks about us, the more we are kent. Our positive vision for Scotland will transform our nation. We are committed to improving significantly Scotland's economic growth, by placing Scotland at a competitive advantage and by allowing the talent of the people of Scotland to flourish and our country's potential to be released.

Only 12 per cent of Scots back Labour's case that we need no more powers for Scotland—it is clear that even the former Labour First Minister Henry McLeish is not one of that 12 per cent.

The SNP's position is a popular one: to build credibility in government, to move Scotland forward and to give the people of Scotland the opportunity to choose independence in a referendum. We trust the people of Scotland to decide Scotland's future, and we ask for their trust to deliver that choice.

10:20

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** In the view of Liberal Democrats, Scotland has a bright future. It is a privilege to take part in this, the final debate of the session, and I look forward to being able—subject to the vote of the people, of course—to build on our success for Scotland in the next session.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have a proud record of achievement since the establishment of devolution. We have helped to deliver free personal and nursing care for the elderly and the abolition of tuition fees; soon, I hope, we will help to deliver the abolition of the graduate endowment. We have helped to deliver free central heating installations for the over-60s. There has also been the introduction of smoke-free public places, free eye checks for all and, if I may give a more local example, the highest ever number of police officers for Grampian police.

The debate is, and should be, about focusing on what we want to achieve in the next session. The Scottish Liberal Democrats want a greener, cleaner Scotland. In time, we want 100 per cent of Scotland's electricity to come from clean, green sources, with major new investment in wave and tidal power. We want to invest more in public transport, with new railways and reopened railway stations, such as at Laurencekirk in my constituency. We want a safer Scotland, with

1,000 extra community police officers. We want 100 new local health centres, with support being given to rural community hospitals. We want to be positive about our young people—Parliament has not been positive enough about them. We want to reduce the voting age to 16 where we can—where the powers of the Parliament permit us to do so. We want to cut class sizes in schools. We want to provide new sports facilities across the country.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have a positive, constructive vision for the future of Scotland, and we intend to have a positive and constructive campaign over the next five weeks, putting to the people of Scotland what we believe.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I wonder why the member's party has not taken the opportunity to implement the policies that he has just outlined over the past eight years.

**Mike Rumbles:** Has it escaped the member's notice that Liberal Democrats do not have a majority in the Government? It is all about coalition. If we were a Liberal Democrat Government—I would dearly like to see that—those are the policies that we would be developing.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Mike Rumbles:** Oh—another intervention, so soon. Go on, then.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Perhaps Mr Rumbles might want to itemise the individual policies that the Labour Party has prevented his party from introducing over the past four years.

**Mike Rumbles:** That is easy. All that members need to do is look at our manifesto and see which are our policies, and look at Labour's manifesto and see which are its policies. That is the test.

I turn now to Annabel Goldie's speech—I was disappointed that she did not accept my intervention. The Liberal Democrats want to work in the next session with anyone who wants to work with us to implement our policies. I contrast that with the position of Annabel Goldie's Conservative party. She has said on a number of occasions that the Conservatives will not work with anyone else in coalition government in Scotland—they will not work for the good of the country in that way. I am genuinely puzzled by that stance. It is a bizarre pitch to voters: "Vote Conservative and we promise we will not go into government."

**Phil Gallie:** Will Mike Rumbles give way on that point?

**Mike Rumbles:** I would have liked Annabel Goldie to have taken my intervention on that point.

**Phil Gallie:** Well, unfortunately—

**Mike Rumbles:** Phil Gallie should just listen. I make a plea to the Conservatives. They should drop that position. It is not good for the country. Far be it from me to suggest that it is also not good for the Conservative party, but the party's stance is bizarre. The Conservatives should be willing to work in government with anyone else, for the good of the country.

**Phil Gallie:** Will Mike Rumbles give way now?

**Mike Rumbles:** Go on.

**Phil Gallie:** I thank Mike Rumbles very much for giving way.

Conservatives in the next session of Parliament will work with others—on an issue-by-issue basis. However, we will not break the promises that we make in our manifesto to coalesce with others who do not believe in the things in which we believe.

**Mike Rumbles:** That is part of the problem. I wish that Margo MacDonald could have been here to listen to that intervention, because that approach is what we are trying to get away from. It is a silly approach. We have a system of proportional representation and we need a government for Scotland that can work. People need to be prepared to work together where they can in government.

I have heard some of the debate this morning and I think that it is a mistake to focus on the negatives of the SNP's approach to independence. I have never accepted the proposition that in Scotland we are either too stupid or too dependent on England for financial subsidies to handle our own affairs. That is nonsense. We should focus on the benefits of staying in the union. The debate should have been about that rather than the negative approach that some members have taken.

It is equally ridiculous to say that the majority of Scots are in favour of independence. They are not, and opinion poll after opinion poll proves that.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member give way?

**Mike Rumbles:** I would have given way but, unfortunately, I cannot, as I have only 30 seconds left.

Most Scots reject independence and I think that most Scots reject the status quo. The Liberal Democrat position is that Scotland has a bright and positive future if we all work together. I believe that the Scottish Liberal Democrats are in tune with the Scottish people, and I am sure that that will be reflected in the votes on 3 May.

10:26

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** In the brief time that is available to me this



morning I want to hark back to something that I said in a debate last week. I am disappointed that the First Minister chose at the outset to tie the record of the Labour Party in Government to the union and to suggest that somehow the future of the union will be decided on the basis of the Labour Party's record. I can never accept that because, as a Conservative and therefore—no doubt members will dispute this—as a member of the pre-eminent unionist party in the Parliament, I think that it is a disgrace that we are not able to have a real discussion about policy. The First Minister should understand the need to separate those issues.

I am sad that the Labour Party has chosen to open the debate on a platform of defending its record, when unfortunately the public sector has been the main driver for growth over the past eight years, while the private sector, which could contribute so much to the Scottish economy, has been the poor relation under Labour's control. I am careful to refer to the Labour Party, because it seems that we have forgotten that the coalition ever existed.

The axes of the debate are interesting, especially when we discuss the Scottish National Party's contribution to it. Nicola Sturgeon came out with the same old story. In opposition, it is easy to say that we should be taxing a lot less and spending a lot more, as the SNP always likes to do. Unfortunately, the sums do not add up—if they started to add up, people might take the SNP a bit more seriously. Nicola Sturgeon quickly moved on to a list of undeveloped issues that she hopes will stir up enough public opinion to panic people on to the streets to vote SNP on 3 May. However, I do not believe that that will happen.

The other point that I took from Nicola Sturgeon's speech is the fact that the enemy is the Labour Party. The Liberal Democrats have been absolved of any responsibility for what has happened. It seems to me that the overtures have started. The SNP is willing to work with the Liberal Democrats, and the Liberal Democrats appear willing to work with anybody.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Johnstone:** I will not take an intervention from the gentleman because he gave me the distinct impression a minute ago that he was willing to go into coalition with almost anybody in order to secure a share of power. My point is that it is important that we give power to this institution—the Parliament—instead of giving it to a coalition formed between any two of the three parties that people might choose to perm.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** No thanks.

Power should not be given to a coalition formed in some dark—but no longer smoke-filled—room, where decisions are based on compromises between individual political parties that seek to gain something.

**Mike Rumbles:** Go on—give way.

**Alex Johnstone:** No thanks.

In the next session of the Scottish Parliament, I want a flourishing of parliamentary democracy, which will bring back the respect for Scottish parliamentary democracy that the coalition of the past eight years has denied and undermined.

We can achieve that by encouraging the Scottish people to vote for more Conservative members. Only when we have enough Conservative members will we be in a position in which no party can work with the Liberal Democrats and form a majority. Then we will have true parliamentary democracy, where decisions are made in the chamber, not behind closed doors.

We could achieve so much. In the first session of Parliament, agreement could have been reached on issues such as free personal care and tuition fees, which Mike Rumbles mentioned, much earlier had it not been for the fact that the Liberal Democrats sold out in coalition. We could do so much more on a cross-party, issue-by-issue basis to deal with climate change and the situation for small businesses. We need to take that step. The way to achieve it is for the Scottish people to elect more Conservatives.

10:31

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** The future of Scotland lies in devolution and in using our powers to the maximum. I believe that that is what most Scots want and expect. They came out in their droves to vote for it and recent trends show that they still support it.

Power sharing with Westminster has resulted in a huge change for Scotland in so many ways, such as unprecedented reform of the law for the better and progress on many social issues and on equality. The Scottish Executive and the Westminster Government have led on issues of equality reform, such as civil partnerships, parental leave, disability discrimination and age discrimination. The Scottish National Party trails Labour on its record on social reform.

No Labour Government has done more for workers' rights. It immediately implemented our EU obligations on working time and introduced the minimum wage, rights for parents, minimum holidays and further protection to stop bad employers taking away public holidays. Far from

being ashamed of our record in government, we are proud of it.

We have not heard much from the SNP about workers' rights and have heard nothing convincing about the future of shipbuilding, which Gordon Jackson mentioned, or how the largest apprenticeship scheme in Scotland would be protected. Gordon Jackson talked about how the country's economy was booming. In my constituency, on the other side of the Clyde, the change is remarkable.

The Beatson oncology centre in Glasgow, which will be opened in a couple of months' time, will be the leading cancer care centre in Europe. In the past, we were not successful in recruiting consultants, but they are now queuing up to join our amazing institution in Glasgow.

We all talk about giving children the best start in life, but that cannot happen if the budget for local services is cut—and I have yet to mention the plans to remove local democracy and prevent local authorities from setting their own rates. How will the SNP continue breakfast clubs and the free fruit initiative and provide other high-quality public services?

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP) rose—**

**Pauline McNeill:** While Labour is making progress in giving the public a better deal, the SNP is making sure that local government would have a shortfall of £400 million. How does it expect its promises to be delivered? Does it not understand that local government is absolutely critical if it wants to deliver on its promises for children in Scotland? Its talk of standing up for Scotland is a cliché and is not borne out in reality.

**Ms White rose—**

**Pauline McNeill:** Presiding Officer, you should ask Sandra White to sit down, because I am not taking an intervention.

The SNP criticises us on our record on child poverty. That is fair enough, but this Labour Government has made child poverty a priority and has set radical targets in which we believe. We have made significant progress, but it is never enough. The SNP has no targets. It attempts to knock down our success, but it will not say how it will achieve anything. The real risks to the progress of devolution are apparent for people to see.

What will child benefit rates be without Gordon Brown? What will tax credits be? What will the system be? The SNP has to start answering those questions.

The SNP accuses us of negative campaigning, but it is not considered negative when Shona Robison attacks the Chancellor of the Exchequer

for helping hard-working families. We have extended child care, invested in sport, new hospitals and schools, reduced waiting times, provided the best cancer care centre at the Beatson, delivered a house-building programme and tackled health inequalities. That is not negative campaigning.

It is our job to spell out to the Scottish public the consequences of electing an SNP Administration that would be committed to separation, because we believe that separation is wrong. Should we not point out to the general public that the SNP plan lacks detail? The SNP should think on and take a reality check.

The Labour Party will fight on its record and plans for the future. Land reform was a bold, radical step of social progress. Modernising family law was not an easy subject for any of the parties in the Parliament, but we led on that. We will prioritise investment in public services, the health of our children, strong industry, a strong economy, strong leadership and a full employment agency. We will fight on our record.

We have shown our ability to work with other political parties in the Parliament. We have listened to ideas from others in and beyond the coalition. We have embraced devolution, but can the SNP do that? The next session of the Parliament must be about making more progress for the people who are directly affected by the decisions that we take. Any time that is spent fighting London on the constitution will be a distraction from the real focus of what the Scottish people expect. If the SNP presents such a fight as what it will do with the next four years under the union in the devolution settlement, we can be sure the Scottish public will not thank it.

10:36

**Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):**

The debate is clearly an occasion for reflection as well as for setting out a vision for a future Scotland. As we look forward to the next session of the Parliament and the future Scotland that we want, we must also consider the decisions that the politicians in the Parliament have made. After all, the decisions that have been made in the past four years will shape Scotland's immediate future, so they deserve some examination.

The Executive, the SNP and the Tories have committed themselves to more motorways and bigger airports. The Executive has approved genetically modified crops. Plans for a new generation of incinerators are under way and are being funded by the Executive. The Labour Party has joined the Tories in a chorus for new nuclear power stations, and the Liberal Democrats, although they say no to new nuclear power

stations now, refuse to rule out nuclear power being part of any coalition deal.

After nearly a quarter of a century proclaiming Green thinking, I have been gratified by the way in which green issues have risen up the political agenda over the past four years. The scientific evidence of our devastating impact not only on our climate but on our natural resources is overwhelming. The Stern review was unequivocal in connecting the economy and the environment and gave stark figures on the cost to the economy of doing nothing. If only that report had been published a decade ago. We all know that time is running out and that we have a window of opportunity of between four and 10 years at most, which is not even two more sessions of the Parliament.

We need to change a lot. Doing a little is simply not good enough any more. Scottish Environment LINK has published the evidence today in an assessment of the progress that has been made since 2003. Page after page show the contradictions. For example, there have been some positive steps on renewables, but more roads and bigger airports. There have also been some good moves on consulting communities, but the ostrich award is given to the Executive for refusing to grant communities a third-party right of appeal. The melting glacier award for policy most damaging to the climate goes to the Liberal Democrat Minister for Transport's go-ahead for the M74 extension. It is a case of one step forwards and two steps back. The Executive always shies away from the tough decisions and ignores the contradictions in its approach. Ministers fly off on jaunts after proclaiming that flying is only for exceptional circumstances, but such duplicity is unacceptable when we know the challenge that faces us.

If the voters want serious action on climate change and green issues, they will first have to vote Green to get it. To have any real green credentials, the other parties should join us in scrapping plans for airport and road expansion and in planning to protect local communities and local economies by legislating for green procurement and investing properly in renewable energy. They should stop demonising young people, regulate supermarkets, abandon the private finance initiative rip-off, retain water in public ownership and massively increase energy efficiency in buildings—and those are just for starters.

Whoever is returned in May must accept that there are stark choices to be made. Reducing our addiction to oil will be hard, but with two decades at most before peak oil—some predict that the peak will be reached much sooner than that—we must start to contemplate life with ever-diminishing

supplies. People must get their heads out of the sand. There is not a lot of oil left. However, it is not all doom and gloom. Moving to a low-carbon economy offers huge opportunities to reinvigorate communities, establish social enterprises and small businesses, safeguard farming and transfer skills from the oil industry to renewables work.

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are real challenges ahead, and we need vision and new politics to realise that vision. Voting for the Green party will ensure that we meet those challenges. Together we will build a better Scotland and a truly sustainable future.

10:41

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** When we wake up on 4 May, we will realise that the outstanding message from the election is that 50 years of Labour rule in Scotland will have ended. It is not only the Scottish National Party that wants an end to those years of Labour rule in Scotland—many of my good Liberal Democrat friends and my good friends in other parties share that ambition. New Labour's chickens are coming home to roost.

The First Minister has said only one positive thing about Labour's record in the campaign so far: he made a proud boast about the smoking ban. He is right to be proud of that ban, but the irony is that such a ban was originally proposed in the first session of the Parliament in a member's bill that Nicola Sturgeon introduced, which the First Minister and the Executive opposed.

**Cathy Jamieson** *rose*—

**Alex Neil:** I will take an intervention in a minute.

We are happy for good ideas that we put forward to be taken up and included in legislation, but with all due respect, the smoking ban—which I voted in favour of—should be compared with the much bigger challenges that society faces. We have heard about tackling climate change, which is a huge challenge for every country, and Shona Robison talked about the huge challenges that we face in tackling child poverty.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Neil:** I will in a minute.

How will the country face up to those and many other challenges? It is my fundamental belief that not only is it important that the Parliament has additional powers, but that it makes perfect sense to redefine our partnership with the rest of the United Kingdom by becoming an independent member of the European Union, which is the much bigger economic and political union that these islands are members of. We could then go to the top table and exercise the same influence and

have the same power that all the other nation state members exercise. Margo MacDonald rightly pointed out that that would not mean that we would rupture the social union with England. It would not mean that there would be barriers at the border and all that kind of nonsense.

**Alex Johnstone:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Neil:** No.

Scotland and England are part of the European Union, and we want to continue—we will continue—a close working relationship with the Government in London, because England is our largest neighbour. We should not be subservient to the Government in London—there should be equality of esteem between our Governments.

We support the approach that the nordic countries take. We support the development of the council of the isles, because many issues in Europe and further afield will continue to have a British dimension. We should unashamedly work not only with the Government in London on those issues, but with the devolved Governments in Cardiff and Belfast and the independent Government in Dublin.

That is the kind of future that we envisage. It is nonsense to use the words “separatist” or “isolationist”. Indeed, one of the reasons why I am a nationalist is that I feel too isolated at the moment. I feel that, whenever I want to reach the wider world, I have to go through London—often physically, if not legally. I want to be able to reach out to the world directly in every sense. I want Scotland to play the same role in dealing with poverty in the developing world that Norway, for example, plays. Norway is one of the most successful contributors.

It is significant that none of the big countries has ever provided the Secretary-General of the United Nations and I do not think that any of them ever will. The position of small countries in the international community is such that they occupy a special niche. They can do things that big countries cannot do. That is why I believe that Scotland the nation can make a much bigger contribution as Scotland the state.

I do not have time to go into issues such as shipbuilding, but there are clear answers to the questions. Of course we will make mistakes, just as the devolved Parliament has made mistakes, but they will be our mistakes and we will be responsible for our destiny. No nation can wish for more. No people can wish for more than for their freedom, their sovereignty and the right to decide their future.

10:47

**Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP):** On 23 May 2006, at the University of Stirling, the First Minister gave a lecture called “Scotland’s Future: Thinking for the Long Term”. I came across his speech while I was tidying up my office. Among other things, he said:

“It is crystal clear to me, though, the greatest change required. Poverty and inequality are at the root of Scotland’s greatest weaknesses.”

I agree, but here we are a year later, and his record in office is exposed by the facts. Behind the bare statistics is untold misery, which was revealed again this week. A report by Barnardo’s states that inequality is at its greatest since 1961, that 2.8 million children in Britain live in absolute poverty, which represents an increase of 100,000 since last year, and that 12.7 million people in Britain live in relative poverty, which represents an increase of 600,000.

The day after that report was published, *The Scotsman* reported that the joint ministerial committee on child poverty, which is led by the Treasury and headed by Gordon Brown, has not met for five years. The committee is supposed to work on child poverty and liaise between the Treasury, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly, but it has not met since September 2002. That epitomises the fact that new Labour’s warm words, which we heard from the First Minister again this morning, stand in stark contrast to its actions.

The report and the article expose the fact that the Executive does not give a flying fig about eradicating poverty. It makes promises on the never-never. In response to the Barnardo’s report, the First Minister said that he would redouble his efforts, but two times nothing is still nothing. The Executive feels the need to be seen to do something about poverty but it does not feel the need actually to do something about it.

The Parliament has discussed the United Nations Children’s Fund’s league table on child well-being, which ranked Britain 21<sup>st</sup> out of 21 countries. The Scandinavian countries are at the top of the table because they have progressive tax systems. The Executive does not have what it takes to change things. It cannot tell its rich friends and the financiers that they will have to pay more tax and get their noses out of the trough because the needy need to get in. We need to be clear and honest with the electorate. To change inequality and poverty, and the affront that the rich are to poor people, demands a U-turn in the decade-long politics of Blairism. That is what we are dealing with.

I understand the other parties in the Parliament when they say that it is logical to reduce

corporation tax. As a young accountant, I worked on firms' books when corporation tax under Mrs Thatcher was at 52 pence in the pound. Labour reduced it to 40, then 30 and, last week, it was reduced to 28 pence in the pound. I have even heard my friends in the independence movement, the SNP, demanding that it be cut to 12 pence in the pound.

Where is the logic in seeking to entice businesses here to allow them to pay less tax? The corporate elite is already spoiled and does not give a damn where it sets up businesses, where it goes for cheap labour or where it gets cheap rent and government loans. It does not give a damn about the countries it goes to; it goes where it can get the lowest level of corporation tax. That is blackmail. Let those companies go elsewhere. Britain sucked in capital in the 1980s and 1990s because it was fleeing from other countries where corporations sought to ignore their corporate social responsibilities.

Social democracy was established as a political philosophy 100 years ago. It emerged to confront precisely the kind of capitalist commercial orthodoxy we see today. However, in more recent times, we have seen the political evacuation of that ground by parties that once called themselves social democrats; parties that have been completely taken in by the neo-liberalism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Scotland is part of that.

The consequences are not just inequalities in wealth, but those that we saw in Edinburgh this week when 720 families or tenants were desperately trying to get a one-bedroomed flat in Stenhouse. Those are the consequences. Military chiefs of staff talk about how Iraq has been a catastrophic failure of this Government's policy. The Stenhouse example shows that the Executive's housing policy has been a catastrophic failure for tenants up and down the country.

As Alex Neil rightly said, this country is heartily sick of new Labour. I have no doubt that, given a choice, Scotland would not have sent troops to fight in Iraq, would not have nuclear weapons based on the Clyde, and would not have the council tax, prescription charges or nuclear power stations. Scotland's vast wealth would be reduced to ensure free school meals for our youngsters and give the poor a helping hand. That is the Scotland that we know. It is in favour of public ownership of our public services and not privatisation of our hospitals, schools, public housing, prisons and roads.

**Margaret Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Colin Fox:** I am sorry; I do not have time.

I have no doubt that Scotland would be better off economically, socially, culturally and politically if

we were independent in a modern democratic republic.

Jack McConnell ended his May 2006 speech by saying that he wanted a Scotland that offers everyone the chance to become the best that they can be. That chance has been denied them. He wanted every child and grandchild across the country to be proud to call Scotland home, but millions are ashamed to call this country home because of our reputation for warmongering, arms manufacturing, nuclear threats, and soldiers in other countries.

I want Scotland to have an alternative, radical and different future, and the Scottish Socialist Party will present just such a manifesto to the country in May.

10:53

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):**

An election is coming up. It must be inspirational for any pensioner who is tuned in to today's debate to hear how much all the parties are going to do for senior citizens. The Tories talked about taking 50 per cent off council tax. The SNP will take a number of pensioners out of having to pay council tax. Little else has been offered, so a plague on all your houses!

The grey vote will be very important in the election, and it has been neglected for far too long. The only independence that worries senior citizens is financial independence. It is brilliant that they get free central heating systems, but they cannot afford to turn them on. Fuel prices escalate and no one tries to get the fuel companies to bring them down. They might come down naturally, but there is no Government interference. Those companies should never have been privatised in the first place; they should have been under the control of the people of the country for the benefit of the people of the country, including all the pensioners.

After a pensioner is means tested, he is awarded £119 a week. His spouse—who, seemingly, is an inferior being in the modern context—gets £62. There is no gender equality in the pension system. That couple, after means testing, have to live on £90 a week each. They get free bus travel—fair enough—and they will get free personal care. However, if they are really sick and they end up in hospital or a care home, the first person to their bedside is a social worker who will ask, "Do you own your own house?" and then steal that house to pay for their residential care. Where is our social conscience? Have we none at all? We take someone who is elderly and vulnerable and steal the inheritance that they want to give to their children. Going by the financial experts in this place, it would cost £5.82 million to rectify that situation. I could not get any Labour or

Tory members to sign my bill on that subject. One SNP member signed it and 22 members of other parties—including the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, the Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarity—and the independent members signed it. That was rewarding, but the grey voters will remember who is looking after their interests. I assure members that they do not think that the present incumbents are. There will be big changes.

One thing that this country must go for is more power. Obviously, the Executive's hands are tied by Westminster. Some form of financial devolution is needed so that we can get our hands on what we can spend in the community for the good of ordinary people. Gordon Brown brought income tax down to around 20p but then did away with the 10p threshold. I do not know whether he thought that Scottish pensioners would be dancing in the streets of Raith after that announcement, but I can tell him that they were not. I can assure him that his budget will not get the Labour Party any votes in the election.

Members should reflect on the results of the elections. I assure them that many of them are in for a fright—I might be too. That would just be members' luck.

10:58

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)**  
**(Ind):** The Parliament is not going away—that is an important statement for me to make, given my background before coming here—but it requires reform. Politicians who do not raise the money that they spend suffer from complacency and arrogance in the selection of their priorities. Politicians who do not use the powers that they already have, but ask for more, show contempt for the electorate's intelligence.

This Parliament is spending far too much as a share of the Scottish economy. When we started, it spent £15.6 billion. Now it spends in the region of £30 billion—such a growth in eight years! I believe that we are creating an economic dependency culture that is stifling enterprise. It is not that we are not well off or that the economy is not growing; it is about our performance relative to others. If we analyse that, we can see that Scotland is underperforming. We could be doing much better and, when we do not do better, the people who lose out the most are the poorest in society.

**Jeremy Purvis:** The member makes a serious point, but does he recognise that growth in the areas that are mainly responsible for the growth of the economy—construction, telecommunications and research—has, in many cases, resulted from investment by the public sector? Does the

member accept that the public and private sectors do not work in competition but are complementary?

**Mr Monteith:** I understand what the member is saying, but the real growth has been in the public sector. Whether it then engages the private sector in some cases is neither here nor there. It is my belief that, if public sector spending was not growing so much, the private sector would be growing far faster and would make up the difference. Indeed, the economic evidence points to that, even just comparing Scotland with England.

Let us consider globalisation. For me, it is not just about emerging markets and the benefits that accrue to so many people from being able to open up trade. Globalisation is about the growing tax competition that is faced, in particular, by Scotland within the United Kingdom. We need just to look at other countries, particularly those that have come out of communism, and the tax rates that they are introducing—to encourage entrepreneurship where once it lacked and to ensure that people want to stay there rather than come to more developed western economies—to see that in Scotland we will be faced with real competition from the Baltic states and central Europe. We can already see the growth in their economies, and we need to be sure that we can keep our best talent and effect a culture change for people who want to start up businesses in Scotland.

To respond to the competition, we must first have a tighter rein on public spending. We must also use the powers that we already have to make a 3p cut in the standard rate of income tax—let us see that power used—and to have an annual reduction in business rates. Never mind corporation taxes, we should use business rates to encourage business and help it to locate here. It is a great pity that in the coming election we see economic policies with very little difference among them.

In the medium term, the Parliament must prepare to replace the block grant and the Barnett formula, not just to make us as politicians more accountable, but to ensure that the union is rebalanced and to remove the potential conflicts, which we are know are still lurking for when Governments change, between this Parliament and Westminster and, in particular, the Treasury. Unionists of all parties must recognise that threat.

In concluding, let me say that we should not settle for running just our country. We are not subservient. The English talk in London of a Scottish raj, with many consuls, ambassadors and people from Scotland running English and UK institutions. We should not settle for running Scotland when we can run Great Britain.

Scotland has an opportunity within the union. If the Parliament is to remain within the union, it must reform. In reforming, we can prosper.

11:03

**John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** Here comes another swan-song, and I am happy to endorse some of the final comments that Brian Monteith made. I appreciate the opportunity to reflect on a long time in two Parliaments and to look to the future of Scotland.

I suppose that I have been a foot soldier in the long fight to achieve Scotland's Parliament. I joined the Labour Party to support John P Mackintosh, who was a very special local member of Parliament. I was the young delegate for Berwick and East Lothian at the 1976 Labour Party conference who moved the motion that committed my party to home rule for Scotland. I was then one of the die-hards who never let go of the issue through the Thatcher years. It took a long, long time, but the achievement of the Parliament was all the sweeter for that.

Then, of course, there was the small matter of building the permanent home for our new Parliament. Perhaps fortunately, I do not have the time to go into that subject. Let me just say that I am proud that some of us kept focused in spite of all the pressure, and I repeat the thanks that I have already expressed to Jamie Stone and Linda Fabiani for their help in the Holyrood progress group. It was hard going, but the Holyrood Parliament building now stands as a tremendous asset for the people and nation of Scotland. I am glad that more and more people are acknowledging that fact.

Some people stand for election because they want to get themselves to the top of government; the rest of us are more interested in getting on top of the Government for the benefit of the people whom we represent. I have tried to be an old-fashioned constituency parliamentarian, and I am grateful to the people of East Lothian for putting up with me for 29 years. I am very happy that East Lothian is a far better place after those 29 years. Indeed, East Lothian is one of the most successful counties in Scotland and Britain after 10 years of Labour Government.

While I am in the business of thanking people, I put on record my eternal gratitude to my wife and sons for their support and for sharing years of stress during my time in Parliament. I am afraid that the worthy aspiration of a family-friendly Parliament is probably a contradiction in terms, but let us keep trying. I express my sincere thanks to Elaine O'Brien, my secretary, who has been running one of the most efficient constituency offices in Scotland for the past 21 years. We have

been able to help quite a lot of people during that time.

I have seen Prime Ministers and First Ministers come and go. I have seen some dreadful ministers as well as some very good ones. Good government depends on sound principles, clear thinking and mutual respect. Without that, we get chaos. That is what happened to John Major in 1992, and it can happen to any party. I have pretty unhappy memories of what happened to the Labour Party in 1983. The question today is whether our main Opposition party in the Parliament is fit for government. At this stage in my career, I would like to be charitable, but it is difficult. Seriously, how could Fergus Ewing and Alex Neil sit at the same Cabinet table? Apart from the fact that our nationalists are united only by their commitment to division—they cannot stand the sight of each other, as we all know if we have listened to them privately—what about their leader? As the First Minister reminded us earlier, Alex Salmond was so scunnered by his colleagues here that he took the first flight back to London to lead the Scottish National Party from the British capital. Mind you, it is understandable that people might want to leave a country where certain politicians advocate policies that could add £5,000 to family tax bills.

There may or may not be different options for government among the immense responsibilities that have been devolved to the Parliament. Nationalism has nothing to do with government, though; it is all about disruption. Prudent, canny Scots are never going to vote for chaos. We have come a long way on the principles set out by great Scots such as John P Mackintosh, John Smith and Donald Dewar and we are not going to sacrifice all that for an orgy of disruption for the sake of Alex Salmond's enormous ego. If the SNP were to accept the settled will of the Scottish people as expressed at the referendum in 1997, they just might become electable. However, as long as they remain hellbent on constitutional mayhem they will never be taken seriously.

It has been a privilege to play a small role in the achievement of home rule for Scotland and a better United Kingdom. The Parliament is working well. We have sensible ministers working together to improve standards for people throughout Scotland. The Labour-led Executive deserves to be re-elected on 3 May and I am confident that that is what will happen.

11:08

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** In many respects, the debate has been largely predictable, although it is an important debate and it is good that so many members have been able to contribute.

As a Liberal Democrat, I always consider issues such as this from the perspective of the individual. I focus attention on the individual and on the individual's role in the community and in society, and try to fashion policies that meet the exigencies of the time. I find that that concentrates the mind on not making false choices. That is always a difficulty for political parties. We try to excite the electorate by making promises and writing manifestos that offer a better, brighter future. Occasionally, however, we offer choices and promise a timescale that, if we examine it carefully, is not immediately realisable.

We also offer false choices. I respect the SNP's right to campaign for independence. I was rather surprised to discover only this morning that Alex Neil was campaigning for independence so that he could become the Secretary-General of the United Nations. That may even have come as a surprise to members of the SNP. I respect Alex Neil for that view, but I ask members not to paint a false choice. I ask them not to paint a choice that says that theirs is the only way of expressing nationalism.

I am a Scot, but I do not define my Scottishness by boundaries on a map. My nationality is defined by the history, the characteristics, and the artistic, religious and other developments in which I was born, bred and brought up. When asked what nationality I am, I make it clear that I am a Scot. Anyone witnessing my excited behaviour at Murrayfield might only regret that.

**Tricia Marwick:** The minister talks about being asked what nationality he is. Why would the Liberal Democrats deny the Scottish people the right to answer a referendum question on whether they want independence?

**Ross Finnie:** I am not denying the Scottish people the right to do anything. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats are one of the most democratic parties that we have. The SNP has the right to hold the view that we ought to have a neverendum for the next four years, but I do not think that the governance of Scotland will be improved—as the governance of Quebec was not and is not improved—by having a neverendum of a debate for the next four years.

When it comes to what is at the heart of making political choices, I go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal philosopher, John Locke. He developed the interesting and widely accepted theory that those of us who are in politics have an enormous burden of responsibility to the people who elect us. We are trustees. We are not just trustees for the people for the time of the Parliament; we are trustees for the good nature and character of the planet, and it is up to us, as trustees, to hand that legacy on to the next generation in the best possible condition. To take the language of Locke

into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that is at the core of sustainable development. With due respect to the Greens, I do not need lectures from them on that concept. They did not invent it—it goes back to a 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal philosopher who had a lot to say on it long before the establishment of the Greens. Sustainable development must be at the core of our political decision making, as it is our failings as trustees that pose the greatest threat to our society. That is exhibited, for the time being, in the presence and real threat of climate change.

Liberal Democrats go into the election looking at issues for the benefit of people and communities—not caught up in the false promise that, by making a constitutional change of the magnitude that is envisaged by the SNP, we will suddenly have more money and all will be well. That is a false choice. We seek greater access to health services and an economy that is open. The SNP makes much of our financial services and the success of the Royal Bank of Scotland, but that success will be maintained only if we remain an open economy. SNP members cannot have it both ways. They should not laud the success of the Royal Bank of Scotland and, at the same time, take the closed economy approach that they took towards the potential takeover of Scottish Power. They cannot have it both ways. The Royal Bank of Scotland would be the worse for that kind of policy, as its aims and ambitions would be very much curtailed.

We go into the election with the Liberal Democrats offering a raft of policies in health, education, crime and justice, all based on the principle of greater liberty for the individual and the principle that nobody can be free from poverty without the opportunity to access health services and better education. Those are the principles on which the Liberal Democrat party was founded and that we are proud to take to the people of Scotland. Our policy programme will reflect those principles, and we will meet the exigencies of today. We will not get caught up in false choices; we will remain a Scottish Liberal Democrat party, proud of our achievements in this coalition and proud to go to the people of Scotland.

11:14

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** In his opening speech the First Minister, with typical bravado and machismo, stated that politics is all about tough decisions. In a somewhat more thoughtful speech, Ross Finnie said that it is all about choices. In a way, both of them are correct. The choice that will face the Scottish people five weeks today, however, has perhaps never been more stark. When we narrow it down, people will need to choose either the failed Lib-Lab pact, a leap in the dark with the SNP or the Conservative party,



which is the only party that has the vision, policies and determination to make a positive difference.

If the opinion polls—and the experience of those of us with many years' involvement in politics—are to be believed, the Labour Party is in deep trouble. I suspect that many Labour members blame Blair. The fact that the Prime Minister is mired in the sleaze of the cash-for-peerages investigation and the underhand way in which the Commons was duped into the Iraq conflict cannot be doing Labour's electoral chances any favours. I have some sympathy with that view, but the problems are closer to home.

As someone from Cathy Jamieson's beloved Ayrshire famously said, the power

"To see ourselves as others see us"

is very important. A few months ago, I met a man with whom I had been at school. He had gone to Australia and had done well there, but he had returned to Scotland as a result of a family bereavement. He contrasted the Scotland that he had left with the Scotland that exists now. He pointed out how all the shops in Glasgow's Union Street and Argyll Street now have security guards outside them. He mentioned that he could not walk 10yd along the road without meeting someone panhandling. He also observed how drugs are visibly and openly for sale in parts of Glasgow city centre during the day. He had done very well in Australia, but he stated that he could not possibly have done so well in this country, where success is often criticised and where the dead hand of government rests upon everything.

We need to examine the present situation. Week in and week out, the First Minister and Mr Kerr stand up and say, "Look how much more money we have spent on the national health service." The increase in Government spending cannot be denied, but spending money is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Unless that money is spent wisely and with political vision, we will get nowhere at all. That is why the Labour Party is in desperate trouble.

Looking across to the SNP, I admit that I was worried for a while when the SNP message seemed to have become seriously blurred. I have always thought that a vote for the Scottish National Party was a vote for independence. I do not agree with independence, but it is a perfectly honourable and honest position. That message had not been coming over clearly, but I am pleased that it is now clear that a vote for the SNP will bring independence and separation. The equation is SNP equals separation plus high taxation.

The effects of separation would be traumatic. It would mean the end of our defence industry and the loss of thousands of jobs from Lossiemouth,

Faslane and Glasgow. Those jobs would go, as would all the jobs that they support.

**Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Bill Aitken:** I will finish this point first.

Separation would mean the alienation of a trading partner that we have had for 300 years and the creation of a dangerous economic competitor right on our doorstep. It would also mean the loss of jobs everywhere else, especially in financial services. Those jobs would go down south to a lower taxation economy in which it is cheaper to employ people.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Will the member give way?

**Bill Aitken:** I will give way to Nicola Sturgeon.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Once upon a time in Scotland, George Mathewson, Tom Farmer, Bill Samuel, Brian Souter and their ilk would have supported the Conservative party. Why does Bill Aitken think that those people today support the SNP? Does he agree that it is because successful Scots want a successful Scotland and they know that the way to achieve that is to vote SNP?

**Bill Aitken:** Nicola Sturgeon properly highlights the handful of people who take that line; I, however, operate in the real world. As members know, I worked in financial services for many years. That industry is one of the biggest employers in Edinburgh—just up the road there are thousands of jobs in it, which could well be at risk.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Will the member give way?

**Bill Aitken:** I am in my last minute; I must continue.

I am convinced that the people of Scotland are not about to take such a leap into the dark. They will not put themselves into a situation in which their prosperity, the future of Scotland and its ethos, which is surely dear to all of us in the chamber, will be put at risk. As I said, the choice is stark. I do not know how the coming election will go, apart from the fact that the Conservatives will do much better.

I tell members this: a vote for the SNP and separation is a vote for the future of Scotland being damaged beyond belief.

11:21

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** This debate was always going to be overshadowed by the forthcoming election. It has also been overshadowed by the recent polls in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* newspapers, which are not noted for their support of the Scottish National Party or the cause of independence. It is no

wonder that there is panic in the ranks elsewhere in the chamber.

The debate started off with the First Minister, who was reminiscent of Harold Macmillan, saying that we have never had it so good. The problem is that the people of Scotland do not buy that in the light of statistics from organisations such as Barnardo's, as mentioned by Mr Fox, or UNICEF, which show startling poverty levels that bring shame on an oil-rich nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Mr McConnell delivered his text with an ease that was almost like Harold Macmillan's and he failed to deliver any passion or commitment. That contrasted with Nicola Sturgeon, who made it clear that the coming election offers a clear choice between instilling fear and promoting confidence; between looking backwards and going forwards into the future; and between failure and fitness to govern. It is time for Scotland to take responsibility.

Mr Jackson, who I see is not present, made a jibe about Ms Sturgeon's absence from the discussion about Govan when she had to leave the chamber earlier. I assure Mr Jackson, who has carried out two jobs throughout not just one but two parliamentary sessions, that after 3 May he will be able to concentrate on his full-time job, which will be located not in this chamber but further up the Royal Mile.

Mr Jackson spoke about the shipyards and Nicol Stephen spoke about his support and admiration for Finland.

**Karen Gillon:** Will the member give way?

**Mr MacAskill:** I am on record extolling the virtues of Finland in this chamber—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** Order. The member is clearly not giving way.

**Mr MacAskill:** Finland should be admired. Mr Jackson should take note that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Clyde was the foremost shipbuilding area in the world. I do not doubt that when Mr Stephen went to Helsinki he learned that when Clyde shipyards were the foremost in the world, Helsinki remained part of the Russian empire. Finland has more people employed in shipyards and involved in shipbuilding than Scotland has today; that is a testament to the so-called union dividend delivered by the Tories and new Labour. It is time for Scotland to take responsibility, as Alex Neil said.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the member give way?

**Mr MacAskill:** Not at the moment.

It is time for us to take political, economic and social responsibility. Politically, we have to decide whether a war should be in our name. Members should be under no illusion: people elsewhere in

the world think that the Iraq war is in our name because it is being carried out by our Government. The elected representatives of the people of Scotland should be able to decide whether our young men should die in a ditch in Basra. We should decide whether our young men should go to war and what they are fighting for. Is it a cause worth dying for, or is it simply to prop up the relationship with the President of the United States?

We need powers that actually matter. For example, we need a justice minister who can tackle the scourge of air weapons in our communities. How can we trumpet the powers that we have over our justice system, when we do not have the power to tackle such matters?

We need more economic powers in order to find out whether we have been undermining our own efforts to take our people out of poverty and to treat our elderly with dignity and respect. The question is whether we have to continue the failures of London and this Executive.

The fact is that not all of Scotland's social problems can be placed at the door of Margaret Thatcher or London rule, and our people and Government need to accept responsibility for tackling issues such as domestic violence and alcohol abuse. As a result, we need to take political, economic and social responsibility if we are to drive Scotland forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the member answer one very straightforward question? He has focused almost completely on taking power and assuming control. However, why would he still allow the Bank of England to set Scotland's interest rates, which, after all, affect every family and business in Scotland?

**Mr MacAskill:** I have to say that Mr Purvis is not one of those members who will be missed after 3 May, but I will address his question in a moment.

The important point is that we need to be a nation state. Miss Goldie said that the union was in her DNA, while the First Minister talked about atomisation. Indeed, as Wendy Alexander, who has not contributed to this debate, has put it, the issue is whether, in the modern world, we should be independent or interdependent.

Of course, all nations in the modern world are interdependent. Post 9/11, no country can isolate itself from terrorism, just as no country can isolate itself from global warming. However, no matter whether we are talking about the UN—where, despite the efforts of Blair and Bush to undermine it a few years ago, Britain still has to go—or the European Union, whose expansion we welcome and whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary we celebrate, the building block of participation is not the devolved state or the federal legislature, but the nation

state. In the UN, it is a Micronesian atoll or Cyprus—not California or Catalonia—that can stand up and say, “This war is not in our name.” As Mr Finnie well knows, when the European Union decides on fishing matters that affect our nation, it is not Bavaria that has the vote, but landlocked Slovakia or Luxembourg. The fact is that anything that is not a nation state does not have the right to representation.

Of course, nation states have to cede some powers. Indeed, that will be the case in the interregnum that must occur when a devolved state becomes a nation state. If we want the benefits of EU membership, we have to acknowledge that, at times, a shared central bank will provide low interest rates and a stable economy.

All such matters require co-operation and must be driven forward, but states that are not nation states are left with the problem that wars can be fought in their name; that their young men can die for they know not what cause; and that their elderly can be treated without the dignity or respect that they deserve. That is why Scotland must be independent.

At the end of the day, we have a choice in this election. This morning, we have heard all about the apocalypse and catastrophe that will happen if people vote for the SNP. Even Mr Aitken in his summing up seemed to suggest that, all of a sudden, the earth will open up. However, the fact is that Scotland is looking for a change. We have had eight years of an Executive that has failed to move Scotland on. The time has come for the people of Scotland not to apportion blame or to say, “It’s all the fault of 18 years of Thatcherism or the eight wasted years under this Executive.” We must take responsibility, improve our economy, act internationally in a way that allows us to adhere to our moral values and change our society for the better.

It is time to move Scotland on. It is time for the SNP.

11:29

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** It is indeed appropriate that, in the final debate of this session, we look ahead to the future of Scotland. What kind of Scotland do we want to live in? More important, what kind of Scotland will our children live in? I want to live in a Scotland in which our imagination is not limited; an ambitious and dynamic Scotland that gives everyone an opportunity; and a caring Scotland in which every child and old person matters and our most vulnerable are cared for. I want to live in a Scotland that is based on equality and fairness, builds tolerance and respect, and changes lives for the better.

I want to live in a country that is truly international in its outlook, welcomes people from around the world and is not characterised by narrow nationalism. We live in difficult global times and we should be breaking down boundaries and borders rather than putting them up. We should be embracing other cultures. There is more to unite than to divide people across different nations. We should strengthen those bonds, not isolate our people.

When we leave the Parliament, we will set out our respective programmes for the people of Scotland and I am sure that there will be a robust debate. Labour’s vision is about building up Scotland and building on our record. More people are in work than ever before, unemployment has been more than halved and a generation is working in the local economy, and average earnings are rising. Crime is falling. Our health is improving, too. Waiting times are down, free eye tests and dental checks are in place and we have introduced the smoking ban, which in the longer term will reduce the daily deaths from smoking-related illnesses.

We will build on our record on education, too, because we want to give young people the best start and the best opportunities in life, by providing a nursery place for every three and four-year-old, reducing class sizes and improving the school estate. When the Tories were in power, they built four schools a year, which is quite impressive. However, Labour is building a new school every week, and soon a new school will be built every five days. That is the difference that Labour makes.

**Phil Gallie:** Will the member give way?

**Jackie Baillie:** Sorry, there is no reference to Europe in my speech.

Under the SNP, at least 80 new schools that are in the pipeline—the plans are drawn up and teachers and children are engaged and excited about the prospect of their new school—would be cancelled at a stroke. The list of schools includes the Vale of Leven academy in my constituency, Dumbarton academy, and other schools in constituencies throughout Scotland, such as the Western Isles, Dumfries and Galloway and Moray. The SNP would deny schoolchildren opportunities and let them down.

Contrast the SNP’s plans with those of Labour. We will invest in our children and young people. We will continue to build new schools and to build achievement in our classrooms. We will create 100 skills academies and invest in child care and after-school care to help hard-working families. We will continue to build opportunity, to ensure that every child in Scotland has the best start in life.

I have long believed that a strong society and a strong economy are opposite sides of the same coin. We will build our economy, ensure full employment, create 50,000 modern apprenticeships and help businesses to grow. We will work in partnership with the Labour Government at Westminster to deliver all that, because working in partnership makes us stronger.

An SNP Administration would be characterised by fighting, turmoil and argument—by Alex Salmond's own admission. SNP members sound like fractious schoolchildren in a playground. There would be no consensus, no putting the interests of the people of Scotland first; everything would be viewed through the constitutional prism and—my goodness—it would be fisticuffs at dawn from wee Eck every day of the week. That might be an unedifying and slightly ridiculous sight—*[Interruption.]*

There is a serious point to be made, and SNP members would do well to listen. Alex Salmond would focus on dissent rather than on building Scotland. What can we expect from someone who prefers the bright lights of London to doing a hard job in the Scottish Parliament? Kenny MacAskill made a jibe, which was unworthy of him, about a member on the Labour benches doing two jobs. Perhaps he has missed this, but Alex Salmond says that he will do two jobs. Not only does he have a fantasy about being the First Minister of Scotland, but he thinks that he can do that and be a member of Parliament at Westminster at the same time. Being the First Minister of Scotland is not a part-time job. Therefore, Alex Salmond is not fit to do that job.

As somebody once said, there are two certainties in life: death and taxes. Let me add another: the SNP will cost people money. I am not trying to scaremonger, which is something that the SNP is good at; I am trying to expose the arguments properly and get to the truth. The SNP has admitted several times that its top policy priority is independence. Therefore, we would not get the SNP without independence and we would not get independence without a cost. For every hard-working person in Scotland, the cost would be £5,000. That is not based on my sums, or the Labour Party's; it is supported by independent financial experts.

**Mr Swinney:** On the subject of cost, will the member take this opportunity, in the final meeting of the parliamentary session, to apologise for the £900 million that the Labour Administration has cost the businesses of Scotland as a result of the higher business taxation that it imposed on Scotland's economy?

**Jackie Baillie:** Oh dear, oh dear. Would the SNP care to apologise in advance for getting its

sums wrong on the £11 billion black hole at the heart of the Scottish budget? I will spell out the situation so that nobody is in any doubt. The spending commitments that the SNP has made in this session of Parliament amount to more than £4 billion a year. If that is not enough, we would lose the union dividend of £11 billion. I am inclined to be generous, but even on the most generous estimates, oil and gas revenues would not fill the gap. Basically, if we do the sums, they show that we are £11.9 billion short and that the cost to each household would be £5,000. Apologise for that, John Swinney.

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** They have failed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Jackie Baillie:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

How will the SNP ensure, as it seeks to break up Britain, that it has enough in the kitty to pay for pensioners, social security benefits and defence? Gordon Jackson was absolutely right that the SNP has no answers on the issue of the 4,000 jobs that depend on shipbuilding on the Clyde or on the matter of the 40,000 or so jobs throughout Scotland that depend on our defence forces. Contrast that with the 10 Labour pledges and the partnership between Tony Blair and Jack McConnell. The pledges cover matters such as a successful strong economy; developing skills; investing in jobs; protecting the Scotch whisky industry and enabling it to grow; and renewable energy. In contrast to that list of partnership pledges, the SNP has not made such pledges, would not deliver and would permanently be in argument with London on those issues.

There is a contrast indeed, as Gordon Brown has reduced the base rate of tax by 2p, whereas the SNP would raise tax for every person in Scotland by 3p in the pound, which would make us the most taxed part of Britain. Wait for it—that would come hand in hand with cuts. As Pauline McNeill rightly said, there would be cuts in local government, which would be aimed at the people and agencies that we want to deliver for children and local communities. With the SNP, people would pay more but, remarkably, they would get less. We will focus on building Scotland and changing people's lives for the better, but the SNP has made it clear that it will focus on the politics of identity and division and on its first and only priority, which is to break up Britain.

The people of Scotland will stop and think. As John Home Robertson said, we are a prudent and canny lot. As people go to the ballot box, they will reflect on what matters to them, their families and their communities. They will not wander blindly into something that they might regret, because they will reject the SNP. The Labour Party is the

party of ambition, progress and opportunity; the SNP is the party of the past and constitutional chaos and the party that will tax people more.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

11:40

#### Road and Rail Transport (Highlands)

**1. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that, over this session of the Parliament, a fair share of funding has been allocated to road and rail projects connecting the Highlands to the central belt that have been delivered, or are planned to be delivered by 2012, and which projects have been or are planned to be delivered. (S2O-12491)

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** In our current roads programme to 2012, we are delivering improvements of £50 million on the A9, more than £30 million on the A96, £16 million on the A82 and £19 million on the A830. Those figures do not take into account the significant levels of annual repair and maintenance works on the trunk road network throughout the Highlands. In addition to the current investment of more than £115 million, work is now proceeding on the A9 from Perth to Blair Atholl, on the A82 from Tarbet to Fort William and on the dualling of the A96 from Inverness to Inverness airport.

We are delivering an extensive and comprehensive multimillion pound package to provide the strategic investment in road and rail that is required to meet the needs of communities and businesses in the Highlands. We have set out in "Scotland's Railways" our aspirations for faster hourly train services between Perth and Inverness. Scottish Ministers are committed to ensuring that all our rural communities receive investment based on geographical diversity and a fair and rational analysis of need.

**Fergus Ewing:** Does the minister consider that it has been a great disappointment to people in the Highlands that, over the past eight years, there has been no single major improvement to the A82, the A96, the A9 or rail links; that Inverness, alone among Scotland's major cities, lacks dual-carriageway links to the rest of Scotland; and that it has only single-track rail links? Does not he feel that the Scottish Executive really must, in the next session, do a great deal better for the people of the Highlands?

**Tavish Scott:** I do not agree with Mr Ewing's analysis. I do not think that the £115 million that we are investing in our road network is to be blithely ignored, as he thinks. Mr Ewing would

have some shred of credibility if he did not spend his time in this chamber saying that he would cancel projects in order to invest in the immediate dualling of roads in the Highlands while also saying that they might not be dualled tomorrow, but some time in the future. To be credible, one has to have a policy—Mr Ewing does not have a policy. The Scottish National Party's sums do not add up. I will point that out every day of the coming campaign.

## Education

**2. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how children and young people have benefited from investment in the education system. (S2O-12530)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry):** In 2005-06 we invested our highest amount ever in the Scottish school education system, with revenue expenditure of £4.4 billion. Expenditure on education has increased at an average rate of more than 5 per cent per annum in real terms since 1999. Under current expenditure plans, that amount will rise to £5.26 billion by 2007-08. We believe that that sustained and significant investment in staff and classrooms is making a difference. Throughout Scotland, pupils have more books and equipment and they are taught in modern schools by growing numbers of well-motivated teachers and support staff. Throughout the country, pupils, parents and teachers are now seeing the real results that the extra cash brings.

**Scott Barrie:** The minister is absolutely correct to highlight the Executive's record investment in refurbishing existing schools, in building new schools, in reducing class sizes, in increasing the number of teachers and in driving up standards. Does the minister agree with me that the excellent report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education into Tulliallan primary school, which was published last week, as well as other reports on schools throughout Scotland, show how our young people are benefiting from that investment and that they show that our young people are truly getting the best start in life?

**Hugh Henry:** Scott Barrie has spoken to me about the excellent work that is being done at Tulliallan primary school. I congratulate not just the head teacher and teachers there, but all the school staff who have made that possible. Such work can be achieved only with the support of parents, which is increasingly significant throughout Scotland, through a real partnership to improve the life chances of our children. Excellent work is being done at Tulliallan primary school, and excellent work is being done in primary schools throughout the country. I congratulate Tulliallan primary in particular, and I ask Scott

Barrie to convey my best wishes to all the staff and pupils there.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I add my congratulations to Tulliallan primary school. Will the minister explain why the number of secondary teachers in Fife has reduced since 1997? Can he also explain to the people of Fife why, despite the investment that he claims has been put into schools, there are schools in Glenrothes that are raising funds through open days and fairs? The money that is raised is not going on extras for the children, but is being used to buy books and equipment.

**Hugh Henry:** Tricia Marwick will need to take that matter up with Fife Council. The reality is that when Peter Peacock was the Minister for Education and Young People, he allocated money directly to every education authority throughout the country specifically to employ additional teachers. When I became the Minister for Education and Young People, I allocated money to authorities to be provided directly to schools to allow them to make decisions about where it should be spent. More money is going into Scottish education. How the money is allocated and spent locally is a matter for the local authority, but the record is clear. The investment has been made.

One thing I know from the considerable record of new builds and refurbished schools in Fife since 2003 is that the promises that have been made by the SNP to build new schools cannot be delivered, because its proposed system of funding is not only unproven but cannot work because there cannot be borrowing. The SNP is still failing to answer the questions about how its programme would be funded. Pupils, teachers and parents throughout Scotland should rightly be worried about what will be done to Scottish education by the SNP's futile argument.

## Mountain Weather Information Service

**3. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide funding to the Mountain Weather Information Service. (S2O-12490)

**The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson):** The Scottish Executive considers mountain safety to be of paramount importance. My officials are in discussion with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, which is the lead body for walking, climbing and mountaineering, about the options available to ensure that a comprehensive mountain weather forecasting service is available to the users of Scotland's mountains.

**Alasdair Morgan:** The minister will be aware that the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, to which she referred, believes that the Mountain

Weather Information Service should be the recommended weather information service for people who use the hills. Does she agree that although that excellent service—which is accessed by about 5,000 people a day in bad weather—saves lives, it cannot continue without a very modest contribution from the Scottish Executive? The discussions to which she refers have been going on for some time. When will the Executive commit to making that modest contribution?

**Patricia Ferguson:** The service to which the member refers is a very good one—I have taken the opportunity to look at it myself. I am also aware that the Met Office currently provides a service, albeit that it is a service that some people do not regard as being equivalent to the one to which Mr Morgan refers. That is why I have asked my officials to look into the matter and to take forward discussions with the parties involved. I certainly hope that those discussions can be concluded prior to the start of the mountain season.

#### **School Building and Refurbishment Programme**

**4. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it recognises the need to continue to invest in school infrastructure so that schools such as Barrhead high and Eastwood high can benefit from the school building and refurbishment programme. (S2O-12546)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry):** Current plans will see schools continuing to be built and refurbished to the end of the decade, and substantial funding is in place to support that. We recognise that there is still more to be done, although decisions on further financial support for work on the school estate are matters for the next spending review.

**Mr Macintosh:** Is the minister aware of the quality of some of the new school buildings in East Renfrewshire? Can he contrast that with the Opposition's plans to cancel any new school builds on the basis of its ideological opposition to public-private partnership? Does the minister agree that it is wrong to put ideological opposition to the finance plan ahead of the future education of our children?

**Hugh Henry:** Ken Macintosh is right to point out the quality of building that is going on throughout Scotland, including in East Renfrewshire.

I visited Carlibar primary school and I really and truly have to say that it is one of the best new build primary schools that I have seen. The design—which is stunning—was influenced by teachers, parents and members of the community

contributing at the design stage. I hope that we can learn from and continue that process. As Ken Macintosh will know, I cannot make specific commitments for individual schools such as Barrhead high and Eastwood high, but we have a building programme in place up to the end of the decade.

However, one thing is sure: if the SNP wins the election and cancels PPP, as it has promised to do, the schools that are planned in the programme cannot be built. The SNP's Scottish futures trust cannot and will not work. The SNP cannot borrow in the way it says it can.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Why do you have to keep saying it?

**Hugh Henry:** We keep saying it because people need to know that the Scottish futures trust can work only through the break-up of the United Kingdom. That is an SNP promise that would devastate communities across Scotland.

#### **Long-term Conditions Strategy**

**5. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive how its planned long-term conditions strategy will address the distinct needs of children and young people living with long-term conditions, and the needs of their parents. (S2O-12566)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** Our national strategy will benefit everyone living with a long-term condition, including children, young people and their parents. In line with the principles laid out in "Delivering for Health", they will be able to benefit from services that are built around their individual needs, embedded in local communities and delivered to them in an integrated way between the different agencies involved in their care.

**Eleanor Scott:** I thank the minister for that answer.

Can he explain how the strategy will reflect the full range of young people's needs, particularly by ensuring that it encompasses services beyond the national health service—for example, social work, education, eventual employment, psychological support and the transition from children's to adult's services?

**Mr Kerr:** There were a number of questions there, which I will try to address. The "Delivering for Health" strategy has a clear framework for action and we have already delivered on some of the commitments. For example, we have established the Long-Term Conditions Alliance Scotland, which is working extremely well. The toolkit for community health partnerships is assessing and developing packages around individuals and we have launched Scottish

patients at risk of readmission and admission—SPARRA—a predictive tool that is designed to help those who are most in need and ensure that services coalesce around individuals. The work of the chief medical officer for Scotland is also at the heart of our strategy. He is bringing together our national health service in partnership with other agencies.

In the joint futures agenda with local government, we are trying to ensure that we take services to individuals and shape them round their individual requirements. That applies equally in education because recent legislation allows it to happen.

As the Scottish Government, we are bringing together different aspects of public services and the voluntary sector to ensure that we focus on the individual, assess risk, develop care packages and work with individuals, their parents and families.

### **Antisocial Behaviour**

#### **6. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):**

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will outline the next steps in its efforts to tackle antisocial behaviour. (S2O-12528)

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Johann Lamont):** We have given tackling antisocial behaviour a very high priority because it is one of the main problems facing communities across Scotland. We have made significant progress by bringing in the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, setting up community warden services and providing support for victims and witnesses, all of which are vital for delivering better quality of life for those in our hardest-pressed communities.

We recognise, however, that more still needs to be done. We are now rolling out police fixed-penalty notices, considering the wider use of community wardens and determining how best to maintain the pressure on local agencies to implement the 2004 act by, for example, using parenting orders and antisocial behaviour orders for under-16s. We will ensure that community safety partnerships act decisively in tackling not just antisocial behaviour but the wider range of community safety issues, including knife crime.

**Ms Alexander:** I thank the minister for her answer.

It is perhaps an appropriate day on which to pay tribute to her personal role, first as a back bencher, then as a committee convener and subsequently as a minister, in driving forward the agenda of tackling antisocial behaviour.

In that context, can she comment on the need to put tackling underage drinking at the heart of the agenda to create safer communities, and on the need to develop a stronger sense of self-respect

among young people and for communities as a whole to take more responsibility for tackling underage drinking and excessive alcohol consumption among our young people, with all the risks and dangers that it brings?

**Johann Lamont:** I thank Wendy Alexander for her kind words. On antisocial behaviour, we should acknowledge the members of our communities who imposed their will on Parliament and who insisted that we act on their behalf to address such problems.

I hear what the member says about alcohol. We are rolling out test purchasing and are working closely with the police on the enforcement of appropriate behaviour by licensed premises. Alongside that, there is the education programme in our schools and our efforts to challenge parents on how they work with young people to address alcohol abuse and how they ensure that young people do more purposeful things with their lives than getting involved in underage drinking, which has an impact on communities.

#### **Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):**

Given that, to date, no parenting orders have been issued, will the minister outline how she intends to encourage use of that provision, which will undoubtedly make parents take responsibility for supervision of their children and which will, crucially, ensure that vulnerable children are not at risk?

**Johann Lamont:** We are disappointed by the lack of use of parenting orders, which are a support for, rather than a threat to, parents. Crucially, they are also a support for children in vulnerable households. It would be most disturbing if there were any suggestion that there is a blanket refusal to use the powers in the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004. We want to challenge our young people and our families, to work with them and to get the best out of them, rather than to tolerate behaviour that is unacceptable to communities and deeply damaging to the children concerned. I hope that agencies will reflect on that and use the powers when to do so is deemed to be appropriate.

**Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that prevention is always better than cure and that politicians of all parties should take heed of the words of the head of Scotland's violence reduction unit, who said that early years investment in health visitors, social workers and teachers is every bit as important as—and sometimes more important than—investment in more police on our streets? Does she also agree that, as well as taking the action that is necessary to address short-term problems, it is vital that we continue to invest in the next generation to achieve change in the long term?



**Johann Lamont:** I pay tribute to Susan Deacon's crucial contribution to Parliament's creation and to making it the successful institution that it has become. [*Applause.*]

I fully acknowledge her point about the importance of prevention and of working with families at an early stage to ensure that issues are dealt with before they become serious problems. That has underpinned our approach to tackling antisocial behaviour. We understand that if matters are not addressed at an early stage, communities and lives end up being destroyed and people end up having no future.

We are talking about two parts of the same important picture. To realise the potential of our young people and to give us safe communities, not only must we challenge—rather than tolerate—problem behaviour, we must also work with the families in the most difficult circumstances. We should not write anyone off, nor should we shrug our shoulders and say that nothing can be done. Underpinning our strategy on antisocial behaviour is a commitment to, and an understanding of, the potential of all our young people and of all our communities to be safe and thriving places for people to live.

#### **Cardiac Specialist Nurses (Grampian)**

##### **7. Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland)**

**(Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many cardiac specialist nurses there are in the NHS Grampian area. (S2O-12513)

##### **The Minister for Health and Community Care**

**(Mr Andy Kerr):** As of September 2006, NHS Grampian had 2.8 whole-time equivalent cardiac specialist nurses.

**Mrs Milne:** I do not know whether the minister is aware that the Grampian heart failure service has been disbanded as a result of a lack of funding, which means that the NHS Grampian area is the only one in Scotland that does not have a dedicated heart failure service or heart failure specialist nurses. What is the Executive doing to help to re-establish that service for Grampian, in the light of the British Heart Foundation's suggestion that NHS Grampian requires a minimum of 5.5 full-time equivalent specialist nurses to ensure adequate provision of specialist heart failure care in that region?

**Mr Kerr:** The question is premised on an assumption that is incorrect. The issue is not to do with a lack of funding—it is about decisions that boards make locally about how they think services can best be delivered. Of course our boards make those decisions—I do not determine the workforce of every NHS board in Scotland.

NHS Grampian has indicated to us that its plans include consideration of how it will take the service

in question from the acute setting to the primary care setting in local communities, and of how it will provide the service in a different way, which will involve training more nurses so that they have the skills to intervene appropriately.

Far from making suggestions about resources, I suggest, with due respect to Mrs Milne, that NHS Grampian is doing things in a different way, but it is nonetheless responsible for providing the service to people in the community. I also remind her that we have attracted not 12,000, but 15,000 new nurses to our health service, that the number of nurses increased by 2.3 per cent last year, and that a record number of people are training to be nurses in our system. We are continuing to invest in our health service and allowing services to be rolled out in different ways while ensuring that they are provided as locally as possible and that the necessary specialisation exists.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S2F-2801)

That is the final time I shall ask that question before the First Minister takes over on this side of the chamber.

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I look forward to meeting the Prime Minister again very soon.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** For the next 35 days, the Scottish National Party will work hard to win the trust of the Scottish people. Does the First Minister agree that he has lost their trust because he has broken so many of his key promises?

I will start with the council tax. I remind the First Minister that, four years ago, he promised to make the council tax fairer, but it has increased by 60 per cent and it is as deeply unfair as it ever was. The First Minister broke the promise that he made and people throughout Scotland are paying the price of that. In this final meeting of the session, will he tell us how he proposes to make the council tax fairer?

**The First Minister:** I say to Nicola Sturgeon that people will not trust the SNP if it tells untruths, which has happened again in the chamber. The high council tax increases under the Tories cannot be lumped together with the increases that have taken place under Labour or since devolution. Those increases have been lower than the increases in the Tories' final years and lower than the increases elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

For the third week in a row, I explain to Nicola Sturgeon that the Labour Party has not had a majority in this parliamentary session and that, as a result, it has simply not been possible to implement our desired council tax reforms. She does not seem to understand that. I look forward to debating with her the plans that she has put forward for a national tax increase of 3p in the pound, which would make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom, and for cuts of more than £1 billion in services. It is probably the first time a political party has made such a suggestion. Such cuts would affect every school, nursery and social work service and every other local service in the country.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Oh dear. The First Minister is making one excuse after another for Labour's failure to deliver. The people of Scotland know the

truth about the council tax, because they pay their council tax bills, which are 60 per cent higher than they were. Is it not clear that the only local tax policy in the election is the SNP's policy of abolishing the council tax?

I turn to another of Labour's broken promises. I remind the First Minister that, four years ago, Labour promised to cut serious youth crime by 10 per cent. It said that such a cut would be "easily achievable," but youth crime has not come down. New figures that have been published this month show that it has gone up by more than 20 per cent. Communities throughout Scotland are paying the price of that Labour failure. After four years of failure to deliver, why on earth should anyone in Scotland trust the First Minister when he says he will tackle crime?

**The First Minister:** Nicola Sturgeon again completely distorts the truth. Back in 2003, when we were making it clear that crime and antisocial behaviour should be a significant priority in the session, the SNP fought what we said tooth and nail. It opposed the legislation that we proposed and said that it was ridiculous to prioritise crime and antisocial behaviour in an election campaign and a legislative programme.

The truth is that the number of violent crimes dropped by more than 1,000 last year—there was a dramatic change in the number of violent crimes that were committed in this country. The truth is that, as a result of our court reforms, more people are being tackled in the courts more quickly and less police time is being wasted. Those reforms have been part of the most comprehensive changes in the history of Scotland's justice system.

I believe that our commitment to tackling antisocial behaviour at the local level and building a better justice system at the national level are helping us to turn the corner and ensure that, here in Scotland, we can get a grip on crime, bring it down, catch more people and have less reoffending.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Let me tell the First Minister the real truth. Youth crime is up, gun crime is up, vandalism is up, and drug offences and serious assaults are up. It is beyond argument that the First Minister has failed to keep his promise to tackle crime, and no amount of ranting and raving about the SNP will cover up that fact.

Is it not the case that the First Minister has also broken his promise to stand up for Scotland? I remind him that, on 4 December at 11 o'clock in the morning, he said that he would listen to the people of Scotland before making his mind up on Trident, but at 6 o'clock the same day he proved that he listens only to Tony Blair. Against the wishes of the Scottish people, he gave his full

backing to spending £100 billion on a new generation of Trident nuclear weapons on the Clyde. That money would be better spent on schools, on hospitals and on fighting crime.

When the First Minister has so completely failed to stand up for Scotland in the past, why would anyone trust him to do so in the future?

**The First Minister:** There are two truths here. The first is that Nicola Sturgeon's campaign manager for the election on 3 May, Angus Robertson MP, who is her party's spokesperson on defence and foreign affairs, explicitly promised to spend any money that was saved from nuclear weapons on defence forces and not on education, health, tackling crime, or jobs. No amount of bluster by her to deny that and to claim something else will be believed by anybody in Scotland. Secondly, the SNP wants to talk in the election campaign about issues that are decided elsewhere because on each and every policy that has been discussed here in the chamber, the SNP has got it wrong. It has been beaten policy by policy.

The most significant truth is that, in education in our schools and nurseries, in social work services and the care of our elderly and our children, and in tackling crime and making money available to our police boards, not only would the SNP lead Scotland to be the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom, it would cut more than £1 billion from local budgets. Every one of those services would be affected. That is the truth in the election campaign, and that is why the SNP will not win.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I say to the First Minister that on education, health, fighting crime and tax, Labour has broken its promises, but all we hear from the First Minister is excuse after excuse. Is it not the case that people in Scotland have a clear choice at the election? It is a choice between Labour's broken promises and the SNP's ideas for the future. It is a choice between a Labour party that has forfeited the trust of the people of Scotland and an SNP that is working hard to win that trust. Is that not why, every day, more and more people are deciding that it is time for Scotland to move on from Labour, that it is time now for the SNP?

**The First Minister:** We will be very happy to debate the SNP's ideas over the next five weeks. Increased tax for every ordinary Scot, cuts in services in every local area—these are the impacts of the SNP's policies. Of course, there is also the policy that dare not be named, which is independence. If the SNP really believed that the people of Scotland will back independence, they would put that, and not all the other alternatives it is proposing, on the ballot paper. The truth is that the SNP does not come without independence and independence does not come without a cost.

Over the next five weeks, the SNP will find that that is true, to its cost.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**2. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-2802)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I sincerely hope that the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet will discuss building up Scotland, not breaking up Britain.

**Miss Goldie:** With only five weeks to go before the election, I hope that the First Minister will focus on articulating the positive case for remaining within the United Kingdom. Does the First Minister realise that it is possible to value and applaud the union without belittling Scotland? By using the language of the apocalypse, he is simply playing into the hands of the nationalists.

Will the First Minister start to make the positive case and paint a picture of a confident Scottish nation that, as part of the United Kingdom, shapes the world and gives our people the best of both worlds?

**The First Minister:** I can do both. Scotland benefits from being part of the fifth largest economy in the world and from our partnership with the stable United Kingdom economy. As a result of that and the policies secured, and the legislation delivered, by the Scottish Parliament, Scotland today has the highest employment in the United Kingdom, the lowest unemployment since records began and an increasing—rather than a declining—population. We have investments in skills and jobs in Scotland that are outpacing the rest of the country. That success is part of the story of Scotland inside the UK, but it is also part of the devolution story.

During the next five weeks, I will not only outline the positive case for Scotland; I will expose the nationalists' policies. For example, they wish to devolve power over our national sporting heroes—against their will—and make a separate Olympic team, but they do not want power over the Scottish currency; they want to leave that with the Bank of England. They have a mish-mash of policies that would be a disgrace to any serious party, but which is very appropriate for them.

**Miss Goldie:** The First Minister has a very small window of opportunity. He must realise that any increase in poll ratings for the nationalists is not about Nicola Sturgeon or Alex Salmond—and it is certainly not about independence, for which there remains little appetite—but about the First Minister and his Lib Dem cronies. The people of Scotland are so fed up with their failure that they are desperate to make devolution work better.

Does the First Minister accept that if he had not squandered the first eight years of devolution he would not be in this mess?

**The First Minister:** The 200,000 Scots who have a job today but did not under the Conservatives do not think that devolution has been squandered. The 1,000 Scots who were not victims of a violent crime last year but who would have been the year before do not think that the improvements that we have made in policing and the courts have had no impact. The Scots who are benefiting from the record number of drug seizures on our streets, which ensures that more people with drugs are caught and criminalised because they are selling drugs and that more drugs are taken off Scotland's streets, realise that there are benefits in devolution. The primary and secondary schoolchildren whose results are far higher than they were when the Tories were in power do not think that the years of devolution have been squandered. They are the people we represent. They are benefiting from devolution and they will continue to benefit as we build up Scotland.

**Miss Goldie:** The Scottish Conservatives are doing what the First Minister will not do, cannot do, but should have been doing. The Scottish Conservatives are making sensible proposals to sort out the bread-and-butter issues on which the Lib-Lab pact has failed. We have made proposals on affordable housing, on defeating drugs and cutting crime and on standing up for families. It is about time the First Minister realised that the only way to save the union is to save devolution; and the only way to save devolution is to start making it work for the people of Scotland and sorting out the issues that matter most to them. Making this Parliament deliver for its people is the only way to save our union from the nationalists. The First Minister and his Lib-Lab pact might not be up for that fight, but I and the Scottish Conservatives certainly are.

**The First Minister:** We have significantly less crime today, and many more police, than we had during the Tory years. We have 200,000 more jobs than we had during the Tory years. More people survive heart disease, cancer and stroke in this country than they did during the Tory years. More of our children get better results at school and get the chance to go on to university and college than they did during the Tory years.

In all those areas, devolution and this Labour and—yes—Liberal Democrat partnership have made a difference for Scotland. In each and every one of those areas, progress has been made that would not have been made under the Tories. Over the next few weeks, I will be delighted to debate with Annabel Goldie ideas about how we can build on the smoking ban to improve our public health, how we can build on the 200,000 extra jobs to

grow our economy even more successfully, how we can build on the reduction in violent crime to ensure that fewer and fewer of our young people get involved in crime in the first place and how we can ensure that our schools go from being among the four best in the world to being the best in the world. That is the challenge for this Parliament; let us go to it.

### **Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)**

**3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-2809)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I expect to meet the Secretary of State again soon. I am sure that we will discuss a range of issues that are current.

**Robin Harper:** Can the First Minister clarify whether he and his party will be campaigning in this election for the building of new nuclear power stations in Scotland?

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Hopefully.

**The First Minister:** I think that that might be an announcement from Phil Gallie of his late candidacy in the election.

The position that I and my party will take in the election campaign will be unchanged from our position of last week, last month and last year. The position is clear. First, we have no plans for a new nuclear power station. Secondly, we will not sanction a new nuclear power station without the issue of nuclear waste being resolved. Thirdly, we will not rule out replacing the more than 30 per cent of Scotland's electricity that currently comes from nuclear generation. The parties that rule that out are being irresponsible and it will be important for us to state that in the election campaign.

**Robin Harper:** So it is in, it is out, it is shake it all about, it is reserved, it is devolved. Can the First Minister tell us whether a vote for Labour is a vote for new nuclear power stations and whether people who do not want new nuclear power stations should first vote Green?

**The First Minister:** I have just tried to explain the position. I understand that this is an issue on which I must answer on behalf of my party and that, on this occasion, I am, perhaps, not speaking for everyone on the Executive benches, but I will reiterate the position.

First, it is a fact that there are no plans for new nuclear power stations in Scotland. Secondly, we should not even consider having new nuclear power stations in Scotland until the issue of waste has been resolved. However, the third fact is that more than a third of our electricity comes from

nuclear sources. For parties to rule that option out for ever, in an uncertain world in which energy supplies are increasingly uncertain, is questionable. During the election campaign, I will be pleased to put forward that balanced approach.

### Asylum Seekers

**4. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what progress has been made on the implementation of the Scottish Executive's agreement on the treatment of asylum seeker families reached with the Home Office in March 2006. (S2F-2808)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We have made significant progress. A number of measures have been in place for some time, including enhanced background checks on immigration staff working in Scotland and fieldwork for inspections of children's services for asylum seekers. Last week, the Minister for Education and Young People wrote to the Education Committee and the Communities Committee to confirm that we have now also reached agreement on lead professional arrangements, which should ensure that the particular needs of children are taken into account when decisions are being implemented.

**Bill Butler:** The First Minister will be aware that the pupils and staff of Drumchapel high school in my constituency played a prominent part in drawing attention to the treatment of asylum seeker families, which led to the agreement that was announced in March 2006. This morning, when I spoke to Wilson Blakey, the head teacher, he confirmed that the pupils appreciate what the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament have been trying to do.

Does the First Minister agree that the Minister for Education and Young People's letter, in which he urged the Home Office to take a sensible and pragmatic approach to reviewing the asylum applications of more than 1,000 so-called legacy cases in Scotland, should be welcomed and that such an approach should be actively pursued, not only because it is backed by the Scottish Refugee Council, not only because it will be supported by the majority of decent Scottish people and not only because it makes common sense, but because it is the right and just thing to do?

**The First Minister:** Bill Butler is aware that I have a long-standing personal interest in the issue. I believe strongly that we need a firm but fair and consistent immigration policy and a consistent but strong approach to assessing the applications of asylum seekers to establish who are genuine refugees and should therefore be allowed to stay in the country. At the same time, there are a number of families, particularly in Glasgow, who have been in this country for a long time. Their children have grown up here and they

regard themselves as Scots rather than people who have recently come here. That is why I believe that those legacy cases, as they are known, are so important.

We have received a commitment from Home Office ministers that the cases will be properly looked at. I welcome that commitment, and I want to ensure that when it is implemented due care is taken in relation to the futures of those young people. Their contribution in our schools, particularly in some of the most deprived parts of Glasgow, to raising standards and even in some cases to leadership as prefects and in other positions of responsibility has been admirable and successful.

Alongside a fair but tough immigration policy, I want to see a proper, sensitive and considered approach to those who would be considered legacy cases—as a result of which I would expect many of them to be allowed to stay.

### Child Poverty

**5. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister whether any of the additional £1.8 billion to be made available to the Scottish Executive, as announced in last week's budget, will be earmarked for tackling child poverty. (S2F-2806)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I welcome Alex Neil's support for the union dividend. The resources are available for the period 2008 to 2011. The Scottish ministers will decide their use when they set budgets later this year.

**Alex Neil:** The union dividend is 4 per cent of the oil revenues; the independence dividend would be 100 per cent of the oil revenues.

Does the First Minister realise that the level of child poverty in devolved Scotland is 10 times what it is in independent Denmark? Does he realise that the level of child poverty under Blair, Brown and McConnell is two and a half times what it was under Harold Wilson? After 300 years of the union, 10 years of a Labour Government and eight years of a Labour-led Executive, when will he actually try to do something about child poverty in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** Not only has pensioner poverty been reduced dramatically since 1997, child poverty has been reduced considerably—both absolute poverty as measured by a straight cash comparison with 1997 and relative poverty as measured by comparison with the rest of the population.

I believe that there are further measures that we can take. I outlined one recently: prioritising the provision of free school meals to the youngsters

who need it most—who had their free school meals taken away by the Tories. That is in direct contradiction to the Scottish National Party policy, which is to provide free school meals to those who can afford it rather than those who cannot.

Alex Neil made a telling point in his question. His whole strategy for the economy would be based around the volatile oil price. The reality is that the parties who would gamble the future of the children in Scotland who are living in poverty on a volatile oil price that has dropped by \$20 a barrel since last summer would not be able to tackle poverty in Scotland. It is those of us who want a strong and stable economy who will tackle poverty, and we will continue to do so.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** Given the First Minister's personal commitment to the abolition of child poverty by 2020, how does he believe the Labour Party's commitment to extending free school meals fits into that ambition?

**The First Minister:** As I have just said, I believe strongly that free school meals should be targeted at those who need them most, not provided on an ad hoc, universal basis that includes those who can afford them. That is a wrong policy from the SNP. A policy of proper targeting is the correct one for the future in Scotland.

I also believe strongly that we are more likely to lift children in Scotland out of poverty if we are part of the fifth largest economy in the world than if that economy is our nearest competitor. With that approach, we can deliver even more children in Scotland out of poverty in the years to come.

### Smoking Ban (Assessment)

**6. Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what assessment has been made of the impact of the first year of the ban on smoking in enclosed public places. (S2F-2810)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Studies so far have indicated that air pollution in pubs has dropped by 86 per cent and that the health of bar workers has dramatically improved. I am certain that the ban has given Scotland an improved reputation elsewhere. I am also confident that the longer-term impact of the ban will be to improve people's health and to reduce the burden on the national health service.

**Euan Robson:** If one of the hallmarks of the second session of the Parliament was the ban, does the First Minister believe that a hallmark of the next session ought to be a reduction in the instances of long-term conditions, in particular respiratory diseases, and better provision for those who suffer from them?

**The First Minister:** Both of those points are important. I hope that the Parliament will continue

to tackle them in the next session. We can all be very proud of much of the legislation that has been passed in this four-year session, but the ban on smoking in public places was a particularly brave decision by the Parliament. It has transformed Scotland's reputation and made a major contribution to the fact that we now have one of the fastest growing tourism industries in Europe. It will lead to improved public health in the years to come and is an example of the kind of policy we should adopt in the Parliament in our third session, when we will take further brave decisions that secure Scotland's long-term future.

**Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the First Minister's comments on the success of the first year of the smoking ban, although I remind him what he said a few short years ago. According to *The Scotsman* in 2004

"Jack McConnell, the First Minister, has stated that his preference would not be for a total ban."

*The Sun* said that the First Minister "shied away from a total ban."

*The Evening News* said that the First Minister "has ruled out suggestions that could lead to a complete ban on smoking in public places."

According to *The Herald*, the First Minister said that an overall ban would be impractical. Given his complete support for the ban now, does the First Minister regret his previous comments in 2003 and 2004 opposing a ban? Does he find it rather embarrassing that when I lodged a motion supporting a ban on smoking in public places, not one, solitary, Labour member supported it?

**The First Minister:** In the spirit in which the question was asked, I point out that, in the first session—before Stewart Maxwell was in the Parliament—Hugh Henry proposed a ban on smoking in public places. I have never said that before in the chamber because I am not interested in who claims the credit; I am interested in improving the health of the people of Scotland. I point out, for the benefit of Stewart Maxwell and other SNP members, that if there is one difference between me and Alex Salmond, it is that I listen. I can change my mind, I can listen to the people of Scotland and I can then deliver a policy such as that. That is something that Alex Salmond has never proven able to do.

**Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** Will the First Minister give a commitment that, when he returns next month as First Minister, he will continue to promote the healthy living agenda that has been so successful in this session of Parliament? Will he consider, in the new session, extending the smoking ban in ways that will protect children and young people in particular, for example by examining the effects of smoking on young people in cars and some outside areas?

**The First Minister:** There is further action that we can take in relation to young people in particular—I am sure that each of the parties will comment on that over the next five weeks. We should build on the public support that has been shown for the anti-smoking legislation by promoting an agenda for public health in Scotland. I believe that such an agenda can secure the same consensus and the same broad support. I look forward over the next few years to building on the sense of national pride that the smoking ban has delivered, to ensure that, across Scotland, particularly in poorer communities that have suffered as a result of ill health for decades—even centuries—we can turn round the health of the whole community, and not just those who smoke.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Members will be aware that this final plenary meeting of the second session of the Scottish Parliament will continue for another 20 minutes or so. I ask Murray Tosh and Trish Godman, as Deputy Presiding Officers, to join me on the podium.

## Motion of Thanks

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S2M-5789, in the name of Jack McConnell, which is a motion of thanks to the Presiding Officer.

12:30

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Before I address the motion of thanks to the Presiding Officer, I propose a vote of thanks to some of our other distinguished Scottish parliamentarians and colleagues.

I pay tribute to Susan Deacon, John Home Robertson, Janis Hughes and Kate Maclean, from my own party. Both Janis Hughes and Kate Maclean have contributed to the work of the committees of the Parliament. Kate Maclean has represented the city of Dundee for many years, as leader of the council and as an MSP. Janis Hughes brought an expertise in health matters to the Parliament and its committees, which has made a difference to the decisions that we have made.

There are many people in the Labour Party who remember John Home Robertson, at our party conference in 1976, moving the motion that committed us to devolution. The legacy of John P Mackintosh has rested well on his shoulders, and he has proved to be a fitting successor to him. It is right and proper that he has served in the Parliament.

Susan Deacon was the Parliament's first Minister for Health and Community Care, and she served in that role not just with distinction but with real success.

I wish all four of them all the best for the future and pay tribute to their contribution to our work over the past eight years.

In the spirit of all-party consensus, I will mention other members who are leaving the Parliament. Although Labour members may have enjoyed some of Bruce McFee's comments in the first session of Parliament more than some SNP members did, he has made a real contribution to the Parliament and I wish him well in the choice that he has made.

**Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I was not here in the first session of Parliament.

**The First Minister:** We still enjoyed what he was saying in Paisley at the time. Bruce McFee has been a valuable member of the Parliament over the past four years, and we genuinely wish him well.

In addition, I personally wish Brian Monteith well. We have known each other for a long time, and I think that he has made a distinctive contribution to the Parliament. I am sad to see him leave at this time, and I wish him all the best. Perhaps, some day, he will be involved in Scottish politics again.

I pay tribute to Phil Gallie and Donald Gorrie, both of whom have a particular knack of irritating many other members on a regular basis. That is one of the reasons why they have been such good parliamentarians. Their individual contributions and work rate in the Parliament have been remarkable, and I wish them all the best as they retire from the Parliament in May.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton served in a Government with which I disagreed on many occasions, but he is a gentleman, we enjoy his friendship, and we all wish him all the very best in whatever he chooses to do in the years to come.

I wish Jim Wallace particular success in his rather premature retirement from the Parliament. Jim was one of the great architects of devolution through the Scottish constitutional convention, and he served the Scottish Parliament with distinction as Deputy First Minister. He made a real contribution to the early success of the Parliament, and we wish him well.

Dennis Canavan is not here, but I say again what I said last week. He was the first member of Parliament whom I ever voted for, and I have respected him all my adult life. I wish him all the best in the difficult months that lie ahead for him. I hope that he enjoys the company of his young son in the years to come. We share his sadness and wish that he was here with us, today. *[Applause.]*

I now set on record my tribute to another well-known face who will not return to the Parliament after the election of the new Presiding Officer in May. When George Reid returns to the chamber in May, to preside over the election of his successor, the Parliament's identity will change in no small way.

From the very start, George Reid has been a hands-on Presiding Officer. He has provided the leadership that has linked the Parliamentary Bureau, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and the chamber. He has also helped to steer the Parliament through some very difficult times, including the move to this great building. We can reflect today on how, when the Parliament's reputation was challenged by the development of the new building four years ago, George handled the completion of the building, our transfer into it and our early years here. That is something for which we should all always be grateful.

Even more important, George Reid has added his authority and distinctive style to the

Parliament's proceedings week after week. He has ensured that all our voices are heard fairly. I believe that he has brought to the chamber gravitas, style and respect and I welcome that.

George Reid has been a great ambassador for our Parliament and our country, both here in Scotland and abroad. I have seen that in the many speeches that he has made and in the way in which he has promoted Scotland in the United States of America and elsewhere.

George has not been preoccupied solely with his duties in the Parliament, but has taken a serious interest in the bigger picture of Scotland's place in the world. I know that he shares my absolute conviction about the worth of futures thinking. I am pleased that the Parliament's futures forum has been established in a way that complements the work of the Government's futures project. That has helped us to understand what we need to do to meet the opportunities and challenges of the next 20 years or so.

When George retires in May—although I suspect that he will not really retire, but has many other challenges ahead—he will have given 33 years of his life to politics. He first served the people of Clackmannanshire and Stirlingshire in 1974. In the following decade, he had a distinguished career with the Red Cross that took him through wars and disasters in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mozambique and elsewhere. Following his time as Presiding Officer and as MSP for the 60,000 people of Ochil, he is about to come full circle. Next month, he will receive the freedom of Clackmannanshire, which is his home county and has been his family's home for more than 300 years. I know that George will cherish that honour, perhaps above all others.

Finally, I pay tribute to what George has done here in our Parliament over the past four years. He helped us—to use his own words—to move in and then to move on. He also reminded us all at every turn that our mission to build a more enterprising, compassionate and successful Scotland has only just begun and is without an end.

On a personal note, I want to say that Bridget and I have enjoyed the friendship of George and Dee over these past four years and that we hope to retain that friendship in the years ahead.

George, today we thank you for all that you have done to make this young Parliament a success and we wish you all the very best for the future. *[Applause.]*

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its thanks and gratitude to George Reid for his service to the Parliament and recognises the important role he has carried out as its second Presiding Officer.



12:38

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Like the First Minister, I pay tribute to those members of all parties who will not be standing for re-election. Each and every one of them has made their own distinctive but important contribution to the Parliament and we wish them every success in the future.

It gives me particular delight to pay tribute on behalf of the Scottish National Party to George Reid. I know that I speak on behalf of everyone in the chamber—and, I suspect, in the nation—when I say that George Reid has been an outstanding Presiding Officer. He has done so much to enhance the reputation of our young Parliament. As the First Minister said, the past four years have been the crowning glory in a remarkably distinguished career.

George has presided over our proceedings in Parliament with wisdom, fairness, impartiality and, at times, an almost saintly measure of patience. As the First Minister said, he played the pivotal role in bringing the Holyrood project—and, with it, a very difficult time in the short life of this Parliament—to a close. For that, we all owe him a great debt of gratitude.

In my opinion, George's tenure as Presiding Officer will and should be remembered most for his role as an ambassador at home and abroad for Scotland, for Scotland's people and for Scotland's Parliament. George has opened the doors of this building to people from across Scotland and across the world. He has brought people to the Parliament and he should be very proud of that. George has also put Holyrood on the map as a model of modern democracy and that really is a remarkable achievement.

George Reid leaves a lasting legacy in the shape of the parliamentary futures forum. I think that he will be an incredibly hard act to follow in the next session of Parliament.

Deputy Presiding Officer, on behalf of my party, I thank George Reid sincerely for his service and contribution and take this opportunity to wish him and Dee all the very best for the future. *[Applause.]*

12:40

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, pay tribute to MSPs who will leave the Parliament today and I share in the sentiments already expressed. From our benches, we will lose Lord James Douglas-Hamilton and Phil Gallie. Lord James was the exemplar of courtly and articulate conduct in this chamber. I am not saying that Phil Gallie was not such an exemplar, but perhaps Phil will be best remembered for his robust contributions—I doubt whether the

Parliament's sound system will ever be similarly challenged again. I thank them and all the others who are leaving for their contributions to the Parliament in the past eight years.

On behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, it is my pleasure to join in this tribute to our Presiding Officer, George Reid. George, I realise that your previous life required you to bind, heal and bring succour. That was no doubt an invaluable experience for anyone aspiring to be a Presiding Officer of this Parliament. We all realise that when you took on the job, there were probably more shoals of rock than there were channels of clear water. However, you navigated them with an assurance and quiet competence that won universal respect. There is no doubt that proceedings in the chamber have benefited from your authoritative and fair stewardship. A whole devolved institution has been enhanced by a canny ambassador and sage diplomat, and Scotland has been the wider beneficiary of such attributes.

Presiding Officer, we thank you for all that service and commitment, but also for being at all times and above all else a very decent gentleman. You gave us wise counsel when you said of this building, "Now we've moved in, it is time to move on." As you move on, we wish you and your family good health and happiness. *[Applause.]*

12:42

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** Presiding Officer, you have played a key role in moving Scotland forward. Four years ago, the public attitude to the Parliament and this building was too often too negative. Now, four years on, the demand from most Scots is, how can we make this Parliament stronger and how can it do more for us? That change is a measure of the skill, passion and flair that you have brought to your role. I have been proud to be present on many occasions when you have represented this Parliament with such dignity.

As part of a remarkable career, inside politics and out, you have been part of many dramatic parts of our history. I hope that your four years of service as Presiding Officer in this Parliament and to this nation will be a part of that life story that you will treasure particularly—as part of a truly international life, those years deserve to be treasured.

It is said that the greatest skill is to adapt. You have adapted away from the ways of the House of Commons back in the 1970s; to appointment as one of Her Majesty's privy councillors; to being Scotland's politician of the year—not many speakers or Presiding Officers achieve that; and to

the implications of the smoking ban in Scotland. [Laughter.]

Restored home rule in Scotland is secure and ready to move forward and that is in very significant part a tribute to George Reid. You have the grateful thanks of my party and our best wishes for your future challenges.

Those wishes go with equal sincerity to two colleagues who are retiring at this election. For 35 years, Donald Gorrie has served his constituents in Edinburgh and across central Scotland with dedication and in pretty much every elected office that can be sought. I am sure that colleagues never cease to be amazed at the range of causes to which Donald brings his own unique passion. He has made a great contribution to public life and I know that, given his youth, he intends for that contribution to continue.

Jim Wallace, who has been one of my closest friends and a great friend to many in the chamber, rightly earned warm tributes last week for his final speech. He stepped up to the role of acting First Minister and served Scotland with distinction, mostly in truly difficult circumstances. Not everyone in the chamber will have been pleased to see a Liberal-led Government in this country for the first time since the 1920s, but we all respect the commitment and integrity that he has brought to life in Scotland. Jim, we will miss you a great deal.

I, too, thank all those in all parts of the chamber who are retiring. As one of the final acts of coalition politics for the next few weeks, I should specifically mention Frances Curran. The First Minister apologises for not mentioning her in his remarks and we—and I am sure all the party leaders and everyone else in the chamber—wish her well.

We should also thank the Deputy Presiding Officers for their very effective work over the past few years; George Reid's wife and family; and, in particular, all the staff who have supported the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officers over the past four years. At this moment, they are up in the gallery.

We have all been part of a dramatic time in Scotland's history and can be proud of our past achievements. We must now look forward to the great possibilities of the future. George Reid, I thank you for the part that you have played in that. [Applause.]

12:47

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** On behalf of the Scottish Green Party, I pay tribute to all the politicians who are about to retire and, in particular, to Dennis Canavan, who is a great

friend and was something of a mentor to me in my first four years in Parliament.

Presiding Officer, it has been a pleasure and an honour to work with you over the past eight years in our new Parliament. Your contribution to Scottish politics and to our development as a legislative body has been extensive, constructive and universally appreciated.

Those of us who have shared from the very beginning your passion for the building in which we now meet owe you eternal thanks for your calm wisdom, tenacity and dedication in bringing the project to a successful conclusion. When sought, your advice has always been freely and patiently given, sound and helpful, and has always been in Parliament's best interests.

Your contribution has not, however, been restricted to Parliament's business. I echo the sentiments that have already been expressed that you have been an ambassador par excellence not only for Parliament but for Scotland. Your dedication to the vision of a new politics for Scotland is beyond question, and your encouragement to our Parliament to be open both to the public and to discussion, and to engage as much as possible with the wider world has been widely recognised.

The words "Wisdom", "Justice", "Integrity", and "Compassion" are inscribed at the end of the mace that sat below you in the first four years of Parliament, when you were Deputy Presiding Officer, and which has sat below you as Presiding Officer. Your compassion was well exemplified in speeches on Iraq, on Afghanistan and on international aid and co-operation that you made during the first session of Parliament. You have dispensed justice with an even hand, acted with wisdom and behaved with complete integrity throughout your time as our Presiding Officer.

On behalf of the Green group, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your contribution and wish you a happy time at home with Dee and in the company of your fellow citizens in your much-beloved constituency of Clackmannanshire. I hope—indeed, I am quite sure—that you will soon be as busy as ever, still making your contribution. May you have many years of health and happiness to accompany you in your projects. Thank you. [Applause.]

12:50

**Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP):** Are you nervous, George? [Laughter.]

The Scottish Socialist Party echoes much of what has been said about the MSPs who are retiring—I am not one of them—and about the Presiding Officer. We acknowledge that during the

past four years you have been fair and—yes—firm, too. The SSP saw a fair bit of that firmness. My colleague Carolyn Leckie was chucked out of the chamber when she stuck up for the nursery nurses and Colin Fox, Carolyn Leckie, Frances Curran and I got a very big row when we protested on the floor of Parliament in favour of democracy and against the G8. I promise that we will not do anything like that today.

You have been fair in giving the SSP time to speak in debates and at First Minister's question time and we are grateful to you for that. We wish you well as you embark on your new life outside the Scottish Parliament. If you need a reference for anything in the future, we will be happy to oblige.

I hear that you will receive the freedom of Clackmannanshire. Congratulations—I know that you are very proud of that. I point out that Cornton Vale women's prison lies within the boundaries of Clackmannanshire. The next time any of us finds ourselves inside, will you ensure our freedom? A file inside a cake will do nicely. I have a wee bone to pick with you, though. The last time I was in Cornton Vale you promised me that you would pop in to visit me, but you never showed up. You shouldna gie a lassie a dizzy like that. If it had not been for the fact that you rescued me just a couple of weeks ago from a gang of Vikings in the garden lobby—you remember them—I would bear a grudge. However, you are off the hook because you stepped to my aid—and made me blush, which is not easy.

Carolyn, Frances, Colin and I wish you all the best. We thank you for being fair and for retaining your sense of humour, which is not an easy task in politics. You are often described as a statesman, but to me you are just a nice bloke in a sharp suit, with a ciggie hanging out of his mouth, in the naughty corner outside Queensberry House.

We thank you for everything. It has been very nice knowing you and I am sure we will see you around in the future. I feel I should leave Parliament as I entered it, with a message written on the palm of my hand—it reads, "Bye, George."

12:53

**Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (Sol):** As colleagues have done, I pay tribute to the hard work of members who are retiring. I ask members to forgive me for making special mention of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, who made me very welcome and was extremely supportive when I joined the Education Committee. I thank him for his courtesy and for giving me the information that I needed to get me started so that I could survive and thrive on the committee.

As co-convener of Solidarity, I am pleased to have an opportunity to thank George Reid for all his hard work during the past four years. One of my first tasks in Parliament was to be on the panel that was selecting Scotland's commissioner for children and young people. That was an honour, but I was somewhat nervous at what I thought was an onerous task. George made me feel comfortable and relaxed and his sincerity and commitment to making the right choice were very clear. I thank him for that.

You have done an excellent job as Presiding Officer. You have shared out the meetings fairly and, with your authoritative voice, I have sometimes thought that you should have been a teacher. My disappointment when I sometimes did not get to speak in debates was always offset by a nice little note from you, with your beautiful handwriting. As a teacher, I always noted your handwriting—I would have been proud of that if I had taught you.

You have represented Parliament well to the Scottish public and you have understood the importance of staying with public opinion, which is why Tommy Sheridan and I welcome your legacy paper on MSPs' expenses, particularly the Edinburgh allowance. As you have said, in politics, perception is everything. On behalf of myself and Tommy Sheridan, I wish you well for the future.

12:55

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** Presiding Officer, it was not just yesterday that you and I and some other political anoraks sat discussing Scotland's possible futures well into the wee small hours in the Salutation Hotel in Perth. I have never said anything about that night and I do not intend to now, so do not worry. Seen from this distance, our thoughts and ideas appear to have come from another age. Actually, it was another age—it was before Andy Kerr. Although the cleaners were Hoovering round us, nobody suggested that you leave the lounge for a cigarette.

Our professional paths crossed again about 25 years later, if I recall correctly, when we shared a broadcasting award. I was delving into drugs and you were running the show at a general election. I suspect that that is when you found that you liked being in the chair and steering things—Parliament has benefited from that. We needed a champion and, as others have said, you have filled the position more than admirably, for which you have our sincere thanks.

If Dennis Canavan were here, he would have done as I have—he would not have said anything about what happened 30 years ago, either. Like you, he leaves front-line politics today. His contribution, like yours, has enhanced Parliament.

Brian Monteith is another colleague who will leave our happy and eclectic group of independents. As with Dennis Canavan and you, I have known Brian for years. I will miss his free-thinking intellect as much as I will miss the same qualities in Dennis Canavan and you.

On this occasion, I can claim to speak for the independents. I have not always done that—I have always said that I was just the one who was pushed to the front while they all talked behind my back. However, I speak for the independents when I thank you and Dee and wish you well in your new ventures, although I fear that those will range wider than visits to garden centres, as I think Dee was hoping. As I am the last member to speak on the motion, I sincerely thank you very much on behalf of the whole Parliament.

## Decision Time

12:58

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S2M-5789, in the name of Jack McConnell, on a motion of thanks to the Presiding Officer, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament expresses its thanks and gratitude to George Reid for his service to the Parliament and recognises the important role he has carried out as its second Presiding Officer.

## Presiding Officer's Closing Remarks

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** It is with great pleasure that I invite the Presiding Officer, George Reid, to make his closing remarks and to close this session of Parliament.

12:59

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** And so, farewell. I am grateful—indeed, I am moved—by members' warm words. They are more than I merit.

Thirty-three years, or a third of a century, or half my life ago, I was elected for the first time. I believed then, as I believe now, that if we are to create in Scotland a society that is enterprising and compassionate and which is comfortable with itself at home and capable of competing in today's global marketplace, we must take a large measure of responsibility for achieving those goals, through a Scottish Parliament. It has been my greatest privilege, a third of a century later, to end my active political career as Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.

Four years ago, we were in some difficulty. The costs and delays of Holyrood had brought hostile headlines, understandably adverse comment from the public, fractiousness and damage to devolution. It was clear that we had to move in before we moved on. We have moved in, and we have moved on.

We can all take pride in this Scottish Parliament. Since 1999, we have grown in confidence, in commitment and in clarity of debate. In the chamber, in committee and in constituencies, we have all worked long and hard to make a real difference to the daily lives of the people of Scotland. We are now widely seen as a participative Parliament, firmly founded in our principles of accountability, accessibility, equality of opportunity and the sharing of power. We have started to let the light shine in on Scottish life. We have opened the doors and given Holyrood to the people.

We have looked over the horizon with the futures forum, and we have played to packed houses in the festival of politics. By bringing G8 participants, Carnegie medallists, our good friends from Malawi and the Microsoft government leaders forum to this place, we have helped to put Holyrood on the international map.

I thank all of you at this time of transition. I have tried to be fair and firm and to give you my trust, and I am most grateful for the trust that you have given me in return. My thanks go to Paul Grice

and the staff of this Parliament for their constant support and engagement; to Lee Bridges and my private office staff in Edinburgh; and to Ellen Forson and my staff in Alloa. They have given me laughter and loyalty, and they shall remain good friends.

My thanks to the people of Ochil, the community from which I come. Over 33 years in politics, I have stood for election only there. I am deeply grateful for the trust and kindness of my own folk.

Finally, my thanks go to my dear wife, Dee. For more than a third of a century, on bad days as well as good days, she has always been there. Without her, it would not have been possible.

And so, farewell—a final fond farewell. Go forth now from this place and into the election battle. Return to your regions and constituencies and prepare the next chapter in Scotland's story.

I now close the second session of the Scottish Parliament. *[Applause.]*

*Meeting closed at 13:03.*



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