

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 13 June 2007

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 13 June 2007

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. I am pleased to welcome as our time for reflection leader Colin Symes of the Community Church, Edinburgh.

Colin Symes (Community Church, Edinburgh): Last Saturday, 9 June, was the feast day of the original patron of Scotland, Calum Chille or St Columba, 1410 years after his death. His influence on Scotland is equalled by few. And he influenced not only this nation, for from his foundation of Iona came St Aidan to found Lindisfarne, whence in the seventh century he sent his disciple, Cedd, who established in sight of the Thames the parish in Essex where I grew up. The scope of Columba's mission far exceeded Columba's own lifetime and geographical reach.

Why were they so readily received, Columba and his successors? Put simply, they brought what man most craves: hope. The hope of a God who loved the world enough to die for it; a God who conquered death itself with life to come. In translation, here are words attributed to Columba, from his hymn, "Help of the Labourer". He sings of hope, the hope of one familiar with journeying on the sea:

"Though tiny and trembling and wretched I come,
As I row through this age's dark, infinite storm,
May Christ bring me with Him to His haven of peace,
Where He reigns and the strains of His praise never
cease."

Christ offers the same hope today that he offered through Columba to all who feel tiny and trembling and wretched. In the midst of our doubts and darkness, Christ would sail with us in the boat, bringing us safe to harbour.

In remembrance of Calum Chille and his Christ, I now pray in his tongue—the Gaelic—the ancient blessing of Aaron, and the New Testament prayer known to Christians as the grace. In English, the words are, the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up the light of his countenance on you, and give you his peace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Gum beannaicheadh an Tighearna sibh
Agus gun gleidheadh e sibh.
Gun tugadh an Tighearn' air aghaidh dealrachadh oirbh,
Agus bitheadh e gràsmhor dhuibh;
Gun togadh an Tighearna suas a ghnùis oirbh
Agus gun tugadh e dhuibh sith.

Agus gu robh gràs ar Tighearna Iosa Crìosd
Agus gràdh Dhè
Agus co-chomunn an Spioraid Naoimh maille ribh uile.

Amen.

Points of Order

14:34

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My point of order is about the statement on higher education that we are about to hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Reference to the contents of the statement appeared in a number of newspapers at the weekend, trailing an Executive announcement on the abolition of the graduate endowment. I understand that it was not idle speculation on the part of the newspapers involved, but rather that the media were briefed expressly on the content of the statement. Moreover, I understand that various student leaders have been invited to Parliament today and that their availability for interview by the media has been circulated, presumably on the basis that they will welcome the contents of a statement that members of this Parliament have yet to hear. Presiding Officer,

"I am concerned that—yet again—we seem to be reading about Government announcements in the press rather than hearing them in the chamber."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2000; c 1259.]

Those are not my words, but those of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop.

While in opposition, members who are now on the Executive benches complained regularly about the then Executive trailing ministerial announcements in the press in advance of Parliament being informed. Although I am sure that the Executive would not wish to appear to be guilty of double standards, this is surely a case of gamekeeper turned poacher.

Presiding Officer, will you rule on whether the Executive is in breach of parliamentary procedures on this matter? At the very least, gross discourtesy has been shown to Parliament and members of all parties.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I thank the member for notice of his point of order. In response, I refer, once again, to the good practice guidance on announcements by the Scottish Executive and repeat that major policy announcements should in the first instance always be made to the Parliament.

However, in this specific case, I have reviewed the press coverage in some detail since the weekend, and can find no evidence that the Executive has breached the terms of the guidance. Moreover, I have not come across any knowledge of any press briefings that have been given. That said, I urge all members to have

regard to the guidance and to note that I expect it to be adhered to at all times.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On Thursday 7 June, in the course of replying to an oral question from Tavish Scott, Richard Lochhead, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, said:

"I was delighted to receive the invitation from the UK minister to visit him in London yesterday as a precursor to next week's agriculture and fisheries council. That invitation was rarely extended to my predecessor".—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2007; c 539.]

As the predecessor minister, I helped to establish the procedure under which agriculture and fisheries ministers of the devolved Administrations as of right and as a matter of course met United Kingdom ministers as a precursor to meetings of the European Union agriculture and fisheries council meetings. Such precursor meetings took place on the overwhelming majority of the 41 occasions on which I attended meetings of the EU council of ministers. It is therefore wholly inaccurate and misleading for the cabinet secretary to claim that I was "rarely" invited to attend such meetings—and equally inaccurate and misleading for him to imply that I rarely attended meetings with UK ministers as a precursor to meetings of the EU Council of Ministers.

Accordingly, Presiding Officer, I ask you to rule that, in accordance with section 1.1(c) of the Scottish ministerial code, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment should take the earliest opportunity to come before the Parliament and correct his inaccurate and misleading claim.

The Presiding Officer: Again, I thank the member for notice of his point of order, which is now a matter of record. However, as I am sure that he is aware, the Scottish ministerial code to which he refers is a matter for the First Minister, not for me. Accordingly, I advise the member to take the matter up directly with the First Minister.

Higher Education

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a statement by Fiona Hyslop on higher education. As the minister will take questions at the end of her statement, there should be no interventions.

14:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): I am delighted to be given this opportunity to announce to the Parliament details of a proposal from the new Scottish Government that will benefit graduates, their prospective employers and the Scottish economy in the widest sense.

As Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, I am committed to taking an holistic approach to lifelong learning, focusing on education in our children's earliest years; on supporting children and families; on improving learning in schools; on developing skills for, and in, work; and on promoting excellent teaching and research in our colleges and universities. Together, those policies will contribute to ensuring that learning will be lifelong for everyone.

This Government's pledge is to create a more successful country that will flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. That is the overriding purpose towards which we will work in government. To do so, we must ensure that a modern Scotland is one where everyone can fulfil their economic, social and personal potential to the fullest possible extent and that any barriers that prevent them from doing so are removed.

That is why I announce our determination to honour our manifesto commitment to abolish the graduate endowment fee. Subject to other parties in the Parliament agreeing to legislate, students who are about to graduate this summer, students who are currently at university, students who are about to enter university this autumn and all subsequent students will no longer have to pay the graduate endowment fee.

The fact that around 50,000 students will no longer be asked to pay a graduate endowment fee of more than £2,000 is good news for them, for their families and for Scotland, but it will happen only if other parties who already have commitments in that area support us. I am hopeful of persuading others that our proposal is in not only the national interest, but the interest of the public purse.

Although the cost of abolishing the graduate endowment fee is approximately £15 million net, after allowing for administration and accounting charges, I can still guarantee that the amount of

money that is distributed to students through bursaries and grants this year will not be adversely affected by our proposal—we will continue to fund them directly.

Some 10,000 people a year are liable to pay the graduate endowment fee, which is set at the beginning of a student's course and which stands at just under £2,300. The background to it is well known. It was introduced by a previous Government in 2001 as part of a new system of student support, which was based on the principles established by the Cubie committee that student support should promote social inclusion and enhance civic society, and that barriers to widening access and participation should be removed. Those are sound principles, which apply just as much today as they did when Dr Cubie published his work. However, the graduate endowment fee is a tool that has failed to deliver those aims in a modern Scotland.

I believe that the basic principle of Scottish education is that it should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. My announcement is a critical step towards achieving that vision not just for today's students, but for tomorrow's, as well as for their families, for our society and for the whole of Scotland. Opening up access to higher education for everyone, regardless of their location, background or personal situation, is a key component of fully releasing the potential of Scotland's people.

Our country's demographic challenges over the next 20 years mean that we must make the most of the opportunities for all our people and must give everyone the chance to make the fullest possible contribution to economic and civic life. Our vision of a smarter Scotland is one in which the benefits of education are spread widely and equitably. That will be possible in the context of higher education only if access to it is driven by ability alone. For some people who have the ability to succeed, the existing structures act as barriers to their future success. The graduate endowment fee is one such barrier. We cannot let it stand in any young Scot's way.

The graduate endowment fee is an example of a policy that was formed when parties with different views adopted a compromise that has benefited no one and which has clearly failed. It has failed our graduates and their families by burdening them with excessive debt; it has failed our most vulnerable youngsters by creating financial barriers to accessing higher education; and it has failed the Scottish taxpayer by not raising the level of income that was initially projected.

The graduate endowment fee is clearly an inefficient way of raising income. In the three years in which it has been in operation, two thirds of the students who were due to pay the fee have not

paid it back directly, but have simply added it to their student loan. The costs associated with the resulting interest rate subsidy mean that the taxpayer loses around one third of the income collected. In fact, the taxpayer recoups the income in real monetary terms only after 13 years—that is how long it takes for the money to be repaid in full to the Government.

As well as being inefficient, the graduate endowment fee is difficult to collect. More than 1,400 of the graduates who were liable in April this year have yet to respond to payment letters from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. That is equivalent to almost £3 million in potential income.

Three cohorts of graduates are liable to pay the graduate endowment fee, their liability having arisen on 1 April in 2005, 2006 and 2007. At the very most, £12.7m has been paid back in cash, with more than twice as much—£26.3m—having been added to student loans. In three years, the princely sum of only £47,000 of that £26.3m has been returned to the taxpayer.

It is clear to me that the graduate endowment fee is a complicated and inefficient way of generating money for student support. Not only does it impact on graduates as a back-end tuition fee, but the law on the matter states that not one penny of the fee can go towards paying for learning or teaching at university. That is the worst of both worlds. With the taxpayer, graduates and Scotland losing out, it is difficult to see whom the arrangement has ever benefited. Abolishing the complicated and inefficient graduate endowment fee is the smart thing to do.

Fear of debt is a real and growing concern for many prospective students. The average amount of debt has increased to around £13,000. Many people who have benefited from access to higher education, including members of the Parliament, might not have participated if faced with the fear of such debt, particularly at a young age. The age participation index, which measures the proportion of young Scots who are engaged in higher education, has fallen since the graduate endowment fee was introduced from 51.5 per cent in 2001-02 to 47.1 per cent in 2005-06. Believe it or not, for the first time since the reformation, there has been a drop in the share of the population studying in higher education in Scotland. Given that participation had previously risen each year, it is clear that the fear of debt is real and is a factor in the choices that young people make when they leave school.

Evidence also shows that young people from low-income backgrounds are the most debt averse. Our system should contain the widest possible incentives so that as many people as possible with the ability to enjoy and participate in the higher education experience can do so. Young

people from areas of multiple deprivation should have wider access to higher education and, although efforts on this have increased recently, the proportion of entrants to university who come from deprived areas of Scotland has still not changed significantly over the past five years.

Fear of debt can and does act as a brake on the aspirations of people from our poorest and most disadvantaged communities and moves us away from a Scottish education system that should be based on ability to learn. Therefore, it must be wrong to burden our graduates with debt and deny them every possible opportunity to contribute to a wealthier and fairer Scotland. It is wrong that they should begin their working lives encumbered by financial pressures, and that is a wrong that the new Scottish Government intends to put right.

If we reduce the burden of debt, graduates will start to gain the full benefits of employment as soon as they leave university, get on with their lives freely, make the ambitious career decisions that will help to power Scotland's economy and make personal choices that will allow them to lead a fulfilling life in this country. Is it not much better that a graduate's money should go towards buying their first home or starting their first business than that it be lost and spent instead on the first of many debt repayments?

I will now set out how and when we plan to deliver the abolition of the graduate endowment fee. The fee was introduced by the Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) (Scotland) Act 2001, and we will introduce primary legislation to repeal the relevant parts of the act. We want as many people as possible to benefit from the change as soon as possible. That is why I am announcing that with, and only with, parliamentary approval, students who are about to graduate this summer, students who are currently at university, students who are about to enter university this autumn and all subsequent students will no longer have to pay the graduate endowment fee. That will relieve all those who become liable to pay the fee on 1 April 2008 and all students who graduate in subsequent years.

To achieve that, we will introduce legislation that we hope will come into force by 1 April 2008. I am aware that that is a tight timescale but it is the most effective way of abolishing the graduate endowment fee. It will give the Student Awards Agency for Scotland enough time to notify students who graduate this summer and notify people who will enter university this autumn of our plans, subject to parliamentary approval. I look forward to support from across the chamber for what I have announced. I ask parties who may not have called for abolition previously to consider the compelling public finance arguments in favour of our proposals.

I intend to consult on the principle of abolishing the graduate endowment fee this summer—I will seek the views of all those involved on the benefits that that will bring. Following that consultation, and subject to the views that are expressed to me, my intention is to introduce a bill in the autumn. With parliamentary support, we have an opportunity to make an important difference for students currently at university—many of whom are sitting their final exams now or are waiting on their results as we speak.

I have no doubt that student loans and the graduate endowment fee act as a disincentive to our youngsters when they consider going into higher education. This Government has three central proposals to reform the current student support arrangements: the abolition of the graduate endowment fee; replacement of student loans with means-tested grants; and relieving the burden of debt repayments by Scottish students. In my first few days as cabinet secretary I began working with my officials on the options for the second and third of those proposals. That work is continuing actively and detailed proposals will be considered as part of the spending review. Abolishing the graduate endowment fee is an important first step for us in delivering those commitments and I am pleased to announce our intention to do so today.

I look forward to working with parties across the chamber to deliver a package of student support that delivers the smarter, wealthier and fairer Scotland that this Government seeks.

We live in a global economy and our key economic resource is our people. Graduates from Scottish universities are among the brightest and the best in the global pool of talent and they contribute enormously to the economic and social lifeblood of our country and other countries across the world. Reducing graduate debt is therefore an investment in our future, in our people and in our economy. It is a statement of belief in Scotland's people and it acknowledges that, in order to compete, we need to remove obstacles that hold people back.

We need to take active steps to ensure that in the future the Scottish economy is supplied with the graduates that it needs in order to prosper and that everyone who has the ability has the opportunity to be involved in the higher education experience.

We made it clear in our manifesto that we would cut student indebtedness. I believe that abolishing the graduate endowment fee will show the people of Scotland that we are committed to that and that we are making progress in the early days of this Government.

Abolishing the graduate endowment fee as soon as possible is an integral part of realising our vision of a smarter Scotland; a Scotland in which educational and academic achievement throughout life are possible; a Scotland—renowned through the years as a “learning nation”—where people learn for their and our future. That will inspire a competitive, sustainable economy for a wealthier and fairer Scotland.

That is why we want to move quickly, and why I call for the support of the Parliament. We need that support to do what we know will make a measurable difference to our people, our society, our economy and the future of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I will allow about 30 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. I intend to fit in more questions than were asked the last time that we had a statement and questions, so I ask members to keep their questions as brief as possible and the opening questions to within the time limits that I have intimated, if that is at all possible.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance sight of her statement. However, the statement is meagre and disingenuous and tinkers at the edge of what the SNP promised to students. The SNP talk is all about students, but the statement says nothing about investment in universities and further education colleges; there is no promise of even a single penny of investment in either higher or further education. Labour said that education would be our priority. We promised additional investment, even if it meant squeezing other budgets.

Why has the SNP failed to tell the Parliament how much it will invest to allow our higher and further education institutions to compete against the rest of the world and against English institutions in particular? Will the SNP urgently introduce proposals to write off student debt and replace loans with grants? The party received many votes on the back of those promises.

Fiona Hyslop: Did Hugh Henry listen to the statement?

Hugh Henry: There was no talk before the election of waiting for a spending review—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Hugh Henry: Even though the SNP was warned—

The Presiding Officer: Order. Excuse me one moment, Mr Henry. The minister's statement was received with courtesy; I ask that questions be accorded the same courtesy.

Hugh Henry: We should not be surprised that old habits die so hard.

As I said, there was no talk of the SNP waiting for a spending review—even though the party was warned that its proposals were unworkable and unaffordable. Last year, Alex Salmond promised to scrap the outstanding student loan debt for current graduates. Today, yet again, it is mibbes aye, mibbes no.

The minister's statement is not a first step; it is a fig leaf to cover the embarrassment of a U-turn, a con trick or both. Graduate endowments were set up to provide income to help poorer students. Where will the money come from now? The minister's proposal, despite the verbiage, does not spell out how young people from poorer backgrounds will be helped to gain access to university. Will Fiona Hyslop write to me with details of how that will be done? The minister's proposal claims that all students will be helped equally, irrespective of their financial circumstances, but the statement says nothing about recompensing those who have already paid the endowment. Will that happen?

I am dubious about the SNP's figures. All the evidence that I have seen—before the election and since—gives an estimated annual cost of between £20 million and £25 million. If the SNP Administration has money to spare, why does it not add a few million pounds, defer its proposal for two to three years, and create 1,000 jobs in August for teachers who are coming to the end of their probationary period? That would surely provide a more immediate and more beneficial impact for Scottish education.

The statement was profoundly disappointing. It badly lets down the many people in Scotland who took at face value promises that the rest of us know to be false.

Fiona Hyslop: Hugh Henry's praise for the announcement reflected his usual generosity.

This Government will deliver on its manifesto commitments, unlike other Governments. Within three and a half weeks, we have made proposals to tackle student indebtedness and abolish tuition fees. I seem to recall a certain other Government that promised, before 1997, to get rid of top-up fees and not introduce them, but three months later it did indeed decide to introduce top-up fees.

We need to study the issues to do with university funding very closely indeed. That is why I met the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and university principals last week, to discuss with them the need for more detailed information. They want to supply that information so that we can make progress. On Friday, I will meet the principals of the Scottish

colleges to discuss the same issues. That is what this responsible Government will do.

Mr Henry talks about the problems facing probationary teachers. Responsibility for those problems lies with Mr Henry's Government, which caused the difficulties when it was in power. If he wants reassurance, I say to him that I hope to come to Parliament before the recess to make announcements on what I will do to help to tackle the problems that Mr Henry's party caused in education.

Had Mr Henry been listening to my statement, he would have realised that this is the first step of our progress. Our proposals are ambitious because we believe in an ambitious Scotland. We want all the people of Scotland to be involved, which will mean ensuring that children and young people from deprived areas have access to higher education and are not prevented from gaining such access, as they were under Mr Henry's Administration.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing an advance copy of her statement. Today's announcement will doubtless be popular with student groups, but there is more to government than grabbing a few cheap headlines and a few cheers from the back benches.

Scottish Conservatives are no fans of the graduate endowment, but my criticism of the cabinet secretary's announcement is that it utterly fails to address the real issue in relation to higher education. The cabinet secretary said in her statement that she wishes to focus on

"promoting excellent teaching and research in our colleges and universities."

She must be aware of the growing concern among Scottish universities that they face a competitive disadvantage compared with English institutions because of the additional revenue that those institutions can derive from top-up fees. The situation will be exacerbated in a few years' time when the £3,000 a year cap on top-up fees will be lifted.

The real issue for the Scottish Government is how to fill that funding gap. In her first statement on higher education, the cabinet secretary had not one word to say on that vital issue. Scottish Conservatives, recognising the serious nature of the issue, have called for an independent review of higher education funding and student support. The Scottish National Party's response has been to propose a policy that will take money out of higher education rather than put it in.

In 2003, the SNP manifesto pledged:

"We will reconvene the Cubie Committee with a remit to review financial support for students at present, as well as

the overall context of further and higher education funding. The committee will not be restricted in its remit".

Why has the SNP abandoned that perfectly sensible commitment, for which it would have had our support? Is it because the balance of expert opinion is likely to run counter to its stance and question the scrapping of the graduate endowment that was announced today?

Will the cabinet secretary join us in committing to establish an independent review of higher education funding, or is she happy to sit back and do nothing while the future of our great universities is put in jeopardy?

Fiona Hyslop: Many students and parents will be deeply disappointed that the member does not think that student hardship and £13,000 of debt on graduation is a real issue. It is a very real issue for many families.

The member talks about responsible government. It is responsible to introduce the proposals that we have introduced. He calls for an independent review. It would be hasty and inappropriate to conduct an independent review a matter of weeks before decisions have to be made on the delivery of the spending review.

England will not review the cap on variable fees until 2009, with implementation expected thereafter. The situation in England is certainly a case for a spending review, but for the next spending review after this. That is a responsible way forward to ensure that we reach the right decisions for universities with regard to investment and teaching, in order—as I said in my answer to Hugh Henry—to maximise the potential not just of our people, but of our institutions.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for the statement and the advance notice of it.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the opportunity to work with the minority Government to end the graduate endowment, as a move towards reducing student debt. I also welcome the clarity—perhaps for the first time—that not one penny of the graduate endowment has ever contributed to student tuition fees in Scotland. That is helpful confirmation of the reality.

However, students and graduates have not heard clarity from the cabinet secretary about whether the sums raised from the graduate endowment will continue to contribute to the funding for poorer students, not just in the next year but in every year of this parliamentary session and subsequently. Will she confirm whether that is the case? Will she honour another SNP manifesto commitment to remove the burden of debt? I did not hear a clear answer to the question from Mr Henry on whether all previous

payments of the graduate endowment will be written off by the SNP Government. Will she confirm that?

Does the cabinet secretary accept that the statement, in isolation, has no net benefit for current students? The Liberal Democrats will work constructively, but we will not support any moves that are uncoded or which provide no net benefit for existing students.

Finally, I have two specific questions. First, has the cabinet secretary, on behalf of her department, formally made a submission to prioritise higher education funding in the comprehensive spending review? If not, why not? Secondly, what information does the cabinet secretary have that has led this new Government, in the period of one month, to downgrade from its manifesto commitment to

"remove the burden of debt repayments owed by Scottish domiciled and resident graduates"

to today's statement, in which she said that the Government proposed to relieve the burden of debt repayments by Scottish students? Does "relieving the debt burden" mean removing it in its entirety?

The Presiding Officer: That was about six general questions and two specific questions.

Fiona Hyslop: Yes. I ask members to bear with me; I will be pleased to answer questions subsequently if I miss any now and if the member wishes to write to me.

I welcome support from the Liberal Democrats on the proposal. Together, we can abolish the graduate endowment fee, as is our intention.

The member asked an important question about what we can do for students who have already paid the graduate endowment fee—a point that Hugh Henry also raised. We have great sympathy for graduates who have had to pay the graduate endowment fee. We voted against the fee while we were in opposition, but unfortunately the previous Administration introduced it. As a general rule, law is applied retrospectively only in exceptional cases and only with the consent of the law officers. In this case, the operational burden of such a move would be prohibitive. We would like to move forward quickly, but the issue of retrospectivity would pose a problem.

The member asked whether we would continue with the young student bursaries. The answer is yes. The problem is that the young student bursaries cost an estimated £65 million. As the member heard me say, the graduate endowment brings in only £15 million, so it meets only a proportion of the cost of the bursaries. We will continue to pay the bursary directly.

The member spoke about our manifesto commitments. The people of Scotland will be delighted that, over a period of just weeks, the Scottish National Party has said not only that it will do things, but that it will introduce legislation to deliver on its manifesto commitments. That is a bit different from the experience that we have had to date.

On the importance of university funding, I agree with the member that we must protect and promote our universities as world-class institutions. That is what I said when I met university principals at a Scottish funding council meeting only last week. I will pursue that in government. With the support of colleagues, I am sure that we will come to a solution that helps everyone.

The Presiding Officer: We come to open questions, which—I repeat—should be brief and to the point.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): We are still looking for an answer. When will the SNP's proposals to pay back all graduate loans be brought to the chamber? Retrospectivity did not seem to be a problem before. That was the SNP's manifesto pledge, after all, although other parties pointed out that it was unaffordable. On the Labour side, in the coalition, we increased the student bursary significantly year on year. By how much will it increase in this session?

Fiona Hyslop: I cannot give the member an immediate answer on that point, but I will come back to him. I would have thought that the member, as a former leader of the National Union of Students Scotland, would recognise the importance of tackling the fear of debt, particularly for people from more deprived areas, to allow them to participate in education.

The member is concerned about other aspects of our manifesto—we are quite happy to implement our commitments. Labour included a number of commitments, not least on class sizes, in its previous manifesto but, four years later, the Government had not implemented them. Introducing manifesto commitments in three and a half weeks is pretty good going.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the graduate endowment and the prospect of massive student debts are scaring a generation of young Scots and preventing them from entering higher education? Does she agree that that point was proven through the publication yesterday of the age participation index for Scotland for 2005-06, which showed that, since the introduction of the graduate endowment, the percentage of young Scots entering higher education has significantly declined?

Fiona Hyslop: The member addresses the central point. If we want a well-educated graduate economy, we must at least maintain the number of graduates in that economy. Under the previous Administration, that number went down.

Another interesting point about that survey concerns the percentage of students from areas of multiple deprivation who are accessing university. Good work is being done to improve the situation, but that percentage has remained static over the past five years, at only 12 per cent.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): First, I warmly welcome the cabinet secretary to her new post. I wish her well with her challenging and demanding portfolio.

Does the cabinet secretary share my view that equality of opportunity is a key principle in the development of higher education? What action does she propose to redress the unequal geographical distribution of universities, with particular reference to the Highlands and Islands?

Fiona Hyslop: The member raises a serious issue, which I am already addressing with officials—indeed, it is one of the issues that I addressed when I spoke to the university principals last week. When we provide the detail of what we will require going into the comprehensive spending review, the geographical needs of Scotland, the articulation between colleges and universities and provision, particularly in the Highlands and Islands—and, indeed, abroad—are areas that I, as cabinet secretary with responsibility for lifelong learning, will be keen to progress. I would be happy to meet the member if he has any suggestions that he would like the Government to bring forward in that regard.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The equivalent to the graduate endowment for those from other parts of the United Kingdom who currently study in Scotland is the £1,700 annual tuition fee. Before the election, the cabinet secretary gave the commitment to the 28,000 students in that category that they deserved exactly the same deal as Scots and that they would pay nothing under an SNP-led Administration. Will she honour that commitment and, if so, exactly when will it be in operation?

Fiona Hyslop: The member refers to the situation whereby English medical students were being charged more to try to deter them. Of course, we saw from the figures that that policy did not work. We think that there should be equity and fairness. Our issue, as the Government, is that we have to prioritise the most important issue to address, which, at the moment, is abolition of the graduate endowment fee. To those who complain, as the member's colleague Boris Johnson does, about English students having to pay fees when

they come to Scotland, I say that we have to reflect that independence would mean that English students would be treated exactly the same as French and German students. The member therefore makes a very good case as to why Scotland should be independent.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Given the failure of the previous scheme—the graduate endowment—to ensure that people from poorer backgrounds in particular were attracted into higher education, will the cabinet secretary, in pursuing her new policy, learn from the successful examples of countries such as Ireland, where participation in higher education has risen steadily since fees were abolished in 1995?

Fiona Hyslop: The member will acknowledge that the Government will look to Ireland for many examples of good practice. Abolishing fees and increasing levels of participation, which he cited, form one such example. We have to have responsibility in how we increase participation among those from more deprived areas in Scotland, and that will be a priority of this Government.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I, like other members, question whether what the cabinet secretary proposes is the best use of available funds. Will the investment pay for one more teacher or one more student place? How does today's announcement address the biggest anxiety facing higher education in Scotland, which is the potential growing funding gap between universities in Scotland and those in the rest of the UK?

Fiona Hyslop: On the issue of investment in teachers, I have indicated that the legacy left to us by the previous Administration—of probationers who are trained but who have no jobs in our classrooms—is very sad indeed and is causing difficulty and heartache for many individuals. However, I have taken early action to see what we can do about that, and I intend to make an announcement to Parliament.

On higher education funding in Scotland compared with other areas, I think that our universities are well funded. The argument that is being put forward is about what happens when the tuition fee cap is lifted in England. As I said in answer to a previous question, that is not due to be reviewed until 2009 and implementation would follow thereafter. We must ensure that we have a good deal for universities in this comprehensive spending review, but it would be a mistake to indicate that universities are somehow cash strapped, because universities do not want to be given that description at this stage. They want a good, fair deal that takes them forward.

I say to Murdo Fraser that the issue is that we have to make decisions in the weeks ahead in the comprehensive spending review for this session, but we also have to look forward. It is not just about competing with England; universities have to compete abroad, so we have to consider what is happening in Asia, America and other places.

We will not have a successful Scotland if we have a well-resourced university base but students who cannot afford to study there. That is why we have to have a twin-track approach that involves supporting our universities in terms of research and teaching and also ensuring that our students are not encumbered with excess debt that holds back them and their families and puts a millstone of debt around their necks.

Today, we have shown how an inventive, creative Government with a will to deliver on its manifesto can produce a result that not only works for individuals, but makes better use of public finances.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Will the minister give a commitment to Parliament, now or in the future, to introduce a widening-access unit in her department so that a wider range of the potential student population in Scotland can access universities? In that regard, I seek assurances of the continuing support of the minister and her department for the greater opportunity of access and learning with schools—GOALS—project. Finally, can the minister give a commitment in relation to the raising of bursaries by a minimum of 10 per cent?

Fiona Hyslop: On the latter point, I would be reluctant to give any commitments without looking at the details of the books, as I am sure the member will appreciate.

I have not been able to visit the hundreds and thousands of civil servants who are located across Scotland but I know, from some of the papers that I have received, that there is a unit that deals with widening-access priorities. I am not sure of the name of that policy team, but I will find out its name and write to the member so that he knows what it is called.

I am familiar to some extent with the GOALS project, which has been successful in Lanarkshire and gives young people an opportunity to find out where they want to go after school and opportunities while they are in school. One of the debates about widening access concerns whether it is the responsibility of schools or universities. However, it is the responsibility of schools and universities. Much can be done in schools to inspire young people and to widen their aspirations and enable them to understand that they can achieve their goals, whether or not those goals relate to higher education. I will be pleased

to find out more about the GOALS project, should I ever visit Lanarkshire.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement as the first step in implementing our manifesto commitments. I remind her that, in 2003, the Scottish Tories' manifesto contained a commitment to get rid of the graduate endowment. If the Tories flip flop again, they might support the cabinet secretary's legislation when it comes before the Parliament.

Following on from the point that Hugh O'Donnell made, I remind the cabinet secretary that a report that was produced last year by a group led by Jim McGoldrick of the Scottish funding council pointed out that about 14 per cent of people from working-class backgrounds—the same figure as 30 years ago—get to university. Will the cabinet secretary monitor the policy on improving access for people from the lower income groups?

Fiona Hyslop: We will monitor the impact of that policy. We think that fear of debt is one of the biggest barriers that prevents those from the more deprived backgrounds from entering higher education.

Alex Neil mentioned the Conservatives. I was trying to be gentle to Murdo Fraser and not remind him of his party's past policies. He was quite keen to quote the SNP's 2003 manifesto, but I was being rather gallant—perhaps the fact that I was being gallant tells us something about this Parliament's equal opportunities policies—and did not remind him of his party's previous manifesto commitments.

We have heard arguments about responsible government. We know that the Conservatives want to ensure that we have astute public finances. I ask members to reflect on the inefficiencies that arise through the policy of delivering student support via the graduate endowment fee. We might as well cut out the middle man and give people the money directly, which will ensure that students are not burdened by current levels of debt.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I will be gentle to the minister and ask whether she remembers the SNP's slick election slogan, "It's time." In particular, does she remember the leaflet that featured the slogan,

"It's time to dump the debt monster"?

The leaflet also said:

"Student debt. It'll lurk around your home like a bad smell on the landing."

It continued:

"That's why SNP will replace student loans with student grants."

There are no ifs or buts in the leaflet, which also said:

"And we will write off the accumulated debt still owed".

It did not say,

"We will do that if John Swinney agrees to it."

The Presiding Officer: Please be brief.

George Foulkes: When will an announcement be made on those two policies? If not today, will it be next week, next month, next year, sometime or never? Is this the first of many promises that the SNP will renege upon?

Fiona Hyslop: I am concerned that the member might be getting overexcited at the pace of the SNP's announcements in recent weeks. As I said, I am working with my officials and drawing up the plans that are required. We want to implement those.

As the member is new to the Parliament—I welcome him and I think that he will bring flavour and colour to the Parliament—I suggest that he reads the *Official Reports* from the summer of 1999 and the summer of 2003. He should count the number of manifesto commitments that the Labour and Liberal Democrat Scottish Executives actually delivered.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to the number of members who pressed their buttons but whom I was unable to call because of time pressures.

Greener Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on a greener Scotland.

15:22

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Scotland's environment is vital if we are to have a healthy and sustainable existence. Today's debate is therefore about how we can create a greener Scotland and deal with the fact that we are living beyond our environmental means, and about the fact that we need a greener Scotland so that we can become a wealthier, fairer, healthier, safer and stronger Scotland. The debate is about how we in Government can use the levers that are at our disposal—funding, guidance, legislation and example—to support and build on the efforts of the many people in Scotland who care about our environment and who are taking early action to protect it; for example by volunteering, recycling or buying locally.

We want to create a Scotland in which there is economic stability and social justice; a Scotland that has a cohesive co-operative society in which people live fulfilling lives; a Scotland where protecting our environment is seen as being in the national and global interests; a Scotland where people are committed to contributing to securing the environment for the future; and a Scotland where people know how to engage effectively in decision making.

We want to create a Scotland where people enjoy a clean and attractive countryside and healthy and thriving wildlife and habitats; a Scotland where people walk, cycle or use public transport as the norm because they are clean, efficient, safe and accessible forms of transport; a Scotland where people live in well-made, energy-efficient homes, most of whose power comes from renewable sources; and a Scotland where people are mindful of the environmental impacts of the ways in which they spend their money and leisure time.

We want to create a Scotland where we recycle as much of our waste as we can; a Scotland where our businesses and industry are highly resource-efficient and competitive; and a Scotland that has a global reputation for innovation involving new greener technologies, minimisation of waste and harnessing of renewables and clean energy technologies. In that Scotland, our people and businesses will have changed their ways and, as a result, our children and grandchildren will also be able to expect to experience that fulfilling way of life.

That is our vision, but where are we now and how will we get there? It is clear that we cannot afford to be complacent. We know that people around the planet are living beyond their natural resources, which creates climate change and other pressures that affect our people, our economy and our environment. There is a lack of due respect for nature, but it is everyone's responsibility to have such respect. The challenge is to translate people's awareness and concern into changed mindsets and action: we need to encourage individuals, businesses, communities, countries and the international community to recognise their duties and obligations. We all need to change our behaviour.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): The minister has acknowledged international obligations and Scotland's obligations. In my speech, I intend to mention the recent achievement at the G8 summit, at which President Bush agreed for the first time to participate in a new agreement on carbon emissions. Will the minister join me in congratulating the United Kingdom Government on its role in achieving that agreement?

Richard Lochhead: I have many disagreements with the current UK Prime Minister, but we all at least acknowledge his sincerity in trying his best to put climate change on the international agenda. Our job in Scotland is to play our role in that. Since the Scottish Parliament's establishment, Scotland has made good progress, but I call for Scotland to do more from that good base. The Scottish Government will offer leadership and will support others in following it.

We have made it clear that Scotland wants no nuclear power stations—a nuclear-free Scotland is an important part of our vision of Scotland's future. We are also committed to taking action to protect our marine environment. As a first step, we will change the law on ship-to-ship oil transfers near environmentally protected sites. Tomorrow, I will provide a briefing for MSPs to outline our progress on that important issue. All members are invited to that briefing.

An exploration of how we can use our resources to work better for a greener Scotland will be integral to the next Scottish spending review. We will ask the council of economic advisers to consider how we might measure environmental resource depletion and well-being alongside gross domestic product, so that we will know to what extent our economic performance is sustainable.

We intend that the Scottish Government and our partners—including local authorities, public bodies and the national health service—work to become exemplars on environmental issues. I can announce that we will work with those partners to develop and publish a detailed programme to

improve the Scottish public sector's environmental and sustainability performance.

The Government acknowledges the good work that is being done throughout the public sector—reductions in energy and water usage and the design of new buildings to high sustainability standards being examples—but we can build on that. I make it clear that we are not doing enough or going forward fast enough. Across the public sector, we need to cut energy and water use, reduce waste, reduce travel emissions and support biodiversity. We need to support green innovation in matters such as renewables and the hydrogen economy. Alongside that programme, the Government will produce guidance for the public sector on how to build into procurement corporate social responsibility as part of a green procurement action plan, which we will publish later this year. The action plan will guide public bodies on how to assess and improve sustainability in their procurement while delivering value for money.

The Scottish public sector must show leadership through not just steady improvement, but a transformation in performance. Cultural change and behavioural change are also critical—education is the key to achieving them. We will drive forward in our schools, colleges and universities the action plan for the United Nations decade of education for sustainable development. We will build on the it's our future campaign by recruiting ambassadors for change, including leaders from the voluntary sector, business and politics. We will develop and implement a training programme to equip the public sector and its partners with the capacity to deliver greener policies and services. We will learn from best practice in countries such as Denmark, Norway, Finland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The public sector in Scotland has the opportunity to take a lead on environmental issues, so we must seize it.

We have identified a programme for a greener Scotland over the life of this session that will focus on five key themes. The first theme is climate change. Unchecked climate change will have serious direct consequences not just for Scotland's environment, including its biodiversity, but for our economy and our people. For instance, we know to our cost the impact of extreme weather patterns on our communities. That is why we have placed climate change at the heart of our economic decision making and why we will ask Parliament to support a climate change bill that will set ambitious targets to reduce emissions. Next week, we will announce to Parliament our objectives for the bill and we will discuss its detailed content with parliamentary representatives and others in the coming months.

Our second theme is sustainable places. Healthy communities need healthy places—they need clean air, green spaces and they need places where people want to live and work. We will work with partners and communities to build on the many good projects around Scotland, in order to support more sustainable places, especially in our most deprived neighbourhoods.

The third theme is people and nature. The importance of our relationship with the natural world is at the heart of our concern for a greener Scotland, so by spring 2008 we will have developed plans to deliver the next phase of the Scottish biodiversity strategy, and we will look closely at how we should best approach the commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

Environmental volunteering is central to the theme of people and nature. Such volunteering has an important part to play in building connections between people and nature. It offers benefits not only to those who volunteer, but to key priorities such as community participation, social justice, regeneration, health, biodiversity and good citizenship. An implementation group including representatives from public environmental bodies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and business has been considering how the Government can assist the environmental volunteering sector. I am grateful to those representatives for their contributions.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): The cabinet secretary did not mention that it is clear that the voluntary sector must be involved in such a body. Perhaps he will do so. Does he intend to engage with that sector, which has a long track record—the past 20 years, at least—in good environmental work throughout Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: I agree that the voluntary sector is key and I assure the member that that is at the heart of our thinking. I will deal with that matter in more detail.

We accept the implementation group's recommendation that we should increase the quality and quantity of the volunteering experience in order to deliver even greater benefits by assisting volunteer managers to become better equipped to handle the range of responsibilities that are placed on them, by removing logistical barriers that small voluntary organisations face, and by helping to raise general standards. To answer the question that Cathy Peattie asked, we will appoint a voluntary sector based project officer to co-ordinate much of that work.

Earlier today—during a visit to Tay house care unit at Murraypark nursing home at Corstorphine hospital—the Minister for Environment and I witnessed at first hand the benefits of

volunteering. We pay tribute, as all members will want to do, to the work of those volunteers, who are improving access for residents to the unit's garden. The project's environmental, health and social benefits were clear for all to see.

Our fourth theme is consumption and production. We must tackle overconsumption and the throwaway society, which means that we must tackle both what we buy and what we use.

Our fifth theme is people and landscape. Our landscape and our environment have made us what we are as a nation and a people. We cannot have landscapes without people. Communities are rooted in the land on which they live and work. Therefore, everything that we do must focus on sustaining living and vibrant communities. The concept of landscape and people will be central to our approach.

In conclusion, we are depleting our natural resources faster than we can replenish them—we would need three planets to continue to meet our current demands. Our challenge is to move towards one-planet living and a one-planet economy, and to balance what we give and what we take now and for the future. We need to unleash the power of Scotland's people, who rightly demand information and engagement and who wish to make informed choices. The Scottish National Party's five themes will, over the parliamentary session, provide the focus of our efforts to deliver a greener Scotland.

15:33

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): We welcome the opportunity to debate a greener Scotland.

We all know that the threat from climate change is perhaps the greatest challenge that the world faces. Climate change could result in environmental disaster and—as Sir Nicholas Stern has pointed out—it could also result in economic disaster. If it continues unchecked, it is likely that there will be an exponential growth in the stock of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, with an expected warming of 0.2°C per decade.

That is why, when we were in government, we set out in "Changing our Ways: Scotland's Climate Change Programme" how we would respond to the urgent social, economic and environmental challenge of climate change. That programme quantified for the first time Scotland's equitable contribution to the UK climate change commitments—the Scottish share of carbon reductions. That was pioneering work, so I ask the minister to clarify whether that approach to defining a Scottish share of carbon reductions will continue. It is hugely important for Scotland to accept its responsibility in that respect—indeed, I

believe that the Government accepts that responsibility, and I am sure that all parties support that approach.

I welcome recent G8 developments and am encouraged that Richard Lochhead also welcomes them. For the first time, it has been agreed that a new global climate change agreement should succeed the current Kyoto treaty, and that a substantial cut in global emissions should be at the heart of that agreement. The most important change has been in the United States of America's position: for the first time, President Bush has signalled that he wants the US to be part of the new global agreement.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am slightly puzzled. Does Rhona Brankin not recognise that President Bush has continued his opposition to binding cuts in carbon emissions, which was the overriding demand from the G8 this year, as it has been for several years? Is he not pursuing exactly the same strategy of subterfuge and obfuscation that he has pursued for many years? Does the member not accept that the US will come on board only once that man is gone?

Rhona Brankin: I think that it is rather churlish of Patrick Harvie not to acknowledge the significant progress that was made at the G8 summit. I very much welcome the hard work that has been put into that, and the role that the UK Government has played in securing that substantial progress. That is the world context and Scotland must play its part in reducing carbon emissions by working constructively with the UK Government. I am sure that the minister will do that—it will be required, given that the UK Government will introduce a climate change bill. Indeed, there is a draft bill at the moment.

The previous Government had some early success. The data show that greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland fell by about 16 per cent between 1990 and 2004, while our economy grew by 32 per cent. Tackling climate change is compatible with growing the economy, but the challenge for us is to decouple economic growth from energy growth and to decrease energy demand while decarbonising and decentralising energy supply. The previous Executive put in place a set of mechanisms to drive forward the climate change programme. I would be grateful if, in replying to the debate, the minister were to clarify whether the Executive will continue the work of, for example, the climate change analysts group and whether it will support the work of the marine climate change impacts partnership. Will it continue the work that we started with Scottish local authorities? I think—given the minister's comments—the answer will be yes. The local authorities committed themselves to the climate declaration earlier this year. Will the Executive

also continue the work that we set in train with the Scottish business community and support the it's our future campaign?

I welcome the SNP's conversion to Labour's manifesto commitment to incorporate well-being in terms of measuring sustainable economic development. I also welcome the SNP's intention to produce legislation on climate change.

I would like to raise a couple of other important issues with the minister. First, I raise the concerns that many people share over the SNP's plan to merge the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, which has potential ramifications for us all. I ask the minister what plans he has to proceed with the merger of SNH and SEPA. Will the Executive ensure that any review will form part of a strategic analysis of environmental governance and that it will consider enforcement, participation, independence from Government and levels of bureaucracy? Will ministers guarantee that no changes will be made to SEPA and SNH behind closed doors, and to bring the matter first to Parliament? We are very much committed to a greener Scotland, but ministers cannot continue to use debates to avoid accountability. The proposal to merge SNH and SEPA is potentially problematic. We have major concerns about it and need reassurance that Parliament will have an opportunity to debate the matter.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the member give way?

Rhona Brankin: Can I continue, please?

Secondly, I will comment on yesterday's court decision on Kinfauns castle. Access legislation and the right to roam were key to the legislation of Labour in previous Governments. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was the centrepiece of our legislative programme and has put Scotland at the forefront of right-to-roam legislation. The Ann Gloag judgment is, therefore, hugely worrying. We know that some people are seeking to challenge the intent of the access legislation. I call for the Scottish Executive's law officers to emphasise to all sheriffs in Scotland that the Scottish outdoor access code is an integral part of the land reform legislation and must be taken into account in all relevant court cases. I wrote to the minister today to that effect. Parliament clearly intended the code to be used as a reference point in such court actions, so it is extremely disappointing that the sheriff in the Ann Gloag case did not take adequate account of it, especially of the advice in section 3.16 on access to land surrounding large houses. Will the minister agree to ensure that the advice that I seek is forthcoming?

Labour believes passionately in the groundbreaking access legislation. Our message to all the people who worked with us and supported us in Parliament is that Labour members will raise the issue at the very first meeting of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee. They will call for an urgent review of access legislation to examine whether the Ann Gloag judgment fundamentally undermines the intentions of the land reform legislation. If that is found to be the case, we will call on the Executive to propose urgent changes to the legislation during this parliamentary session.

Labour is passionate about a greener environment. We welcome the opportunity to debate the issue but, as I said, ministers cannot go on forever using debates without motions. We look forward to debates on motions on which we can make decisions. It is not good enough to hide behind debates such as this one; I am sure that the minister will reassure me that the Executive will bring motions and, indeed, legislation to Parliament. That would be good. Perhaps he will also tell me when he is going to introduce marine legislation.

However, we welcome the opportunity to debate the green agenda on this occasion and will do so on many future occasions.

15:42

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I begin by declaring an interest as a farmer and as chairman of Ayrshire Farmers Market Ltd. I welcome today's debate because it gives each party the opportunity to tell Government its priorities in the debate about climate change, energy, transport and the use and care of the rural and marine environments. What makes the debate important and gives it a sense of urgency is undoubtedly climate change, which is one of the most compelling reasons for reconsideration of policy and changes in policy direction.

The minister outlined his proposals and the need for a climate change bill. The Scottish Conservatives would welcome such legislation in the Scottish Parliament as well as at Westminster, and although we appreciate that the separation of powers in respect of climate change between Westminster and Holyrood will be complex, given the interplay of reserved and devolved issues, that is not a reason for not making a start. Perhaps the sooner we get started, the better. I welcome the announcement of the minister's intention to make early progress with a bill.

We would also support in principle the creation of a coastal and marine national park, provided that it was appropriately sited and implemented only after proper consultation of local people. Such

a park will only work if local communities want it to succeed and if they can see benefits from it—community buy-in is essential. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could tell us what stage he is at with that proposal.

We would also like to see the extension of a scheme to boost the microrenewables sector and to incentivise householders, communities and small businesses to install energy creating and saving technologies. Will the cabinet secretary tell us what progress the SNP is making on its similar proposals? I welcome his comments about creating public sector environmental efficiencies.

It is essential that we reduce our carbon footprint. If we accept that as a key parameter, our policies will flow naturally from that position. We would have encouraged the development of carbon capture and storage at the Miller oil field off Peterhead, and we deplore the Labour Government's lack of leadership and direction in failing to grasp a unique opportunity to give Scotland and the United Kingdom a world lead in the technology through the proposals of BP and Scottish and Southern Energy. Although I know that Scottish and Southern Energy took the decision to withdraw from the scheme on economic grounds, I urge the First Minister, if it is within his power, and even at this late stage, to do all that he can to resurrect the project.

Sustainable, secure energy supplies that deliver adequate base-load capacity are essential, but they must be delivered economically. Although we support wind farms in principle, we believe that a moratorium should be placed on their development until the renewables obligation certificate scheme has been reviewed and a national location strategy for siting wind farms has been developed.

Wave and tidal energy will be vital and must be developed in the future, as must clean coal technology. We will support anything that the Government does in that regard. Biomass, too, has a future if the economics can be made to stack up. Also, if the Westminster Government were to decide to replace existing nuclear power stations in Scotland on a new-for-old basis, we would not oppose that.

Energy savings and efficiencies in the home must be encouraged because UK electricity demand is rising by 2.1 per cent a year and 25 per cent of our carbon emissions are generated in the home. Every man, woman, boy and girl in Scotland can help to reduce our carbon footprint. We support awareness-raising campaigns to show how individuals can help in their own way. I welcome the minister's comments today on the voluntary sector.

I turn to transport. There is a case for investigating the costs and environmental impacts of high-speed rail links between Glasgow and Edinburgh and between Scotland and London. More frequent modern rail links—such as a 20-minute service between Ayr in my constituency and Glasgow—would encourage people on to trains and reduce traffic congestion in Glasgow, especially on the Kingston bridge. Support for Stagecoach and other bus operators in their drive for better, quicker and cleaner travel by coach is essential if we are to reduce congestion, particularly by encouraging local authorities to find appropriate spaces for park-and-ride facilities in and around town centres.

I turn briefly to our rural and marine environment. Again, our objective in delivering a greener Scotland should be to reduce, where possible, our carbon footprint. Local farm food and local fish and shellfish should be supplied locally, which would reduce food miles. I welcome the NFU Scotland campaign—what's on your plate?—which was launched today and supports the call for people to buy local and eat local. Movement of shellfish around the world and back is not sustainable in the long term, in the same way that importation of beef of doubtful provenance from Brazil makes no sense. The alleged lack of traceability, the alleged illegal use of hormones and the potential for bringing foot and mouth disease into Scotland beg the question why the European Union is not doing more to provide EU and UK farmers in respect of the level playing field that they deserve in supplying food to consumers, who believe that all that they find on supermarket shelves is produced to EU standards of traceability and welfare. I would welcome any comments that the minister feels able to make on that difficult subject. In short, if we are to support our farming industries, we must develop country-of-origin labelling, with the food production standard of each country clearly documented, and with greater transparency about the provenance of the food on our supermarket shelves.

Our fishermen, too, deserve a better deal than they have had in the past. The Scottish Conservatives want more national, regional and local control over fisheries.

Finally, I offer a word on waste. Even greater efforts must be made to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill. I welcome the positive start that the previous Administration made, but it is essential that we work harder and faster to reduce the 1.7 million tons of biodegradable waste that go to landfill every year.

I have outlined some of the Conservative party ideas that we will press to have delivered in this session. We believe that those ideas will create a

cleaner and greener Scotland. I commend them to the minister and Parliament.

15:48

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I welcome Richard Lochhead back from his first fisheries council meeting. In his press release, which I have with me, he said that he found it a valuable experience to “observe” the way the UK government handles the arrangements for those meetings. I had thought that Richard would be here today fresh from his victory in persuading Ben Bradshaw to give up his seat at the top table to him. After all, has Richard not spent the past eight years campaigning for that? I thought that he would have used all his charm and persuasion skills to lead from the front. Did Richard not tell all members of the Scottish Parliament in this and previous sessions that the most important issue for the environment and for Scottish fisheries was that a Scottish minister should lead the UK delegation?

Richard Lochhead: I realise that charm and persuasiveness are a couple of issues that may divide us, but perhaps we can be united on another issue. Does the member support Scotland having the lead role for the UK in the fisheries negotiations, which are vital for Scotland’s coastal communities?

Mike Rumbles: I am asking the questions. Will the minister tell us in his summing-up how he is getting on in respect of what he thinks is the most important issue in those negotiations? I ask for an update on how well he is achieving his objectives. That is what we want to know.

I move to the substantive issues in the debate, as opposed to the inconsequential ones. The Liberal Democrats welcome the Executive’s previously announced pledge to resist new nuclear power. However, it cannot be serious about delivering a greener Scotland while it plans to cut public transport projects such as the Edinburgh trams, the airport rail link, and while it—Richard Lochhead in particular—also opposes land-based renewables.

Richard Lochhead: The member said that I, in particular, am opposed to land-based renewables. Can he name one such project that I have opposed?

Mike Rumbles: I will write to the minister with a list of projects in his Moray constituency in particular. He should await my letter.

The Liberal Democrats are, without doubt, the greenest of the main parties. [*Laughter.*] I urge members not to take my word for it: assessments of the parties’ manifestos by Friends of the Earth and WWF Scotland made that clear. [*Interruption.*]

I see that I have sparked some interest in the debate; it was very quiet until this point; I am enjoying it.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats want 100 per cent of our electricity eventually to be produced by renewable means. Building of state-subsidised nuclear power plants will not only produce vast quantities of waste material, but it will—which is more important—sap investment away from Scotland’s renewable energy industry. That is what we need to focus on. I am glad to see that the minister is backtracking on his previous opposition to land-based renewables.

I am delighted to give way to the Greens.

Patrick Harvie: I am pleased to have given Mike Rumbles such delight. Does he agree that the Friends of the Earth assessment of party manifestos made several stinging criticisms of the Liberal Democrats, not least of their utterly unsustainable record on transport infrastructure, such as approval of the M74 northern extension?

Mike Rumbles: I am so glad that the member mentioned the M74. Let us look at the Greens’ position. It is good to see the Greens taking part in today’s debate—they were missing entirely from the first environment debate. The Greens claim to oppose the M74 extension that Patrick Harvie just mentioned. They claim to oppose the abolition of tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges and the scrapping of the Edinburgh trams. However, they guarantee support for the SNP budget that would pay for all those measures. What for? Is it so that Patrick Harvie can have a chair on a committee?

Patrick Harvie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in order for Mike Rumbles knowingly to mislead Parliament about the nature of the agreement between the Greens and the SNP?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order.

Patrick Harvie: Of course it is a point of order.

Mike Rumbles: Patrick Harvie certainly knows that that was not a point of order. It was a debating point—a rather poor one, at that. It is obvious that the Greens have been neutered and are feeling it. They have lost their ability to speak out with any credibility. [*Interruption.*] I hear an aside from the Conservatives. I notice that John Scott made no mention of nuclear power today.

Members: He did.

Mike Rumbles: Did he? Okay. [*Interruption.*] John Scott claims that nuclear energy is safe. I must not have been concentrating on his speech, for which I apologise to him.

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): Mike Rumbles has no answers and admits that he does not listen. He is doing well.

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister be quiet?

This has been a short debate on green issues and one without a conclusion. What a surprise. Of course, it should be no surprise to anyone that, once again, the minister has brought a debate to Parliament without giving us the opportunity to decide on any issues. It seems to me that the new SNP Administration's strategy is straightforward: it brings as little as possible before Parliament for a vote in case it loses, and it wants to turn Parliament into a docile beast—little more than a debating society. I have news for the minister: that is not the role of Parliament. On the Opposition benches, our role is to hold the Government to account. That is certainly what we intend to do.

Getting by until the summer recess without any votes is a short-term strategy for the SNP and—of course—it will work in the short term. However, we cannot have this dumbing down of Parliament when we return in September. There will have to be real, not subject, debates, with real votes that the SNP Administration had better be prepared for.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to open debate. We will start with five-minute speeches, but members should be well warned that we will probably have to move to four minutes. In fact, those who are winding up might even have to lose a minute each.

15:55

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): As we will have to move in stages towards the greener Scotland that we all seek, this is perhaps the right time to set new targets and to audit the steps taken by the previous Executive. I hope that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, of which I am to be a member, and the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee will carry out some of that work. After all, we have to find out whether previous measures actually worked. I want to establish, in particular, whether involving the community in planning and decision making has been taken far enough.

In order to create a greener Scotland, we will have to set the mood and allow people to become involved. After all, the people who bandy about words about wind farms and many other developments do not acknowledge the need to do the groundwork that will allow people to see the issue in the round. For example, the Department of Trade and Industry in London commissioned a study on co-operative energy that focused on the lessons to be learned from how co-operatives in Denmark and Sweden organise much of the local energy output. If we could send study tours from all over Scotland to Denmark and Sweden to see how they have made a fist of those issues, we

might have a much more positive situation in parts of the country where people have attitudes that are not shared by the vast majority and there has been a lot of nimbyism.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Like your own.

Rob Gibson: Taking the name of other members in vain will not solve the problem. Perhaps the member should join a study tour with people from Perthshire and discuss with them the situation in Denmark and the DTI report, which is an excellent example of how information can be shared throughout the country.

The Golspie Recycling and Environmental Action Network, which was set up in 2001, provides an example of how the voluntary sector can help us to move ahead. The network has a service level agreement with Highland Council under its waste strategy to operate a kerbside collection service for recyclates. However, because of the time that it has taken the council and the civil servants to work out the funding for the area plan, the network has encountered enormous problems and much of its effort has been taken up with trying to fit in with the situation.

That situation is why we need to audit area waste plans and find out whether they work. On too many occasions, bodies such as GREAN have been left with not enough time to collect the tonnage of waste that they have to collect and, because the process is so cumbersome, they have lost out on much of the cash that they could have had.

GREAN is a good example. It offers a service to 3,000 of the 4,000 households in the area—90 per cent of which have taken it up and 75 per cent of which present a kerbside box for collection once every three weeks—and collects a wide range of items, including paper, card, food and drinks cans, plastic bottles, textiles, glass bottles and jars, bicycles and lawnmowers, which it then sells on. The Government must ensure that there are markets for many more items than are currently collected—and, indeed, that are collected only in certain parts of the country. For example, we have to find markets for materials such as plastic, and ensure that mixed plastics are not simply shipped out to China. Such a move would allow us to take forward the process that I have been discussing.

If we are to take advantage of the opportunity that Scotland has to become a green energy capital, we must ensure that social enterprises, local authorities and the many other bodies that are involved view waste as an enterprise issue rather than just an add-on. GREAN creates many jobs for people of all abilities, including people of very low ability, so it is essential that the organisation's work is considered in the round and

not simply from the point of view of meeting the waste directive's needs. If we are to make Scotland greener, we must adopt a holistic approach. GREAN is looking to the new Government to offer a lead. I hope that in his closing speech the minister will respond to my points.

16:00

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I very much welcome today's debate on a greener Scotland, which, as the minister outlined in his opening remarks, covers a great deal of territory. I am sure that other members have faced a similar dilemma in selecting what to speak about.

I have decided to focus on the marine environment, which is a policy area in which the Executive will face some of its most significant green challenges. The health of our seas and what happens in them are fundamental to our planet's existence. The seas are the basis of life on earth. They are home to myriad species, many of which are known and catalogued, but many of which have yet to be discovered and catalogued. Our seas are abundant with life, but throughout history humankind has treated them badly. For generations we dumped all types of waste into our oceans, in the belief that they had infinite capacity to treat the waste effectively and to recover. We now know that that is not the case.

We also know that, not just here but worldwide, we have overfished our seas and put whole species in danger. A diet that includes fish is a vital foundation for human existence, so achieving sustainable fisheries is vital to all our futures. I want my grandchildren—assuming I have some—to be able to enjoy eating cod, haddock, whiting, plaice and all the other species that I have had the pleasure of eating over time. However, it is argued that 16 out of 21 Scottish fish stocks are already beyond sustainable limits. We know, too, that some fishing practices threaten our sea beds and the life that they support.

To most of us, our seas always appear the same, but we know from scientific evidence that much of what is happening below the surface is negative. We are losing biodiversity in our seas, and we must halt that decline if we are to have a healthy future. For most of us, what happens in our seas is largely out of sight and out of mind, but we in the Parliament have a duty to expose what is happening beneath the surface. If we fail to do that, we will fail future generations.

Scotland's seas are truly extraordinary. They support many important species, including 45 per cent of the EU's breeding seabirds. They also support many thousands of jobs, not just in fishing and aquaculture but in wildlife watching, leisure,

energy supply—to an increasing extent—and other marine industries. However, there are growing pressures on our fragile marine environment, and we need new approaches to ensure that the many modern uses of it do not conflict with each other. Sustainable management of our seas and coasts is crucial if we are to continue to reap the rewards of healthy, productive and biologically diverse seas. A marine act for Scotland would be one means of addressing those issues, and I look forward to finding out about the Government's proposals in that regard in due course.

The advisory group on marine and coastal strategy reported just before the elections and set out a way forward on managing Scotland's seas. Its report mirrors many of the points that the Parliament's Environment and Rural Development Committee made in its session 2 report on the marine environment, to which the Parliament will need to return to consider more fully issues such as marine spatial planning and the form of marine management that will leave us best placed to carry it out in future. We must assess the territory over which it would be right for such planning to operate. For example, should it extend out to the 200-mile limit?

The Government and the Parliament must have marine ecosystem objectives. We must examine the role that nationally important marine areas could play in protecting Scottish specialities such as seagrass and our flame shell reefs, and we must consider how we can ensure that our marine nature conservation is based on objective science.

A major challenge for the Executive is to ensure that an ecosystems approach is taken to fisheries management that is based on sound science. It must put independent science at the heart of decision making. Our approach should be guided by the management principles that underpin the common fisheries policy—a precautionary and ecosystems approach. The Scottish National Party wants to withdraw from the common fisheries policy, but I sincerely hope that it does not want to withdraw from those key principles as well.

The Executive's environmental credentials will be judged on whether it can resist its predilection for supporting certain fishing interests above science and taking a precautionary approach. The recent decision to suspend strengthening of the fisheries protection fleet is an ominous sign that the Government does not regard fisheries protection as a priority.

Richard Lochhead *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The member is winding up.

You must wind up now, Mr Peacock.

Peter Peacock: I would have taken the intervention otherwise.

Decisions on how we manage our coasts and seas must be made with the involvement of local communities and others who will be affected by those decisions, which includes environmental groups, wildlife watching tour operators and everybody else who works in, lives near or simply enjoys the marine environment. Involvement should not be restricted to fishermen representing particular interests.

16:06

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): First, I will take a second to acknowledge the work of my predecessor, Kate Maclean. Kate was respected for her work with groups and on committees and will be missed by many in the Parliament. I am sure that all members join me in wishing her well for the future.

I will concentrate on the urban aspects of energy use and production in a greener Scotland. Those of us who live in cities are responsible for the overwhelming majority of energy use, whether in industry, our homes, our institutions or through transport, so we have a responsibility to find ways to reduce our energy use. Many homes in Scotland are still without proper insulation or use inefficient heating systems. I hope that the Government intends to continue to tackle that by extending grant schemes, and I hope that we will redouble our efforts to advertise them, particularly in areas where fuel poverty remains a concern.

As a Parliament that is committed across the parties to a greener Scotland, we need to determine whether there are ways that we can reduce energy consumption. One of the first things that we need to do is examine ourselves and the Parliament. I was surprised, to say the least, by the number of energy-guzzling light bulbs that we have around the Parliament. Replacing such light bulbs with energy-efficient bulbs would be one of the easiest ways to save energy, and with a short payback time, so why has it not been addressed in the Parliament?

People are becoming increasingly aware of the need to be energy efficient but, in some cases, it is increasingly difficult to make choices that best serve the environment. I am talking about domestic appliances that, on the face of it, provide easy access to information on energy ratings by having such information stuck to their side. However, that information may be misleading. The energy rating system has encouraged washing machine manufacturers to move towards cold-fill-only machines to gain the maximum efficiency. Clearly, the most inefficient part of a washing machine is the heating of the water. If they use

only cold water, the overall efficiency rating is driven up, so we have the strange situation whereby a washing machine that is rated AA for energy efficiency—which is high—can be less efficient than an older, inefficient washing machine that has a warm fill. We need to address that issue and ensure that we provide people with the proper information so that they can make real choices.

Although I am convinced that the biggest contribution that urban society can make towards reducing CO₂ emissions is to reduce its energy consumption, I am also convinced that we can make a real contribution to green energy production. Much of the debate about renewable energy centres on harnessing the power of the wind to provide energy for our cities. That debate is often polarised as one in which people are either for or against large-scale wind farms in areas of natural beauty. I challenge that by suggesting that, with the correct support and investment, there are many possibilities for wind generation in our cities.

In Dundee, the Michelin tyre factory has successfully installed the UK's largest corporate wind energy project. The twin 2MW turbines generate around 8 million kilowatt hours of clean, green energy per year, which covers around one third of the plant's energy needs. Generating the energy on site reduces transmission costs and improves the efficiencies of the system so, as well as reducing CO₂ emissions by more than 3,000 tonnes, Michelin has increased the efficiency of the Dundee factory and protected jobs in a highly competitive market.

The project required considerable investment on the part of Michelin. The turbines are close to two housing estates, and are a few hundred yards from my father's house, where I grew up. As with anything new, people were concerned. They said, "They will be noisy, I won't be able to sleep at night and they will interfere with our television reception." Rather than run away in the face of public hostility, Michelin engaged with the residents of the area to win support from the vast majority of people. There will always be some people who will object to any major development, and some people remain unconvinced, although the turbines cannot be heard above the background noise, and any problem with TV reception has been dealt with. Whether the turbines are an eyesore or a thing of beauty is a matter of opinion, but I for one am proud that Michelin has chosen to site them in Dundee and I congratulate the company on its long-sighted view. Large turbines will not be appropriate for every factory location, but Michelin has proved that an urban location is not in itself a reason to discount them.

16:11

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I wish to mark the moment in the history of Scotland when we have seen the passing of Harry Ewing—the noble Lord Ewing of Kirkford. Harry Ewing was a great architect of the Scottish Parliament. He was not a founding father like Donald Dewar and many of the key players who brought this Parliament into being, but he deserves to be acknowledged in this Parliament today by all colleagues. [*Applause.*]

Harry Ewing was born in Cowdenbeath and he was a close family friend. I apologise to members as tomorrow I will be at his funeral, because he was such a close friend, and will be unable to participate in the business of the Parliament.

I congratulate the minister, Richard Lochhead, and his colleagues on their new roles in the Scottish Government. I am sure that they will understand why I do not rejoice in that, but nevertheless I congratulate them. I wish them well and I hope that they make something of the job that they now have to tackle.

Over the years, the Scottish Parliament has debated on a number of occasions how we plan for a green Scotland. It is clear from those debates that politicians seem to be united in protecting our planet. However, it is vital not only that we agree but that we work out how we will proceed. That is where we differ—on our strategies and our plans to achieve that common goal. For some in the chamber, the previous debate on this subject, in September 2006, was the first time that they had brought the issue to the chamber—indeed, only a couple of Conservative members are in the chamber at the moment—but late converts to the green agenda are always welcome. However, adopting a tree as a new logo will not be enough.

Our debate should be about what is done by Government. It should also be about working together with people throughout Scotland. We need not only Government but individuals and industry to contribute to tackling the green agenda. The challenge to industry and commerce is enormous. The prospect of a total change in public opinion on the need to address climate change offers huge opportunities to our young people and to people in academia, research and development, and manufacturing. The practice that follows from the change in public opinion will be key. I say to the minister that fine words are great, but each of us in Scotland must ask ourselves how we have changed what we do in order to make a difference.

The green jobs that could emanate from pursuing the strategy that we have set out offer Scottish business huge opportunities. I see that Tricia Marwick is in the chamber. Jobs are being developed in Methil in Fife Central and in my

constituency of Dunfermline East. Throughout Fife there are tremendous examples of the new type of renewable energy projects that can be developed. I had great joy in showing members of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body the progress that has been made in developing those jobs in Fife. One of the first wind farms in Fife will be in my constituency. That will be good for the economy and good for the environment, by helping to tackle climate change.

I will highlight a wonderful new development that is taking place in Edinburgh, Dundee, Fife and elsewhere. Freecycle is a scheme whereby people offer, ask for and exchange goods on the internet. Money does not change hands but a box of chocolates or a bottle of wine might. That is a tremendous new initiative.

I am sad about one issue in today's debate—the Green party's incredible present position. I will read from a letter that was published in *The Inverness Courier*:

"How incredible, the Green Party getting into bed with the SNP, a wholly owned subsidiary of the North-East fishing industry, who will now be looking forward to plundering our declining fish stocks.

How incredible, Patrick Harvie of the Green Party, perhaps the parliament's best known gay rights campaigner, leaping into bed with the SNP, the party funded by Scotland's best known anti-gay rights campaigner.

How incredible, the Greens, the party opposed to a new Forth Road Bridge, rushing to give support to a party committed to a new Forth Bridge.

How incredible, the Green Party, a party committed to more railways, supporting the SNP, the party committed to cancelling Scotland's most important new railway project."

I hope that Rob Gibson will persuade his colleagues in the new Government that we should continue with the plans for new tramlines in Edinburgh.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that all speeches will now have to be limited to four minutes.

16:16

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): How happy I will be to vote for the SNP's policy to legislate against homophobic hate crime—something that the Labour Party refused to do, despite promising it for so long. And how persistent I will continue to be in challenging and opposing the SNP's unsustainable transport measures, just as I was persistent in challenging the Labour Party's.

A debate on a greener Scotland is bound to cover more than one ministerial portfolio. I was interested in the SNP's first ministerial portfolios. I am pleased that the ministers who are responsible for the environment will work within a single

department that considers the economy, energy, transport and climate change. It is important to link cause and effect.

Rhona Brankin: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I have only four minutes.

Having different ministers pursuing incompatible policy objectives, as happened in the previous session of Parliament, is not acceptable. The Executive in the previous session had a sustainable development policy but it sat well outside its main economic strategy. As Helen Eadie suggested, that Executive had a green jobs strategy, but it was a poor relation of its wider approach to employment.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: In a moment.

That Executive had a number of ministers whose job was to bang the drum on climate change, but at the same time others were pursuing policies that were leading to increased carbon emissions. In short, that Executive had a green thread, but it was little more than decorative embroidery. I say to Mike Rumbles that if anyone has been neutered it is the green-thread apologists who have just lost power in this Parliament. I will happily let him intervene now.

Mike Rumbles: I am grateful to Patrick Harvie for giving way when he has such limited time. So that there is no doubt, will he confirm that the Green party will not support an SNP budget if it aims to hit all the public transport projects that the Greens are so in favour of—the Edinburgh trams and the airport link, for example?

Patrick Harvie: I have made it clear that if the SNP wants a budget to be passed it must produce one that will gain the genuine support of the majority of members in the chamber. For me, such a budget would include those transport projects.

Mike Rumbles knows now, because I have pointed it out to him, that we have made a commitment to work together on agendas that we and the SNP genuinely share. That will be a refreshing change after eight years of “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”

I have some questions for the SNP, and I will echo some points that Peter Peacock raised about fisheries. There are also points to raise about incompatible objectives. The new Government will have to answer those questions. For example, will the minister responsible for tackling climate change—who also has responsibility for transport—continue the practice of subsidising aviation, despite the massive subsidies that aviation already receives? Will the minister

responsible for energy fully support the deployment of renewables, including onshore wind? Will the minister responsible for external affairs ensure that Scotland assists developing countries with adaptations and mitigation measures, in addition to meeting existing international development objectives? Will the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment make it a priority to improve environmental governance, rather than pursue a simplistic deregulation agenda?

There are many other questions, and the Executive will have to answer them before it can be judged. I am open to working with the Executive where common ground exists, but the judgment will come after we have actions, not only words.

Where a genuinely shared agenda can be found, I hope that all parties will be willing to work together. Ultimately, though, a truly green Scotland cannot be based on the idea of everlasting economic growth on a planet of finite resources, because that approach would result in social and environmental harm, caused not only by climate change but by pollution, habitat loss, biodiversity loss, overharvesting and so on. Any steps towards a greener Scotland are to be welcomed. I look forward to pursuing that across party lines.

16:20

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I welcome the fact that the SNP Government has chosen to have a debate without a motion on a greener Scotland because it gives us an opportunity to talk about a range of issues, including some that a few of us may not even have thought about before.

The key point that I will make is that Scotland is different but it is the same. Scotland relies on international agreements and the behaviour of many other countries in Europe and elsewhere in order to ensure that our future is safe and environmentally sound, yet Scotland has the power to contribute towards that international achievement. That is why, when we consider the concept of a Scottish climate change bill, it is so important that we do not make the mistakes that could be made.

Several members have used phrases such as “taking the lead” and Rhona Brankin talked about defining Scotland’s share of what is required to mitigate the effects of climate change. The problem with that is that Scotland is different; there are things that we can do here that cannot be done elsewhere and there are things that we can do more of here than can be done elsewhere. For instance, Scotland is ideally suited to exploiting

renewable energy technology and we must take advantage of such opportunities. However, it is possible for us to make mistakes that could damage Scotland. The idea that Scotland's correct strategy on any area of policy should be to set an example means that we could ultimately find ourselves setting higher standards, setting higher hurdles and requiring achievements in the Scottish economy that undermine our potential to achieve the sustainable growth that is essential for our economic well-being.

It is therefore important for the Conservatives in supporting a Scottish climate change bill that such a bill should complement the action of any Government at Westminster and any agreement that is achieved in Europe or worldwide. It is a great pity that there will be no opportunity in the near future to change the Government at Westminster, as I genuinely believe that David Cameron's proposals in opposition for a climate change bill at Westminster are superior to anything that has been proposed by the current Labour Government. It would then be the role of the Scottish Executive—of whatever colour—to ensure that its policies and bill on climate change dovetailed into the climate change bill at Westminster to ensure that we do better what we can do better and do more of the things that Scotland is best suited to do but that we do not make the mistake of tying one hand of Scotland's economy behind its back simply to set an example.

Scotland's public services must be supported by sound economic growth. I am increasingly of the opinion that green economic growth—sustainable economic growth—is possible. We can have the high-quality public services that a green economy can provide, but we must not make the mistake of expecting Scotland to take the lead at its own expense.

16:24

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Another week, another debate without a motion. Given the difficulties in squaring the various positions within the SNP on issues ranging from public transport to onshore wind energy, it perhaps proved too difficult to come up with a motion that would command the support of a majority in that party.

Let me start in the spirit of consensus, and we will see where we go from there. I welcome the debate and I congratulate Joe FitzPatrick on an excellent maiden speech. I look forward to working with him on the Finance Committee.

As I mentioned two weeks ago in response to the statement by the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism on the UK Government's energy white paper, Liberal Democrats applaud

the Executive's pledge to resist new nuclear power stations in Scotland. Not only would building state-subsidised nuclear power plants produce vast quantities of waste that we do not know how to deal with, it would suck investment away from Scotland's renewable energy industry. That investment is vital if we are to make a breakthrough in marine and other renewables technologies. Building new nuclear power plants would also put at risk our ability properly to fund the development of microrenewables and ambitious energy efficiency initiatives.

Members are no doubt already tiring of hearing me refer to the enormous potential of Orkney, where leading-edge work is taking place not only in wave and tidal energy but in biofuels, biomass and fuel-cell technology. It is in the interests not just of Orkney but of Scotland for that work and similar work across the country to receive the level of support that is possible only if we do not embark on nuclear new build. For example, if we are to achieve a more decentralised system of energy generation—I believe that we can and should do that—that will require significant investment in infrastructure, including interconnectors.

If the Executive is to achieve its goals on energy, it will need to have the means as well as the ends. It is no use for the cabinet secretary to call for Scotland to aspire to be the world leader in renewable energy while his colleagues call for a tax on wind power and a cap on future wind developments and demand that anything that has a visual impact should be deemed not green. The potential impact of such an approach on investor confidence in the renewables sector could be horrific. I yield to no member in my determination to have wave and tidal energy play a major role in Scotland's future energy generation mix, but onshore wind is the proven technology and it will remain a core component of that mix for decades to come. Anything that undermines confidence in that market risks damaging the development of renewables as a whole.

Although I encourage ministers to think out of the box, I put in a plea that that should not lead to the honeycombing or detonation of any so-called sad and lonely islands in my constituency. Swona and Stroma might appear sad and lonely to the casual observer who has been sent up by the SNP to think the unthinkable, but blowing them up would set a dangerous precedent for other less-than-ecstatic islands. I am bound to say that that would also risk making the Pentland Ferries crossing decidedly unpleasant in a westerly gale. Perhaps that is what is meant by the title of the debate.

Significant further investment in microrenewables will be needed. Positive strides have been made in the past few years, but further

incentives and funding are necessary. I urge the minister to commit to measures that will help to drive demand up and costs down.

On the critical issue of energy efficiency, I am encouraged by what ministers have been saying. As with microrenewables, much has been achieved on energy efficiency, but our performance must continue to improve if we are to strike a better balance between supply and demand.

I understand that we might have an opportunity before the recess to consider in more detail the proposals for a climate change bill. Such a commitment, to which the cabinet secretary alluded, will receive willing and constructive support from this party. The need to cut carbon emissions year on year is surely now beyond dispute. The SNP made much of the need for binding annual targets while it was in opposition. The SNP manifesto states:

"In government we will introduce a Climate Change Bill with mandatory carbon reduction targets of 3% per annum".

We questioned that commitment, believing that having four-year targets to allow the Government to be held to account over the parliamentary session, coupled with annual reports to the Parliament, provided the sensible way forward. I would welcome the minister's view on that commitment.

16:29

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I congratulate my good friend Joe FitzPatrick on his first speech. Like him, his speech was gracious and informative. I look forward to hearing many more of them in future.

I add my condolences to the family of Harry Ewing. Like me, Harry Ewing was born in Cowdenbeath, so I always followed his political career with interest. I was delighted that, when he became a lord, he called himself Lord Ewing of Kirkford which, as Helen Eadie will know, is an area of Cowdenbeath. Harry Ewing was a giant of the Labour movement and he will be sadly missed by his many friends in Fife and beyond.

I thank the cabinet secretary for his speech and, in particular, for his reference to ship-to-ship oil transfer off Methil in my constituency. I look forward to his briefing tomorrow and I know of his determination to find a way out of the legislative mess into which we have been led.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and to highlight the progress that is being made in Central Fife, for example by the energy park in Methil and by important businesses such as Tullis Russell, which has been producing paper in Markinch for nearly 200 years, and Diageo. On

Monday, I had the great pleasure of visiting Diageo's Cameronbridge distillery in Windygates to find out more about its £40 million expansion plans. There has been whisky production on the site for almost 200 years. Those companies are two of the oldest in Fife, if not in Scotland, and I am delighted that they are both pushing ahead with plans for biomass energy projects. They are setting a necessary example to some of our newer businesses.

Tullis Russell has proposed a £100 million biomass project, which will reduce Scotland's emissions by 20 per cent and contribute 6 per cent of Scotland's renewable energy targets. When I was in Brussels last week, there was real excitement about the Tullis Russell plans. The project is of precisely the kind that Scotland needs and I know that the SNP ministers have been working hard with the company to make its plans a reality. That is in contrast to the previous Executive, which did nothing to help Tullis Russell to bring its plans to fruition.

Diageo is determined that the Cameronbridge distillery expansion will generate environmental benefits. It expects to be able to reduce carbon dioxide emissions through bioenergy options. I was surprised to learn that the distillery at Cameronbridge uses a quarter of all Scotland's wheat production. Without getting technical about whisky production, I can tell members that, after the process is completed, the spent grain is disposed of. That grain will be used in the new biomass plant. I cannot be alone in hoping that there will be emissions from that plant and that the air around Windygates will be filled with whisky fumes—alas, I fear that that will be a vain hope.

Diageo also wishes to open up a disused railway line from Methil to Cameronbridge to enable rail freight to be carried, which will reduce road transport by up to 2 million heavy goods vehicle miles a year. However, it is proving difficult to get agreement from Network Rail on the matter.

Tullis Russell and Diageo are doing their bit for the environment. In fact, they are leading the way in Scotland and I am delighted to offer them all the support that I can. However, it is vital that individual companies are given the support of Government, Government agencies and agencies under the direction of ministers. We need to ensure that those organisations match the ambition of our companies and make it clear that we will not accept it when obstacles or bureaucracy are used as excuses for inaction.

16:33

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): In the previous session, the Scottish Parliament focused on climate change and the various

committees will be able to return again and again to the climate change programme that is in front of us. A particular challenge for the delivery of our climate change objectives that was set out by Rhona Brankin today—as well as a couple of weeks ago, when we spoke about environmental issues in the chamber—is the role and capacity of SEPA and SNH. Those are vital Government organisations, which raise the standards of our environmental performance and provide best-practice information and scientific information that is key in assessing potential climate change impacts and how we mitigate climate change. Although both organisations often make life very difficult for decision makers, that is part of their job. Given the challenges that we face in tackling climate change, we need their expertise as well as that of NGOs.

I noticed that in its manifesto the SNP set a target of an 80 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2050. That is extremely ambitious, which is why I question the SNP's wisdom in distracting our key organisations from their work on pollution, tackling climate change and promoting biodiversity and green space—in fact, on all the five key areas that the minister set out in his opening remarks. I know that SEPA and SNH staff are already nervous and uncertain about their future. Given the direct questions from Rhona Brankin this week and previously, it would be helpful if the minister could set some of those fears to rest in his closing speech and give a clear commitment on his intentions in relation to SNH and SEPA. There are other ways to make energy efficiency savings than by ripping up both organisations and merging them. That is a challenge for this Executive.

We need to be rigorous and systematic in reducing our carbon emissions. We have to do it in ways that complement our targets on social justice and tackling poverty. That is why I was pleased to hear the range of comments by MSPs around the chamber in support of higher energy efficiency standards in buildings, an expansion of microgeneration and, crucially, an expansion of decentralised energy networks. There are all sorts of exciting community-ownership models that enable local communities to set their own targets, recycle money back into their communities—in a way that targets it at members of the community who most deserve it—and expand support for energy efficiency. The Government needs to take radical action. A lot of progress is being made but, in combination with the move towards zero-carbon housing, there are some exciting challenges.

I say to Rob Gibson that we do not need to go to the continent to see some exciting projects. We can see them in Edinburgh Central, Glasgow, Berwickshire and elsewhere in Scotland.

Rob Gibson: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: I am in my last minute.

Let us praise the work that is being done locally. Yesterday, I visited some excellent projects in my constituency. I saw the new allotments that are being created in Edinburgh and some excellent mental health community projects that involve people in the development of their area. I draw members' attention to the Edinburgh community back green initiative, which has revamped communal tenement back greens that had been abandoned and had become depressing eyesores. The initiative involves on-site community composting—which is not a straightforward thing to organise, given SEPA's rules—planting fruit trees, recovering garden spaces for residents and cutting through the awkward management and ownership issues that surround tenemental properties. The next phase will involve moving to community microgeneration. There are some exciting opportunities in that regard. The initiative, which is a model from elsewhere in Scotland, is working in seven sites in my constituency and I urge the minister to consider such bottom-up projects and think about how they can be incorporated into the work of the Executive.

16:37

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I welcome Richard Lochhead's speech and take particular interest in the green procurement action plan that he mentioned, especially given my interest in local food procurement, which is being debated next week. I recognise that the minister acknowledges the fact that the depletion of natural resources is unsustainable. However, his desire for Scotland to be the world leader on renewable energy is, perhaps, a little bit rich given that he has fought against many wind farms.

Tricia Marwick mentioned Diageo leading the way. I hope that it does so by pledging, at last, always to use Scottish malting barley in its Scottish whisky.

In coalition, the Liberal Democrats made huge strides on renewable energy. We set the target of producing 40 per cent of our electricity from renewables by 2020 and the target of 18 per cent was met three years early. We invested around £100 million in renewables and energy efficiency support over the past three years, which puts us ahead of any other part of Britain and Ireland. Further, we provided support for more than 600 small renewable energy projects in Scotland. Liberal Democrats have delivered record recycling rates, which trebled under our governance, record renewable energy levels and public transport initiatives. My party has a proven track record in

delivering green policies. We know what we are talking about and we know what is achievable.

Today, many of us have talked about renewable energy potential, which is hugely important. However, as a priority, we must address energy demand. In the UK, the demand for electricity for power is only 15 per cent, which is significant, but the demand for electricity for heat is 52 per cent, which is by far the biggest demand on our limited energy market. Insulation and energy efficiencies can go a long way towards addressing that situation. We believe that better energy efficiencies can be achieved through having tighter building regulations for new buildings and by providing serious encouragement for existing buildings to upgrade. By combining that with microgeneration in all new homes in Scotland, we can look forward to a greener, more environmentally sustainable future.

We therefore believe that the Scottish Executive must introduce a new energy efficiency and microgeneration strategy with targets. Combined with the greater use of renewables from not just one source but many, that will go a long way to address the energy gap. Some people try to balance a greener Scotland with economic growth as though those were different matters, but they are not. The key wording is "sustainable development". Without that, economic decline will happen fairly soon.

I said that heating places the main demand on our limited energy supply, but the second biggest demand comes from transport. That leads me to ask how the SNP Administration can shelve vital public transport plans—the tram project in our capital, the main airport rail link and the Borders railway—and simultaneously tackle climate change in a serious way. Although the Liberal Democrats welcome the new Executive's pledge to resist new nuclear power stations and its commitment to publish a bill on climate change, I share Mike Rumbles's concern that the Administration cannot deliver a greener Scotland while it cuts public transport plans and opposes renewables. We need joined-up thinking and decisions from the few cabinet secretaries whom we have. Perhaps that is something for the minister for everything to do.

16:41

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): We live at a crucial time for our environment. In a rapidly developing world, the cumulative impact of mankind is having a significant effect on finite resources, on the landscape around us and, above all, on our climate. It is incumbent on us to use fewer of the earth's resources and to take more responsibility for the environmental impact of our actions so that future generations can meet

their needs without the burden of undue environmental costs.

We can all do our own little bit as individuals, but the Government can help by adopting policies that make it easier for us to make that effort. I commend the SNP for making a greener Scotland a strategic aim of its Government and for focusing today on the local environment by making a significant commitment to help the many volunteers throughout the country who give freely of their time to keep their communities clean and attractive.

I say to Mrs Eadie that, like all parties, we too are committed to tackling climate change. We will not agree with the SNP on every policy or issue, but we will co-operate where possible in facing up to this major challenge to our future. Accordingly, we look forward to the cabinet secretary's statement on climate change next week. We will listen carefully to what he says.

We want more to be done to promote energy efficiency in Scotland, because that is undoubtedly the cheapest, cleanest and safest way to achieve our climate change commitments. People must be educated about energy efficiency and given practical help to encourage them to achieve energy savings, especially at home, where 25 per cent of our carbon emissions are generated. We therefore commend Scottish Gas for its efforts and particularly for making available an online energy efficiency home audit through which people can get advice on how to reduce their energy use.

In our manifesto we proposed a £12 million eco-bonus scheme. Such a scheme would boost the micrerenewables sector and give households, communities and small businesses an incentive to install modern, energy-creating and energy-saving technologies. I am pleased that the Minister for Environment told me last week that he is willing to consider such a scheme.

As the cabinet secretary said, our children need to learn about energy saving and sustainability. I note with pleasure the installation of wind turbines and solar panels on two of my local schools. I also congratulate the pupils of Milltimber primary school in Aberdeen on receiving a regional award for their work on a greenhouse that is made from recycled bottles. I wish them well for the national finals in London next week. A global spin-off from the pupils' work is their decision to help the environment by reinvesting some of their £1,000 prize money in sponsoring a solar power project in Mexico.

We are concerned that the previous Executive's policy allowed wind power to get ahead in the market to the detriment of other technologies, which resulted throughout the country in mounting local opposition to large developments. As John

Scott said, we seek new planning guidance on the siting of onshore wind farms.

I do not have enough time to elaborate on other issues, but John Scott, who has been a leading champion of local food promotion for several years, told members how important that is to us. We need to safeguard our farmers and smaller local shopkeepers in the interests of our economy, our health and our environment.

There are many facets to a greener Scotland, such as waste reduction and management and carbon capture, on which I have not touched, but I look forward to addressing all those issues as we work together to create what I hope will be a sustainable, healthy and attractive future for our country.

16:45

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I have listened with interest to the debate. Given Patrick Harvie's welcome for John Swinney's gargantuan department, it is perhaps a pity that John Swinney, Stewart Stevenson and Jim Mather could not attend the debate, but I am sure that each of them will read what has been said.

From what has been said and what is in Friends of the Earth's commentary on the party manifestos, there appears to be broad consensus in the Parliament on the scale of the challenge that we face in dealing with climate change. Clear targets on emissions are essential and environmental considerations must be given a much higher profile in policy making.

These things are not new. We should acknowledge the significant progress that was made under the previous Administration. Jack McConnell's first major speech as First Minister was on sustainable development. Rhona Brankin and other Labour members ran through some of the coalition Government's achievements, as did some Liberal Democrat members. The most significant of those achievements was the 12 per cent reduction in Scottish greenhouse gas emissions between 2001 and 2004. Progress to reduce those emissions has gathered pace in subsequent years because of actions that were taken. I sincerely hope that the new Administration will continue to pursue some of those actions.

Under the Labour-led coalition, resources were deployed to progress environmental objectives. Measures included the strategic waste fund to accelerate recycling and the priority transport projects, eight out of 10 of which were targeted at improving public transport. Labour introduced legislation on land reform and planning, which enhanced individuals' rights and provided additional environmental safeguards.

It is worth repeating one key point that Jack McConnell made in his speech on environmental justice:

"Bringing about real change and truly developing Scotland in a more sustainable way means building sustainable development in everything that we do."

We must all try to live up to that.

If the new Administration's commitment to take forward the agenda were judged merely on the basis of window dressing—putting the word "sustainable" in John Swinney's job title and giving Stewart Stevenson responsibility for climate change—we might not have too many disagreements with the Administration. However, more than that is required.

We support some SNP proposals, including its intention to introduce a climate change bill, to which we made a commitment in our manifesto. However, the test that we will apply to the new Administration is not whether its rhetoric is sufficiently ambitious. We have no interest in outbidding other parties on percentage targets for 30 or 35 years from now. The SNP will be judged on what it does now and in the immediate future. We will assess resource allocations and policy priorities on whether they contribute to or detract from sustainability. We will watch carefully the balance that is struck between spending on roads and spending on public transport, and between meeting renewable targets and protecting the countryside's uniqueness, and we will consider whether the SNP's energy-saving proposals are realistic and deliverable.

Under Labour, 70 per cent of transport expenditure was directed to public transport, and relieving road congestion was the top priority. In its first few weeks, the Administration has sought to strike out two key public transport projects. It has said that upgrading the A9 is a priority but it has not provided any proper costings or evaluation or produced a prioritisation exercise. The removal of tolls on the Forth road bridge was announced before studies had been received on the congestion impact of such a policy and without due consideration of funding options for a replacement crossing.

Patrick Harvie's impassioned defence of his selling out of his principles was perhaps conditioned by his embarrassment at some of the new Administration's decisions.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Des McNulty: No. I do not think that we need to hear another set of excuses.

The Administration's choices will not be compensated for by the introduction of a climate change bill; it is arguable that they make a mockery of it. The first task in addressing climate

change is the reduction of carbon emissions, directly and indirectly. Promoting public transport is one way to achieve such a reduction; another way is promoting renewable energy as an alternative to burning fossil fuels or relying on increasingly expensive imported gas.

In government, Labour was well on its way to reaching its target of generating 18 per cent of Scotland's electricity from renewable sources by 2010, rising to 50 per cent by 2020. The progress that was made was ahead of that which was made elsewhere in the UK, and it compared favourably with progress elsewhere in Europe. We must be realistic and pragmatic, but that progress must continue. The largest commercial wave farm in the world, which the previous Administration supported, has a generating capacity of 3MW. If we take only capacity into account, more than 300 similar units would be required to make up for the decommissioning of Hunterston. If the intermittency factor—which affects wave generation and, in particular, wind generation—is included in that calculation, the multiplier will increase: it will double or treble. However, SNP members, including Rob Gibson, have been prominent in opposing local wind farm proposals. Indeed, their arguments have been ambiguous, and talking about a community veto while arguing that the SNP will increase the renewables target does not represent a sustainable balance. There must be a realistic programme. Ministers should think about setting energy targets in the local strategic plans that are required for local authority areas. Those targets could sit alongside new housing development or transport proposals and could provide a process for managing new developments throughout Scotland.

Some interesting speeches have been made. John Scott made excellent points about food—I refer in particular to his advocacy of the NFU Scotland's local food initiative—and Peter Peacock made excellent points about the need for an ecosystems approach to managing the marine environment. I recommend that Mr Lochhead takes a marine ecologist rather than fishermen to the next meeting of the European Union fisheries council. Joe FitzPatrick paid a generous and welcome tribute to Kate Maclean. Like him, I wish her well.

This debate is the first in a long series of debates on the future of our country and how we can make it greener. We must progress in a spirit of partnership, but we will be watching the SNP.

16:52

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): I am pleased to have the opportunity to close this debate on a greener Scotland. We deliberately chose the subject debate approach so

that a wide range of views could be heard. I remind Liam McArthur—he may not be aware of this—that subject debates were vigorously pushed by another Liberal Democrat, Donald Gorrie, who wanted members to have a chance to think about issues and debate them properly.

Mike Rumbles: Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, thank you. I will not.

It seems strange that the Liberal Democrats now oppose subject debates.

I pay tribute to Joe FitzPatrick, who made his maiden speech in the debate. Those of us who know him know that he is thoughtful, principled and rooted in his community. That was reflected in his speech, on which I congratulate him.

I was heartened by the speech that was made by someone to whom I referred two weeks ago as "Disgusted of Midlothian". She is a mite less disgusted these days, but there was a curious conundrum in her speech and in Des McNulty's closing speech. If it is true that the Labour and Liberal Executive did everything so well and successfully for eight years, how come the people of Scotland did not want it to continue to do what it was doing? What a strange political thought. Perhaps the Labour Party and the Liberals should ponder that at some length and in silence.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: Not just now, thank you. I have only seven minutes.

I was slightly concerned by Ms Brankin's comment that her party would instruct Labour members on the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee. That does not seem to me to recognise the primacy of parliamentary committees. I hope that she will rethink that approach.

Before I come to more pleasant issues, I will address what Mr Rumbles said. It is interesting that the school of leadership to which he belongs in dealing with his remit is the same Liberal Democrat school of leadership as that to which Nicol Stephen and Ming Campbell belong—that is, there is no leadership at all. I was sorry to hear his speech; I hope that his speeches improve.

There have been positive contributions from across the chamber. Peter Peacock, to whose thoughtful points on the marine environment we must listen—even if we do not agree with all of them—certainly made a positive contribution.

Tricia Marwick offered her thoughts on the ways in which large businesses can be involved in protecting the environment. I assure her that we are working hard to ensure that Tullis Russell

succeeds in its aims. John Scott and Nanette Milne gave us their thoughts on the primacy of producers and the need for local food and local consumption to be much more closely associated. We also heard Patrick Harvie's thoughts on a shared green agenda for the environment. I pay tribute to him for his speech, in which he identified something that became a strong theme: the need for us to work together rather than to indulge in—I hear it in voices off—the old politics that has failed the people of Scotland.

I move on—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Michael Russell: In the debate, the best exemplar of the new politics was the speech from Sarah Boyack, who brought some real substance to the debate. I assure her of two things. First, better environmental governance will not distract attention from real priorities; it is intended to focus attention on real priorities. I assure her that the days of such things being done behind closed doors are gone: we will bring the matter to the chamber to be discussed fully. Secondly, I offer encouragement on the ideas that she raised regarding community microgeneration. Last week an oral question was asked in the chamber on individual microgeneration. As Rob Gibson rightly pointed out, there is a need for every individual to be involved in the issues that we have debated this afternoon. This is not about politicians; this is about people, and we will do everything that we can to encourage such schemes.

The really important audience for this debate was not in here—it was out there. We know how strongly young people in Scotland feel about environmental issues. More than 81 per cent of those who responded to a recent Young Scot poll said that they were worried about global warming, and the Scottish Youth Parliament's recent manifesto, "our scotland", includes a series of demands on green issues. Young people are passionate about green issues. We need not just to help them to translate that passion into action, but to learn from them. We must listen to what they say on green issues, encourage their involvement and give them and everybody else opportunities to develop skills and confidence so that they can make a difference not just to Scotland, but to the planet.

We will build on existing initiatives, including the 2,531 eco-schools in Scotland. The Liberal Democrat manifesto contained the ambition that every school should be an eco-school—we will endeavour to make it so. Eco-schools are giving young people in Scotland the opportunity to learn about sustainable development, to put it into practice in their local environment and to share their ideas and experiences. Young people—

indeed, all people—are at the heart of our approach. As Richard Lochhead said in his opening speech, much good work is already being done across Scotland, and I agree with Rhona Brankin and Des McNulty that some of it came from the previous Executive.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: No. The minister is in his last minute, I am afraid.

Michael Russell: I would have given way otherwise.

Sustainable development is a global challenge. We in this chamber have no monopoly on the answers. This Government wants Scotland to play its full part, setting an example and learning from and sharing good practice and experience internationally to create the frameworks that will help us to deliver. Richard Lochhead has already blazed a trail in Europe, and I look forward to attending my first environment council meeting in Luxembourg on 28 June. I shall endeavour to get from Scotland's first world heritage site, St Kilda, to Luxembourg as quickly as I can—by public transport, of course.

This Government's vision for Scotland is based on the values of success, social and physical well-being and interconnectedness. However, a greener Scotland is not an end in itself; it is an integral part—along with our four other strategic objectives—of how this Government will make life better for all the people of Scotland. A greener Scotland must be achieved not just by this small team of ministers, the larger ministerial team and the entire chamber, but by everyone right across Scotland. It is a job for all of us. We are all in this together.

Rhona Brankin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in order for a minister such as Mike Russell to indulge in personal abuse as a substitute for answering questions? Are you aware that he has yet to respond to one question in his performance in this Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: I am not sure that I was here for the part of the debate to which you refer, Ms Brankin, but that is a matter entirely for the minister.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-165, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 20 June 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Executive Debate: Government's Objective for a Smarter Scotland

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 June 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
Education and Lifelong Learning;
Europe, External Affairs and Culture

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: Climate Change

followed by Executive Debate: Housing

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 27 June 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Executive Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 28 June 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
Rural Affairs and the Environment;

Health and Wellbeing

2.55 pm

Executive Business

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by
Crawford.]

Members'

Business.—[Bruce

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of one Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-166, on committee membership.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the membership of committees of the Parliament as follows:

Audit Committee

Membership: Willie Coffey, Murdo Fraser, Charlie Gordon, Jim Hume, Stuart McMillan, Mary Mulligan, Dr Richard Simpson, Andrew Welsh

Equal Opportunities Committee

Membership: Helen Eadie, Marlyn Glen, Bill Kidd, Margaret Mitchell, Hugh O'Donnell, Elaine Smith, Sandra White, Bill Wilson

European and External Relations Committee

Membership: Jackie Baillie, Ted Brocklebank, Alasdair Morgan, Alex Neil, Irene Oldfather, John Park, Gil Paterson, Iain Smith

Finance Committee

Membership: Derek Brownlee, Joe FitzPatrick, James Kelly, Liam McArthur, Tom McCabe, Elaine Murray, Alex Neil, Andrew Welsh

Public Petitions Committee

Membership: Bashir Ahmad, Claire Baker, Angela Constance, Rhoda Grant, Robin Harper, Mr Frank McAveety, Tricia Marwick, Nanette Milne, John Farquhar Munro

Procedures Committee

Membership: Keith Brown, Cathie Craigie, Marlyn Glen, Jamie McGrigor, Christina McKelvie, Hugh O'Donnell, Dave Thompson

Standards and Public Appointments Committee

Membership: Keith Brown, Cathie Craigie, Marlyn Glen, Jamie McGrigor, Christina McKelvie, Hugh O'Donnell, Dave Thompson

Subordinate Legislation Committee

Membership: Jackson Carlaw, Helen Eadie, George Foulkes, Ian McKee, Gil Paterson, Elaine Smith, Mr Jamie Stone

Justice Committee

Membership: Bill Aitken, Bill Butler, Cathie Craigie, Nigel Don, Stuart McMillan, Paul Martin, Margaret Smith, John Wilson

Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee

Membership: Brian Adam, Gavin Brown, Iain Gray, Christopher Harvie, Marilyn Livingstone, Tavish Scott, Dave Thompson, David Whitton

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Membership: Rob Gibson, Patrick Harvie, Alex Johnstone,

Alison McInnes, Des McNulty, Cathy Peattie, David Stewart, Stefan Tymkewycz

Health and Sport Committee

Membership: Malcolm Chisholm, Ross Finnie, Karen Gillon, Christine Grahame, Lewis Macdonald, Ian McKee, Michael Matheson, Mary Scanlon

Local Government and Communities Committee

Membership: Alasdair Allan, Bob Doris, Kenneth Gibson, Johann Lamont, David McLetchie, Michael McMahon, Duncan McNeil, Jim Tolson

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Membership: Aileen Campbell, Rob Gibson, Ken Macintosh, Christina McKelvie, Pauline McNeill, Jeremy Purvis, Elizabeth Smith, Karen Whitefield

Rural Affairs and Environment Committee

Membership: Richard Baker, Sarah Boyack, Roseanna Cunningham, Jamie Hepburn, Peter Peacock, Mike Rumbles, John Scott, Bill Wilson.—[Bruce Crawford.]

17:01

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I shall speak against the motion for several reasons.

I know that the Parliament is in a difficult position and that we have to work out committee convenerships using the d'Hondt principles, but I regret and lament—in fact, my views are even stronger—that we have put the Conservatives in charge of the Equal Opportunities Committee: it is like putting Attila the Hun in charge of care in the community. I will not, therefore, support the motion.

Further, during previous parliamentary sessions, I have served on as many as three committees at once. It is not that I am shy of working hard. I was a committed and hard-working member of three committees during the previous session, when at least one member was not a member of any committee, but if the motion is agreed to this evening I will resign immediately from the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Subordinate Legislation Committee.

There is an issue here for the Procedures Committee, which must address whether the Parliamentary Bureau should propose a member's name if that member has not agreed to their nomination. I urge the Procedures Committee to consider that.

I will not support the motion and serve notice that, as a protest, I will write to you, Presiding Officer, and resign immediately from both of the committees for which I have been nominated. I do not intend to disrespect the individual members of the Conservative party, because I have worked with several colleagues in that party for some time and I greatly respect and admire them, but I will not stand by and watch the Tories being put in charge of equal opportunities in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: You must wind up now Mrs Eadie.

Helen Eadie: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. As I am the only front-bench Conservative spokesman present—others are coming—I would like to say that it is absolutely outrageous that Mrs Eadie should make such suggestions to slur the Conservative party, and I invite her to substantiate them.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. Mrs Eadie made it quite plain that she was not making a personal attack on the Conservative party. Minister, would you like to respond?

17:04

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): I was unaware that Helen Eadie had this angst. I assure her that when it came to the d'Hondt process, the Conservatives were delighted to be given the convenership of the Equal Opportunities Committee. There were queues of members who wanted to serve on the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Subordinate Legislation Committee. They are important committees, and I know that that view is shared throughout the chamber.

The committees must get on with the important business that they were designed to undertake. I suggest that we press ahead with some urgency and pass the business motion. It will be up to the Labour Party to sort out the problems it has with this particular member.

Decision Time

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There is just one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S3M-166, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on committee membership, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 112, Against 1, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the membership of committees of the Parliament as follows:

Audit Committee

Membership: Willie Coffey, Murdo Fraser, Charlie Gordon, Jim Hume, Stuart McMillan, Mary Mulligan, Dr Richard Simpson, Andrew Welsh

Equal Opportunities Committee

Membership: Helen Eadie, Marlyn Glen, Bill Kidd, Margaret Mitchell, Hugh O'Donnell, Elaine Smith, Sandra White, Bill Wilson

European and External Relations Committee

Membership: Jackie Baillie, Ted Brocklebank, Alasdair Morgan, Alex Neil, Irene Oldfather, John Park, Gil Paterson, Iain Smith

Finance Committee

Membership: Derek Brownlee, Joe FitzPatrick, James Kelly, Liam McArthur, Tom McCabe, Elaine Murray, Alex Neil, Andrew Welsh

Public Petitions Committee

Membership: Bashir Ahmad, Claire Baker, Angela Constance, Rhoda Grant, Robin Harper, Mr Frank McAveety, Tricia Marwick, Nanette Milne, John Farquhar Munro

Procedures Committee

Membership: Keith Brown, Cathie Craigie, Marlyn Glen, Jamie McGrigor, Christina McKelvie, Hugh O'Donnell, Dave Thompson

Standards and Public Appointments Committee

Membership: Keith Brown, Cathie Craigie, Marlyn Glen, Jamie McGrigor, Christina McKelvie, Hugh O'Donnell, Dave Thompson

Subordinate Legislation Committee

Membership: Jackson Carlaw, Helen Eadie, George Foulkes, Ian McKee, Gil Paterson, Elaine Smith, Mr Jamie Stone

Justice Committee

Membership: Bill Aitken, Bill Butler, Cathie Craigie, Nigel Don, Stuart McMillan, Paul Martin, Margaret Smith, John Wilson

Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee

Membership: Brian Adam, Gavin Brown, Iain Gray, Christopher Harvie, Marilyn Livingstone, Tavish Scott, Dave Thompson, David Whitton

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Membership: Rob Gibson, Patrick Harvie, Alex Johnstone, Alison McInnes, Des McNulty, Cathy Peattie, David Stewart, Stefan Tymkewycz

Health and Sport Committee

Membership: Malcolm Chisholm, Ross Finnie, Karen Gillon, Christine Grahame, Lewis Macdonald, Ian McKee, Michael Matheson, Mary Scanlon

Local Government and Communities Committee

Membership: Alasdair Allan, Bob Doris, Kenneth Gibson, Johann Lamont, David McLetchie, Michael McMahon, Duncan McNeil, Jim Tolson

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Membership: Aileen Campbell, Rob Gibson, Ken Macintosh, Christina McKelvie, Pauline McNeill, Jeremy Purvis, Elizabeth Smith, Karen Whitefield

Rural Affairs and Environment Committee

Membership: Richard Baker, Sarah Boyack, Roseanna Cunningham, Jamie Hepburn, Peter Peacock, Mike Rumbles, John Scott, Bill Wilson.

Global Campaign for Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-40, in the name of Karen Whitefield, on education. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the Global Campaign for Education event at Moray House on 30 May 2007 with young people from Clarkston, Lawmuir, Echline and Dunnikier primary schools and Kirkcaldy High School, from Malawi who are visiting Kirkcaldy High as part of a school exchange programme and from Save the Children's YES project in Glasgow and young gypsy/travellers attending to highlight the campaign; acknowledges that education is a basic human right; notes that 80 million children around the world, most of whom are girls, are still being denied the opportunity of going to school and almost one billion adults are illiterate; supports the goal to ensure free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all by 2015; considers that this important agenda should continue to be driven forward in order to deliver for children around the world, and supports the efforts of the members of the Global Campaign for Education, including Save the Children and Oxfam in Scotland, in raising awareness of the campaign.

17:07

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I thank all the MSPs who signed my motion, which is on a topic that is important not just for Scotland but for the world. It seeks to raise awareness of the vital work of the global campaign for education and to welcome recent events that it has held, with the aim of building links between young people across the world.

I start by paying tribute to Oxfam and Save the Children—two organisations that have played a key role in highlighting and campaigning on the issue. Although the campaign has always been of interest to me, I became more involved in it when I was approached by pupils from Clarkston primary school in my constituency. Last year, they were selected by Save the Children and Oxfam to make a presentation to MSPs here in the Scottish Parliament. I was impressed when I listened to those pupils, who told me about their work to develop links with pupils in Africa. They told me about their campaign for more teachers across the world and about the shocking fact that millions of children have no teacher, no school and no education. Thankfully, here in Scotland, many of our children are able to take those things for granted.

I was impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the pupils from Clarkston primary, who also gave me a petition addressed to the Prime Minister. In February, I had the great pleasure of accompanying them to Downing

Street, personally to deliver the petition, which demands education for all. The children were made very welcome, and I am proud that they came away excited by the fact that they were listened to and that they have a Prime Minister and a Government that have demonstrated their support for the global campaign against poverty. It is essential that the campaign to ensure universal education across the world by 2015 is driven forward.

The motion draws members' attention to an exciting and innovative event that took place last month at the Moray House school of education. It brought together young people from Clarkston primary in my constituency, pupils from Lawmuir, Echline and Dunnikier primary schools, pupils from Kirkcaldy high school and young people from Malawi who were visiting on an exchange programme. We also heard from young Gypsy Travellers, who told us about their experiences of education. They gave us an interesting presentation on the similarities between their experiences and those of children in Africa whose families also travel around.

There were also young people from Save the Children's young east end speaking project in Glasgow. Frank McAveety has had to return to his constituency tonight, but he asked me to tell members that he is sorry not to be here to support the debate and that he has been very impressed by the work of the YES project.

The event at Moray House was a huge success. I am sure that all members, from various political parties, who participated agree that such events are vital in bringing our young people together. They help to build bridges between our communities and our countries, so that we can work together to break down barriers and towards common goals and aspirations.

I would like to pay tribute to the work of the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, who ensured that his Government worked with Malawi. Campaigning on global poverty has been a priority for many members across all parties, and for many organisations in Scotland. Labour in government has done much to raise awareness of the issues and to contribute resources to tackle the problems. I hope that the new Administration will continue with the commitments that we have made, particularly those to Malawi.

Bringing the campaign for global education into our schools and communities is important. We aim to get every parent, student and school in Britain and in the developed world to become campaigners, united in a common drive to deliver a better future for the world's children. We aim also to promote links between our schools and those in developing countries in a global call to all

Governments to make education their number 1 priority.

Education is a basic human right. It is every child's birthright: it is a right that should not depend on who the child is or where they live, yet 80 million children have no schooling and almost 1 billion adults are unable to read and write.

The majority of those who are missing out are girls. One in five girls of primary school age is not in school. When girls miss out, not only are they denied the chance to learn to read and write, to earn a living and to participate in democracy, but their lives and the lives of their children are put at risk.

I will not bore members with statistics, but if a woman completes school, her children are 50 per cent more likely to survive past the age of five. Furthermore, if every child went to school, 7 million cases of HIV/AIDS could be prevented in the next decade alone.

The year 2007 is crucial as it is the midpoint towards realising the goals of education for all. Time is starting to run out, and we need urgent action to meet the deadlines and make our goals a reality. Millions of children around the world have known AIDS, poverty, war, hard labour and hunger, but they have never known a teacher or had the pleasure of reading a book.

The goal of ensuring free and comprehensive primary education for all by 2015 is vital to ending world poverty. Education is the world's best weapon against illness, disease, poverty and conflict. If we are to meet the 2015 targets, the next few years will be vital.

Our responsibility and obligation in the Scottish Parliament is to do whatever we can to ensure that the education for all targets are met and that the G8 delivers on its commitments; to offer our full support to the global campaign for education's work and to events such as the one held last year in the Parliament and this year in Moray House; and to do all we can to raise public awareness, to keep our young people and communities involved and to ensure that the issues that I have highlighted remain centre stage. By doing so, we will help to secure a better, brighter future for children across the world and to make our aspirations a reality.

17:15

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Karen Whitefield on securing a very important debate. I feel that I can speak about the value of education because, 50 years ago—there it is; I am very old—I was the first in my council house scheme to go to university and because I spent 12 years as a secondary school

teacher before I took on a second degree, this time in law.

It does not matter whether one is brought up in Scotland or in Africa: education is still a basic human right. As you know, Presiding Officer, two years ago, during the G8 summit that Karen Whitefield referred to, we had the W8 summit, which was addressed by eight women from Africa. The story of one of those women, Hauwa Ibrahim from northern Nigeria, illustrates not only the value of education but women's struggle for education. She brought the W8 conference to silence; indeed, one could have heard a pin drop as she explained how, every day, she would walk for three hours each way to bring water for cooking and washing back to the village where she lived with her sisters and brother. Her father and brother had priority over that water and the women in the family had to use whatever was left.

Hauwa Ibrahim's destiny would have been much the same as that of many young women in that situation, but for the fact that she had a very strong temperament. I will read out her own words, which I first read out on 23 June 2005, during the members' business debate on the W8 summit. She said:

"I was born and brought up a Muslim. My father was ... one of the mullahs who call for prayers. It was not allowed for girls to go beyond the elementary schools (in my village). At the age of 12, 13, you should be ready for marriage. I refused to get married because I thought, 'I want to get more education.' I picked up a newspaper on the road, and I saw a university graduate with a four-square cap. And I thought, 'I must be like that person.' I funded my schooling by picking roots to hawk. I was hawking anything that is hawkable—food items, vegetables, peanuts."

She went on to have an extraordinary career. As an advocate, she took on Sharia law by using its very elements. In 1999, when she first appeared in court to conduct an appeal, a man had to speak her words because, as a woman, she was prohibited from speaking.

What did this woman do with her education? She practised law in the northern part of Nigeria, which, as she told us, exposed her to all 19 states of the federation. She had to go into the hinterland. Because the villages that she went to could not be reached by bicycles or motorbikes, she had to travel by camel and donkey. Once there, she tried to stop the amputations of young men who had stolen because they were starving and the stoning to death of young women who had allegedly committed adultery. She was not simply trying to save individual young men and women; she knew that, once one of those punishments was carried out, the whole thing would spread.

As I said, Hauwa Ibrahim operated within the terms of Sharia law, which meant that she was well aware of the difficulties that she faced. Indeed, she went on to say:

"I do feel uncomfortable, at times fearful. When it comes to the issue of death, the moment you stone the first woman, there may be no stopping of it. And I cannot live with that. Because of that, I fight ... I fight my fear. Almost all those women ... are from a very poor background, the same background that I came from. I feel that I'm returning back to humanity what I was given in terms of my education".

As far as I know, she has succeeded in everything she has done and in preventing women from being stoned.

Adding to what Karen Whitefield said, I feel that if the women get educated, the family gets educated, and that if one generation gets educated, it educates the next.

The political ramifications of Hauwa Ibrahim's actions are extraordinary. Through her deeds, she has taken a small step towards preventing the spread of the misinterpretation of Sharia law. Her story of being educated against all the odds in Africa supports Karen Whitefield's motion.

17:20

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I begin by congratulating Karen Whitefield on her motion. We always offer our congratulations in members' business debates, but the subject of this evening's debate is extremely important and I agree with every word of the motion and with all that has been said so far.

The subject of the debate puts into perspective our local debates in a country where, despite the challenges that it has faced, there has been a right to free and compulsory primary education for, I think, 130 years and an aspiration to have a school in every parish since at least the reformation of 450 years ago.

Aspects of tonight's debate relate both to this country and to countries far away. I was not able to get to the Moray House event that Karen Whitefield mentioned, but last night I went to a British Council event in the Scottish Storytelling Centre here in Edinburgh on the linked subject of global education. As an MSP and a former minister, I have launched or attended quite a few international education events. The work that has been done by Oxfam, the British Council, Save the Children, the Scottish Executive Education Department and councils, schools and teachers throughout Scotland has led to a great expansion of good twinning links and school exchanges with many countries, prominent among which have been Malawi and other African countries. I strongly agree with what Karen Whitefield said about the work of the previous Executive—especially its work with Malawi—which I hope will be followed up by the new Executive.

More important than those links have been the friendships that have grown up between teachers and educationists across the continents and the insights that young people have gained in their formative years. It is no exaggeration to say that, as a result, the attitudes, interests and motivation of many thousands of children in Scotland have been broadened, to the huge benefit of Scotland and of Britain as a whole.

That is the perspective, from our end, of the benefits that our young people gain from the encouragement of global citizenship and the spread of knowledge and understanding of such wider issues across the world. However, the motion is primarily about the 80 million other children in countries both far away and not so far away who do not get to go to school and the many other children who have access only to rudimentary education facilities.

I had not realised, until a visiting teacher from Malawi told me in a matter-of-fact way, that teachers and pupils in some countries that are afflicted by high levels of HIV/AIDS spend rather a lot of time going to funerals or that investment in teacher training can—before the investment bears fruit—be wastefully and tragically brought to nothing by the loss of teachers at an early age to the ravages of disease. The education challenges that are faced in countries such as Malawi, Burundi and Sudan are not just to do with class sizes, poverty, geography, buildings or textbooks, although all those issues are relevant; there are aspects that are worldwide, as anyone who listens to conversations between teachers as they share their experiences in widely differing societies can testify. As well as the challenges that are specific to particular developing countries in Africa, there are common issues across the world.

The motion makes an important point that has wider provenance, which is that education is a human right and that in many developing countries human rights are a powerful and central driving force in the development of a peaceful, modern and successful society. It is important to recognise that the actions of this country and of other western countries can be hugely supportive or hugely damaging to the interests of the third world—although that is perhaps a debate for a different day.

I turn to one of my favourite voluntary sector organisations, Castlemilk Community Can Cycle, which is based in Glasgow, the area that I represent. It began as a local project renovating bikes and providing them to local children, but it has expanded and now sends cycles to Africa, to enable young children who may live some distance from school to get there without having to make a very long walk. By supporting education in

faraway countries in that small way, the organisation has a big effect.

Karen Whitefield said that education is the best weapon that the world has against poverty, deprivation and war. That important insight sums up the debate. It is a privilege for me to take part in the debate and I thank Karen for bringing the matter before the Parliament.

17:25

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): It is also a privilege for me to lend my support to Karen Whitefield's motion.

Education is many things. It is the foundation on which we base our hopes and aspirations for our children, as well as something that touches our deepest emotions—a point that Christine Grahame rightly brought to our attention. It is also the prerequisite for economic wealth, the guardian of our culture, the vehicle by which we learn about our rights and responsibilities and the key with which we can unlock many doors to the wider world. Like health, education matters to everyone and it is often used as the yardstick by which we measure the progress of a nation.

It is tempting to focus solely on the need to ensure that all children across Scotland, whatever their backgrounds or physical and mental abilities, have their respective educational needs addressed. That is a major challenge in itself, but the wider moral issue of what to do about the international situation is also at stake. In that context, it is right that education is defined as an inalienable human right and that it should be defined as such in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, it is not right that education is still denied to almost 80 million children across the world. It is our duty to rectify the situation in whatever way we can and to ensure that the privilege of education is extended to the many millions who are currently without that fundamental human right. What should we do?

In the first instance, our international aid programme must be refocused to ensure that money goes to those who are most in need. Currently, only 32 per cent of our aid budget is spent in the poorest nations. When we consider the nature of the challenge that we face—1.2 billion people, which is around one in five in the world, survive on less than \$1 a day; life expectancy is actually falling in some nations; 30,000 children die every day from easily preventable diseases; 11 million children are AIDS orphans and another 40 million are HIV positive—it is clear that far more money must be directed at the poorer nations and that aid should remain independent of British commercial interests. Not only is it important to end the practice of tied aid,

but my party would also like there to be more opportunity for money to be sent directly to those who are most in need. Perhaps that would be best managed in the form of aid vouchers that can be redeemed collectively by individuals in the poorest communities for development services that can provide new schools and new medical centres.

There is a moral obligation on the British Government not only to meet the United Nations' target figure of 0.7 per cent of gross national product being spent annually on aid, but to try to ensure that that happens before 2013. In particular, more money needs to be spent on medical services—for example, on projects such as the millennium development goal on malaria—so that more children have the opportunity to have a better health record that will allow them to attend school regularly.

One of the most important ways that we can assist with education is to export knowledge; to ensure that a growing number of businesses and individuals with professional expertise have the incentive to work with the poorest nations to build new infrastructures and public services that give people a better start in life.

Such is the scale of poverty and educational disadvantage that it is all too easy to be overwhelmed by the challenge that we face. However, there are positive policies that we must pursue, and it is incumbent upon us all to play our part in delivering a more efficient structure of international development that will help to provide far more individuals everywhere with the education that they have a right to receive.

17:29

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): I thank Karen Whitefield for bringing this extremely important and worthwhile initiative to the Parliament's attention. Now that I am a minister, it takes a bit of getting used to not being allowed to sign motions, but I am sure that my colleagues and I would sign up to the motion that we are debating.

Not only is the Government committed to a fairer and more equal society in Scotland, but we richer nations of the world have an obligation to ensure that the world becomes a fairer and more equal place. That includes the fundamental right to an education that everyone has. It is clear that we have not managed to come anywhere near to achieving that goal. Debates such as this one will help to raise the profile of continuing inequalities and ensure that that agenda remains high in our conscience and priorities.

Children are crucial to the debate. All children deserve an equal chance to have a happy and safe childhood and to realise their full potential.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights and protections that every child should enjoy, wherever they live. This Government fully supports the provisions of the convention and I welcome the fact that almost every country in the world has signed up to it.

The Scottish Government's strategy on international development helps to promote those rights in developing countries by supporting a range of projects that tackle infant and maternal mortality and ensure that children get the education that they have a right to, for example. We congratulate the former Executive on the Malawi exchange programme and on the work that has been done. We are committed to carrying on that work.

Nelson Mandela said:

"there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Leaving so many of them without an education is no way to treat children. As Robert Brown said, children may know poverty, hard labour, ill health and HIV-AIDS, but they may never know the inside of a classroom.

More and more Governments are responding to popular pressure by announcing an end to primary school fees. As a result, millions of children have flooded into schools. It is great to see the co-operation between our schools in Scotland and schools in, for example, Malawi. As far as we know, 80 schools in Scotland are involved with schools in Malawi—the initiative has taken off throughout the country. Karen Whitefield should be proud that, like schools throughout the country, Clarkston primary school, which is in her constituency, has joined the programme. However, without a consequent increase in teaching resources, most children drop out of school long before the end of their viable schooling. As Robert Brown said, some teachers who die of AIDS are not replaced.

Scotland has a long history of helping countries to develop their education systems. As I said, education plays a strong role in our Scotland-Malawi co-operation agreement. The education strand of our joint action plan stresses the importance of education for all children and aims to increase access to education and to improve retention levels, especially for girls. Christine Grahame highlighted how important it is to educate women and gave the striking example of the young woman from northern Nigeria. I think that it was last night that I witnessed on TV the beating in another part of the world of a young woman who had clearly gone against Sharia law. It is clear that we need more women like the woman whom Christine Grahame mentioned: women who stand up for equality, justice and human rights.

I recall that three adults and three school-leavers from one of my local churches went to Malawi two years ago to help. They found themselves teaching the children arts and crafts. The young girls were astonished by the enthusiasm and good behaviour of the children. As Karen Whitefield said, unfortunately some of our children take education for granted and treat it accordingly—no doubt, that is something that we will have to work on.

Another example of how Scotland is helping to get children in Malawi into education is the enterprising global citizen project, which is jointly funded by the Executive and the United Nations Children's Fund as part of the UN rights of the child programme.

As Karen Whitefield said, voluntary organisations such as Oxfam and Save the Children add value to such work. All Scottish local authorities have been offered the opportunity to participate in the enterprising global citizen course. Through the Scottish Executive's international development fund, the EGC course has also been introduced in Malawi. Working through the EGC course shows each child how to create and develop their own child-led enterprises—in other words, how to educate themselves out of poverty. Malawian children do not want handouts: they want an education that will lead them to make their own way in the world, give themselves a good standard of living and ensure that their own children receive the education that their parents—whom they will be better able to support—were denied.

We in Scotland cannot be complacent. Research indicates that 23 per cent of Scottish adults have low numeracy and literacy skills. We must strive to make that a statistic of the past.

I note that some of the participants at the event that Karen Whitefield mentioned were from the Gypsy Traveller community. Cathy Peattie is no longer in the chamber, but she and others will know of my commitment to that community when my party was in opposition. We must ensure that the Gypsy Traveller community has equal access to an education that takes into account their itinerant lifestyle.

We should also not forget children with special needs, both here and in the developing world. Every child has the right to full access to an education system that develops them to their full potential. All of us present today have a duty to ensure that we do not fail them in that goal.

Through education, we can directly influence the thinking and approach of future generations in dealing with health issues and the prevention of disease. We can also provide a broader understanding of sustainable economic development and can help to establish sustainable, thriving and healthier communities.

What can we do in Scottish classrooms to raise the profile of global issues in general and the global campaign for education initiative in particular? We can raise awareness and, through awareness, understanding—so that the children involved, as the voters of tomorrow, can continue to put pressure on Governments to increase meaningful aid. None of us who took part in the make poverty history march can forget how meaningful the campaign was—not only to the participants but to all the G8 members who came to Scotland for the summit.

It is imperative that our education system ensures that all our young people acquire a knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it. Young people must learn about the increasingly interconnected world that they live in and about the major challenges that we face, including globalisation, climate change and world poverty. If we fail in that, not only do we fail our young people, but our society as a whole will be poorer. With that in mind, I confirm that this Government is committed to ensuring that an international education is taken seriously in all our schools. That will provide opportunities for all young people to become responsible and knowledgeable citizens as well as successful learners, confident individuals and effective contributors.

The schools involved in the global campaign for education event that Karen Whitefield mentioned should be congratulated by all of us on the fantastic work that they are doing in educating their children about the world and the challenges that we all face. I hope that many more schools will follow their lead. By raising the profile of the aims of the global campaign for education, we can assist those aims. I urge members to do all that they can to help; we will do all that we can.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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