

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 1 May 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 1 May 2008

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

Housing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Good morning. The first item of business is a Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party debate on motion S3M-1812, in the name of David McLetchie, on housing.

09:15

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): In the Parliament, the Scottish National Party loves to tell us how hard done by we are and to criticise the alleged parsimony of our Treasury paymasters in Westminster. One example was the budget settlement, which was referred to constantly as a tight financial settlement, notwithstanding that, in real terms, the Government has more money at its disposal to spend on devolved services than any previous Government in the history of Scotland, before or after the establishment of the Parliament. More recently, we were told that only Westminster stands in the way of the Government's plans for a so-called local—but in truth Scottish national—income tax, because Westminster will not give us the equivalent of the £400 million that is presently paid out in council tax benefit. Only this week, the report of Lord Sutherland's review committee reignited the debate about the relationship between free personal care and attendance allowance, in which the amount in dispute is about £30 million.

On housing, however, Her Majesty's Treasury has on the table a total in excess of £2 billion that is available to wipe out the accumulated housing debt of the 26 councils in Scotland that have so far failed to transfer their housing stock to housing associations. That money would transform social housing in many parts of Scotland, but the Government is doing absolutely nothing to pick it up and apply it to good account, which is little short of a perverse disgrace. At April of last year, the relevant debt figures for the councils that have tried and failed to secure positive votes in tenant ballots were £278 million for the City of Edinburgh Council, £153 million for Highland Council and £144 million for Renfrewshire Council, not forgetting £19 million for Stirling Council.

What was common to those ballots? In each and every case, the SNP campaigned, hand in hand with Tommy Sheridan and his former friends in the

Scottish Socialist Party, for a no vote, spouting nonsense about the privatisation of council housing when no such proposal was ever on the table. Now that the SNP is in government, the official position is that those matters are local decisions and the SNP Government is neutral on the issue. How can the Government be neutral about gaining £2 billion to improve the standard of housing in Scotland? How can a Government that likes to boast about its historic concordat with local authorities and which will demand all manner of outcomes in agreements with them not insist, as a condition of Government funding support, that councils put in place new stock transfer measures, which would wipe out all the debts and give social housing a fresh start in most of our country?

Let us put the numbers into perspective. At the recent SNP conference, Nicola Sturgeon was quick to boast that the Government will allocate £25 million in the next three years to councils to help to finance a new council house building programme. By comparison with the moneys that are on offer from stock transfer, that is peanuts. As I pointed out in an earlier housing debate, the summit of the SNP ambition is to build half the number of council houses in the next 10 years that the Conservatives built in our last 10 years in government.

Nothing gives me greater pleasure than highlighting such delicious ironies, but the more substantial point is that the new council house building programme runs entirely contrary to the direction of policy that has been pursued by successive Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Governments in Scotland in the past 30 years. The consistent policy has been to encourage home ownership, in line with the aspirations of the vast majority of our people; to use the sale proceeds from the right to buy to improve the homes of those who wish to remain tenants and to build new social housing; and to use locally based housing associations as the owners and managers of homes to rent.

Overall, there is no doubt that the policy has been a great success. We have 480,000 new home owners who have improved their homes at their expense, rather than the expense of the taxpayer and tenants.

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell) rose—

David McLetchie: Excuse me.

For those who have remained as tenants, all the indications are that they receive a far better service from housing associations as managers than they did from their council landlords. The proof of that particular pudding is to be found in the conclusions of an Audit Scotland report that was published in 2006 that examined the

experience of tenants who had been the subject of stock transfer. The conclusion was that

“tenants are finding the service provided after transfer is better, new landlords are investing in the housing stock and keeping rent increases within agreed limits and transfers have promoted greater control for tenants.”

The record of Conservative Governments demonstrates clearly that there is no incompatibility between giving tenants a right to buy and building new affordable homes for rent, whether the builders are councils or housing associations. That incompatibility is a myth perpetrated by those who are instinctively hostile to the policy. The policy does not stop people finding affordable housing, because it matters not whether a house is occupied by a tenant or an owner; the relevant factor is that it is occupied and, accordingly, not available for occupation by anybody else.

The fundamental issue is stock transfer, which can unlock investment in affordable housing far in excess of that which the Scottish Government proposes. Some will say that the Treasury should pay off the accumulated housing debt, transfer or no transfer, with arm's-length management organisations often touted as an alternative to stock transfer to housing associations. However, railing against the present rules is, frankly, of little use, because they are not going to change.

In the meantime, more than 450 homes in north Sighthill in my constituency are scheduled for demolition in a programme that is now under way, while the Liberal Democrat and SNP-run council has not a clue as to how those houses will be replaced in that community, in contrast to the situation that applied under the original transfer proposals.

The situation is not good enough. The Government should work with the Treasury and our councils to release the funding, rather than stand and gurn on the sidelines. In the last analysis, the motion, which I will have much pleasure in moving, calls on the Government to get a move on, which it should do as a matter of priority.

I move,

That the Parliament regrets the failure of the Scottish Government to actively pursue and promote housing stock transfer by local authorities to community-based housing associations and thereby obtain a debt write-off from HM Treasury of over £2 billion; believes that the role of social landlords is best undertaken by housing associations and other not-for-profit, co-operative bodies, and deplores the introduction of any further restrictions on the right to buy.

09:22

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): As our amendment to David McLetchie's motion makes clear, the Government

believes that local democracy extends to local authority tenants deciding whether their homes should be transferred out of local authority ownership. That means respecting tenants' right to retain their local authority landlord where they vote to do so and supporting transfers where they enjoy local support. That is why, in December 2007, I was happy to approve the transfer of Inverclyde Council's stock to River Clyde Homes.

Under current Treasury rules on debt write-off, deciding against a transfer has serious implications for future investment in stock. We believe that the rules are unfair and penalise tenants who choose to remain with their local authority landlords, which is why we asked the Treasury to consider write-off where transfers do not take place. I regret that the Treasury was not prepared to contemplate flexibility in the interests of supporting tenants and respecting their right to choose. As matters stand, we must live with the Treasury's intransigence—we do not have the powers or resources to do otherwise. Perhaps other members should support the transfer of the powers, rather than moan about the fact that the Treasury will not agree.

Local authority tenants suffer the consequences of reduced investment in their homes. That is unsatisfactory. We made it clear in “Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland” that we would consider proposals for full or partial transfers, particularly where they qualify for debt write-off. However, we will not press tenants—some might say bribe or blackmail them—into voting for a course that they do not believe is in their best interests. At root, the Tories are dogmatically opposed to local authorities being landlords, and that antipathy lies behind their motion. We do not share their antipathy—quite the opposite; we acknowledge that local authorities continue to play a large role in providing social housing, and we want to support them in that role.

Two weeks ago, Nicola Sturgeon announced £25 million for the next three years to kick-start a new generation of council house building, and we will soon announce the housing association grant allocations for 2008-09. Our proposal has been widely welcomed, with the huge majority of respondents to “Firm Foundations” expressing clear support for it. It is easy to see why. There is an acute shortage of affordable housing to rent. The policies of previous Administrations have not been a huge success, as David McLetchie claimed. Our support for local authority house building will help to address that shortage by encouraging councils to start building again. We will discuss with our partners in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities how the money can be used to best effect by encouraging local authorities to augment, as cost effectively as

possible, the supply of new social housing in areas of need.

It is worth stressing the point about augmenting new supply. The Tory motion implies that we undervalue or are somehow trying to undermine housing associations and other not-for-profit and co-operative housing bodies, but that is quite simply not the case. We acknowledge that the not-for-profit sector has made a huge contribution to the provision of high-quality, affordable homes across the country and to the regeneration of communities and neighbourhoods.

We were clear in “Firm Foundations” that we expect the not-for-profit sector to continue to supply the great majority of new social housing. We need the sector to thrive and grow as a key player in a housing system that is much more responsive to demand for affordable housing across all tenures. Unlike the Tories and the Labour Party, we have no difficulty in contemplating a world where the not-for-profit sector and local authorities both help to create a system that better meets Scotland’s housing needs. I am encouraged to note that the not-for-profit sector appears to share that view.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the minister give us a rough, ball-park figure for how many houses the Government expects to get out of its £25 million? Will he confirm that the announcement of 240 council houses for West Lothian is a direct result of the previous Executive’s decision to change the rules on prudential borrowing?

Stewart Maxwell: I will give Johann Lamont an exact figure for the number of houses: it will be exactly a hell of a lot more than six.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Maxwell: Johann Lamont has had her intervention. The fact remains that Labour failed utterly to build any council houses over the past four years. I have to point out that the six council houses that were built were built in Shetland, so they were not exactly available to people in West Lothian, Glasgow or anywhere else in the country.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the minister give way on that point?

Stewart Maxwell: No.

In the coming weeks, we will make a statement to Parliament setting out the broad direction of our housing policies in light of the responses to “Firm Foundations”, which will include our plans for ensuring that the not-for-profit sector can deliver the maximum possible number of sustainable, good-quality homes for the available level of public expenditure, and our plans for support for first-time buyers.

I want to make one point absolutely clear: nothing in the proposals in “Firm Foundations” for reforming how we distribute subsidies for new social housing is intended to undermine the diversity of the not-for-profit sector or its ability to respond sensitively to local housing needs.

The Government knows that the right to buy has had a profound effect on our housing system, and that in many, but by no means all, cases it has been positive, not least in providing great diversity of choice for households throughout the country. However, policy should not stand still, as the Tories appear to want, but evolve to address emerging challenges. That is what we intend to do with our proposal to end the right to buy new social housing, which will effectively safeguard for future generations our planned investment in new supply. That proposal attracted near universal support among respondents to “Firm Foundations”—94 per cent of respondents supported it. That does not suggest that many will join the Tories in deploring our willingness to propose a major change in policy that will serve the interests of those who are seeking affordable housing. Similarly, few will follow the Tories in ruling out any attempt to review how the policy applies to existing stock, such as exploring ways of achieving greater flexibility for the modernised right to buy in light of evidence on how it has operated.

I move amendment S3M-1812.2, to leave out from “regrets” to end and insert:

“respects the democratic right of tenants to determine the ownership of their homes; regrets that HM Treasury will only write off local authority housing debt where local authority housing stock is transferred; believes that housing associations and other not-for-profit, co-operative bodies continue to have the lead role in providing new social housing but welcomes the Scottish Government’s encouragement of local authorities to augment the supply of new social housing as part of their role as landlords, and endorses the Scottish Government’s plans to end the right to buy on new social housing and to review how right to buy applies to the existing stock of social housing.”

09:28

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome this important debate. The intention of my amendment is to get the Government to focus on taking responsibility for its actions and delivering a housing strategy worthy of the name. It is most unfortunate that the Government makes assertions with no evidence whatsoever. We should be focusing and developing policy on a huge range of housing issues, such as affordability, homelessness and the needs of disabled people, but we are stuck with a Government that is more interested in spinning headlines than taking action.

Over the past eight years, we built a real consensus around the key issues and built 36,000 houses for social rent, but we now have a minister who will not even tell us what his target is, and who claims that his £25 million will go some way to addressing need.

It is depressing that with this Administration we get assertion rather than action and headlines rather than creative solutions. Despite being instructed to do so, it cannot even say whether the £2,000 first-time buyers grant is in or out—it cannot say yes or no to that. Perhaps the minister will address that in his summing up.

What is the Government's strategy? Despite the spin, Nicola Sturgeon acknowledged the role of housing associations in providing affordable houses, which will remain central. I am therefore at a loss to understand the distinction that the Government makes between council housing and housing that is built by housing associations and co-operatives. It is meaningless to say that we built only six council houses, given that we built 36,000 houses of a high standard for social rent.

Despite what the Government says about supporting housing associations, the evidence is that there are going to be significant cuts to HAG. There is uncertainty in the sector because the minister will not even tell us what the allocations are. Housing associations are fearful of the consequences. They will have to borrow more at a time of volatility in the private markets, they will have to put up rents, they are unable to plan and they fear that development programmes will be halted. At the same time, the key strategy of the Government's "Firm Foundations" document, which has been widely criticised, is to drive efficiencies into housing associations—with no evidence about where the inefficiencies are—with a single developer model, which I am sure the minister will acknowledge has been criticised by the people who responded to the consultation.

The minister has managed to create the impression that the sector that has been most successful in terms of housing strategy for the past 30 years has been living off the fat of the land. The Government is attacking the key element of the housing association movement, which is community ownership.

I understand that the Government needs to address the discomfort of its own back benchers, given that £260 million is going unconditionally to businesses and that the Government is going to drive efficiencies into the housing association sector. We hear all the nonsense about the £25 million. In the last year of the previous Executive, £501 million was spent on addressing affordable housing issues. The £25 million is a nonsense. It cannot go to the local authorities that the SNP urged to vote against stock transfer, because of

housing debt. The money is going to be top-sliced off HAG and redistributed to areas that do not have the greatest housing need.

The reality is that the Government is committed to not addressing the key issues of affordable housing and to keeping its own back benchers sweet. A moment's scrutiny shows that it is not doing what it is claiming to do on the right to buy. At the same time, it is flat-lining budgets for community regeneration and wider action. The Government is paralysed when it comes to making the hard decisions and addressing the real problems. It is settling for easy headlines that a moment's scrutiny shows to be nonsense.

I move amendment S3M-1812.3, to leave out from "the failure" to end and insert:

"that, following the parliamentary debate on 20 March 2008, ministers have not yet reported to the Parliament on the future of the £2,000 first-time buyers grant, despite the Parliament agreeing that they should, regrets that ministers have not yet reported to the Parliament on how the Scottish Government plans to respond to the consultation on Firm Foundations which identified serious criticisms of the Scottish Government's approach to housing; notes the critical role of housing associations and housing co-operatives in delivering affordable homes for rent; condemns the Minister for Communities and Sport for not yet announcing the allocation of Housing Association Grant, and reaffirms its view that the Scottish Government has no coherent housing strategy."

09:33

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I am grateful to the Conservatives for using their time to debate the vital issue of housing. David McLetchie's central point about the opportunities that debt write-off offers is entirely valid. The loss of a potential £2 billion in housing spend is a mistake of significant proportions by the SNP Government. I have to ask the minister, as the SNP often asked us when we were in government, what is plan B? We have heard clearly that there is no plan B; there is no alternative and the Government's approach is all hot air.

Apart from the fact that the Government in London was never going to write off the debt without conditions, I am not sure that unconditional write-off is the correct approach in principle. The dynamic link between debt write-off and community empowerment was what made the policy fly.

I say to the minister with respect that the SNP Government's housing strategy is one of its weakest points. "Firm Foundations" is a poor document. The fatal flaw at its core is the idea—which, as Johann Lamont said, is not backed up by evidence—that centralised procurement has the potential to save money and be more efficient. In reality, such procurement jeopardises the future of the unique Scottish system of community-based

housing associations. It will cost more and it will be hugely bureaucratic. That is the reality, despite the minister's weasel words on the matter.

In contrast, Liberal Democrats believe that communities should be the source of power. In housing, a dynamic partnership between councils as the strategic elected body and housing associations and co-operatives, which deliver local participation, is often a strong tenant empowerment mechanism. The SNP makes great play of the historic concordat, but it has shown most clearly in its housing policy that it does not trust local people, as its strategy tends to strip local councils and housing associations of power.

Even more central is the challenge of providing enough affordable rented housing—whether it is socially rented housing or council housing is substantially incidental—yet the SNP is lamentably and demonstrably failing to rise to that challenge. There is total confusion and uncertainty about the Scottish Government's programme. It should be a simple task to answer the question—which has been put to the minister—of how many houses for rent in the public sector the SNP Government plans to build or how many houses the £25 million that has been reallocated to council housing will produce.

The Government pulls all the relevant levers, particularly through the funding from central sources to councils and housing associations, but despite pressure from housing organisations such as Shelter, the SNP continues to duck and weave. As with many other issues, it seems determined to brazen it out with a smoke and mirrors act rather than come clean. The reality is obvious—fewer houses than ever before will be built in the public sector under the SNP, and housing has a distinctly lower priority under the SNP than it had when Liberal Democrats were in government.

It is time for the SNP to come clean. The minister can end all uncertainty by telling us the investment that the SNP will make in housing over the spending review period, how many affordable houses for rent it is able and proposes to build over that period, and the breakdown between providers. The SNP has made much play of the fact that it is allowing councils to build houses, but there is nothing terribly new in that, and the numbers involved are tokenistic, as has been said. In its briefing, Shelter suggests that fewer than 20,000 rented houses will be built from 2008 to 2011, and that the small number of extra council houses will be funded from a reduced allocation to housing associations.

The SNP Government must learn that it cannot govern by press release, that the art of government imposes constraints on ludicrously extravagant promises, and that the ultimate test is delivery.

I move amendment S3M-1812.1, to leave out from "believes that" to end and insert:

"recognises that local councils are best placed to assess and meet varied local housing needs and to determine their local housing strategies; believes that the role of community-based housing associations and housing co-operatives is vital to such diverse local strategies which should also include the ability to mould right-to-buy policy to fit local needs, and calls on the Scottish Government to produce clear figures on its housing plans including the number of affordable rented houses to be built from 2008 to 2011."

09:37

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I have no doubt that every member has at some time campaigned or spoken on housing. Scotland faces a housing shortage in the public sector. East Dunbartonshire faces a social housing crisis, which is due in no small part to the voting down by Conservative councillors there of a target for a minimum percentage of social housing for rent. When the opportunity arose in January to provide for a substantial percentage of social housing for rent, the Tories, along with Labour and the Liberals, did not take it. The SNP group even offered to lower its 15 per cent target to 10 per cent, which the ruling Labour-Tory administration preferred, but that figure was still rejected.

East Dunbartonshire Council has a waiting list with which the current council housing stock cannot cope. When the right to buy was introduced, the area had more than 10,000 council houses. That figure was reduced to just over 3,600 by 2006-07, whereas the number of people on the waiting list is about 4,500. The council also has a backlog of homelessness applications. As a result of all that, local people cannot stay in the area. Where will they go? Perhaps they will move to another local authority area and add to its overstretched waiting list. Our local authorities face such problems, but effective social housing can help to alleviate them.

Johann Lamont: Your regional responsibilities include Inverclyde. Do you welcome the decision of people in Inverclyde to support stock transfer? Do you regret the campaign against it in other areas, where people will not receive the benefits?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members not to use the second person unless addressing the chair.

Stuart McMillan: I will talk about the Inverclyde situation later.

The actions—or lack of them—of the previous Scottish Executive have left Scotland facing a housing shortage. The SNP Government has been clear in its aim—which has received overwhelming support—to build 35,000 new homes in the next decade.

The right to buy has been a bone of contention, but I make no bones about saying that the Tory position, which dates back 30 years, shows clearly that the Tories are behind the times. The proposal not to remove but to restrict the right to buy for new social housing was supported by 94 per cent of respondents to the Scottish Government's recent consultation. If that measure is not taken, research shows that 90,000 socially rented homes will be sold in the next 10 years. As I have shown, we do not have enough social housing to allow that to happen.

Moreover, it is no secret that the Labour Party, along with its Tory pals, took to encouraging tenants to vote for housing stock transfer. In Inverclyde, tenants voted overwhelmingly to transfer to a large housing association—that was up to them; it was their choice. However, since then, some constituents have asked me why they were forced down that road. Some have even mentioned the word “bribery”, because if they had rejected the offer, the housing debt would not have been written off. Those tenants were given no option, because if they had exercised their democratic right to vote against transfer, they would, in effect, have been punished.

A year into the SNP Government, we have had a commitment to create a fairer Scotland and to clear up Labour's mess again. The investment of more than £1.6 billion over three years in housing and regeneration from the tight budget settlement is just one example of action.

I hope that, in summing up, the Tories—and perhaps even the Labour Party—will explain why the United Kingdom Treasury will write off housing debt only if housing stock transfer takes place. Surely if the Treasury can provide £50 billion to the UK financial sector because of the credit crunch and can pour a similar amount into Northern Rock, paying £2 billion to wipe out the housing debt is a mere drop in the ocean. I urge members to back the Government amendment.

09:41

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, which is on an important topic. I will support the amendment in the name of my colleague Johann Lamont.

I do not often have the chance to thank the Tories for anything, but I thank them today, as they have at least brought the subject of housing to the chamber, unlike the SNP Government, which does not want to talk about devolved issues such as housing—at least not here.

It is gratifying to hear Mr McMillan taking such an interest in my constituency. I welcome the debate, as it gives me the opportunity to mention

an event that I will attend this afternoon in Kirkintilloch, where the leader of East Dunbartonshire Council's Labour-Conservative coalition—members will not hear that phrase often—will officially open a new development of affordable homes.

The completion of those 40 new properties is a major boost for the town's Harestanes area. They comprise 28 homes for rent and 12 shared-equity properties that have been built under the first low-cost initiative for first-time buyers—LIFT—project in East Dunbartonshire. The development involves a partnership between Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association, Lothian Homes, Cruden Estates, Communities Scotland and the council. Such is the demand for affordable housing in my constituency—I thank Mr McMillan for the update on the figures—that more than 200 applications were made for the 12 homestake properties. However, the good news is that there are plans to build more such properties in Bearsden, Bishopbriggs and Milton of Campsie.

As I have said, that is the good news. Elsewhere, the situation is not as rosy. In the Hillhead area of Kirkintilloch, which is an area of multiple deprivation, Hillhead Housing Association is still waiting to find out whether Communities Scotland will reinstate an offer—which had been deferred—of £4 million that it requires to proceed with phase 2 of redevelopment in the area. HHA has been told that officers from the Government's housing and regeneration directorate, which was Communities Scotland, want to wait for more up-to-date costs, because the directorate's investment team apparently wants to appraise the scheme's costs against the new housing association grant assumptions. Under those arrangements, which Mr Maxwell introduced, an association could be forced to use reserves to back its bid—although HHA has none—or to think about increasing rents, but Hillhead is an area of deprivation, so that is not an option, either. The intention is to allow HAG to be spread more thinly. That seems to be the SNP's idea of how to make housing associations more efficient. The result is that tenants must pay more.

HHA will be able to increase its borrowing only if lenders view the business plan as viable. The scheme will cost £7 million, and even with £4 million from HAG the association will still have a shortfall of £3 million, at a time when the cost of borrowing new money is more expensive than ever. All that happens against the background of some lenders pulling out of the social rented sector. The irony is that East Dunbartonshire Council's area has been identified as facing a severe homelessness crisis, so the council wants to maximise the number of new units that are approved this financial year.

Scotland needs more homes to be built, and several applications to build are outstanding in my constituency. The question is how many of those new homes will be in the affordable or social rented category. The SNP's "Firm Foundations"—if ever a document had a dodgy title, that is it—refers to building 35,000 houses a year by 2015, but offers no commitment on the number that will be in the social rented sector. Robert Brown asked about that, and I repeat his question. I had hoped that the minister would tell us his target today. Shelter believes that fewer than 20,000 affordable homes will be built in the next three years. Is that right, or will the minister care to give us another number—in fact, any number?

I would like the minister to tell East Dunbartonshire Council what its housing grant allocation will be. He said that it would be announced soon; today's ceremony would have been an ideal opportunity to release that information. Phase 2 of Hillhead Housing Association's plans, involving 142 units, is waiting to go.

A large number of people in my area are living in overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation. The people of Scotland deserve better than they are getting from the Government.

09:45

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

As members have said, housing is one of the most important issues that Scotland faces. We support speeding up the planning system for housing, the shared ownership scheme and having more rural homes for rent. It is also right that the Government works with the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association and community groups to utilise potential homes more fully by bringing properties up to standard. However, there is no doubt at all that stock transfer has the potential to transform social housing in Scotland. To be honest, stock transfer is the only game in town. It is unfortunate for tenants in Scotland that the Government does not support it.

We must not only consider the costs of building new homes; we must also increase our focus on energy efficiency to ensure that homes are cheaper to live in. It is all very well for people to get affordable homes, but if they cannot afford to live in them there is little point in having them. As Shelter has said, 6,000 families are evicted from their homes every year. We can be sure that a percentage of those families were unable to pay utility bills and other bills. Better insulation and energy efficiency could address that problem.

Many families are evicted as a result of the lack of support to get people back into training and employment. In fact, when many people get a

house, they lose contact with support systems and fall back into old ways. In the past 10 years, the number of people in temporary accommodation has doubled, and the number of households living in bed and breakfast accommodation has more than quadrupled. The current economic conditions are leading to even greater difficulties for first-time buyers. In Scotland, the average age of first-time buyers is 37.

As David McLetchie said, the stock transfer policy is a means of addressing the housing shortage in Scotland. It is a means of not only writing off debt but refurbishing existing homes and building new ones. I remind the minister that, thanks to the Conservatives' policy, which Labour supported, more than 300,000 families in Scotland exercised their democratic right to buy the home in which they lived.

In 2006, tenants in the Highlands voted on housing stock transfer. Not only would transfer have wiped out the £153 million council housing debt, there would have been money for new homes. One of the major incentives to vote for the housing stock transfer was that 41p in every pound of rent that was paid to the council went towards paying off the debt. That situation is unsustainable in the current economic conditions, because less money is available to invest in properties. We can look towards a deteriorating housing stock in future.

There were additional benefits. The housing stock transfer would have guaranteed rent rises of no more than the rate of inflation for five years, and in the following five years rents would have risen by only 0.5 per cent above inflation, and probably by less than that. There would have been even more tenant control and improved repairs and services. Tenants would undoubtedly have been far better off.

I support the motion in the name of David McLetchie. My experiences are from the Highlands, but it is no surprise to me that a motion has been lodged that states:

"That the Parliament regrets the failure of the Scottish Government to actively pursue and promote housing stock transfer by local authorities".

Highland Council has one of the largest housing debts in Scotland. Things could have been different if the party in government, supported by the Scottish socialists, had not carried out their concerted campaign.

Quick action needs to be taken to address housing problems. I urge the Government to have a rethink, and to work with the stock transfer moneys and housing associations to benefit tenants in Scotland.

09:49

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am grateful to the Conservatives for securing this debate on housing, although having said that, there is little in the motion with which I agree.

The first proposition in the motion pertains to promotion of housing stock transfer by local authorities. I am proud to be a member of a party that does not try to coerce council tenants by way of the bribe that capital debt write-off, in tandem only with stock transfer, represents. If the Treasury is capable of servicing council house debt, why will it do so only under the conditions of stock transfer? Mary Scanlon said that

“stock transfer is the only game in town”,

and David McLetchie said that the present rules are the rules. I say that the rules of the game are wrong.

Johann Lamont: Is Jamie Hepburn, as a member of the SNP, proud to have urged people in Edinburgh to vote against stock transfer and now to have a Government minister who has said when there have been problems that rents should be put up, land should be sold, or jobs should be got rid of? Is the member proud of the response to those who voted no to stock transfer?

Jamie Hepburn: I wonder whether Johann Lamont is proud to be a member of the party that tries to bribe council house tenants. If the Treasury is able to service the housing debt, it should do so.

It is clear that housing stock transfer is little more than an attempt to hammer nails into the coffin of council housing in Scotland. Council tenants in various local authority areas have stood up against such moves—that is to be applauded. They have doubtless been partly inspired to do so as a result of having witnessed the shambolic handling of the housing stock transfer in Glasgow under the previous Administration.

The second proposition in the Tory motion is

“that the role of social landlords is best undertaken by housing associations and other not-for-profit, co-operative bodies”.

That is a seemingly innocuous proposition, but it masks what the Tories really mean, which is that there should be no role for local authorities. If stock transfer was meant to be a nail in the coffin of council housing, the Tory-inspired right to buy was designed to be the first blow struck against it.

I will qualify what I have said. I accept that many families have benefited by buying their council homes—indeed, many people in my family have done so. Equally, however, others—such as my stepfather's father—have on principle refused to buy their council homes because they recognise the value of local authority housing remaining

available for future generations. Individuals have benefited from the right to buy, but we must also recognise the gross failures of the policy. Many children and grandchildren of people who have bought their council homes are now struggling to secure their own roofs over their heads. That is why Wendy Alexander's talk of families aspiring to own a second home is misplaced. Thousands of people still aspire merely to renting their first home, never mind to owning a place in the sun. In 2006-07, there were almost 60,000 homelessness applications in Scotland. Those are the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

To respond to the demand for homes, we need a mix of housing tenure, but above all we need a new generation of council housing. The policy that the Government is pursuing of restricting the right to buy in respect of new council homes is a huge incentive for local authorities to build such homes. We are already seeing plans to construct more council homes than have been built for many years. That is another sign of progress in Scotland under an SNP Government.

09:53

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I thank the Conservatives for bringing a housing debate to Parliament.

Sheep seem to be following the minister, which is strange.

Since 1999, members have worked hard to put housing, which is important to us all, high on the political agenda. However, it is essential that the Opposition parties continue to raise housing issues in Parliament because it is clear to us that the SNP Administration will not bring housing policies to it for parliamentary debate and scrutiny.

In a debate in March on a Labour Party motion, Stewart Maxwell complained that only a few minutes were available to him to speak. It is disappointing that he has been unable to persuade his ministerial colleagues to allow him time to lead a housing debate in the chamber, and to give him an opportunity to outline the SNP's plans. Could it be that the SNP does not have any plans, or could it be that its policy is in tatters as a result of the amount of spinning that the Administration has done in order to convince itself and SNP back benchers that it is doing something that takes housing seriously and deals with the housing needs of the people of Scotland?

How many affordable rented homes will be built between now and 2011? That question has been put here today. The minister was happy to shout from a sedentary position earlier, but he would not answer members' questions about the numbers, nor has he answered the same questions when they have been asked by people in all sections of

housing. There has been no answer from the SNP.

The ending of the right to buy was announced by the Administration in a flurry of press releases as a means to appease its back benchers as they were being guided through their masters' right-wing budget plans. Who are they kidding? The SNP has not abolished the right to buy, as we will realise as we go forward. Shelter points out correctly that the right to buy was conceived in a very different landscape back in the 1970s. It seems to have passed the current Administration by that the previous Administration modernised the right to buy to take account—[*Interruption.*] Presiding Officer, would the minister like to intervene?

Stewart Maxwell: All right. The right-to-buy policy originated in the 1970s, as Cathie Craigie suggested, but why is her party still defending one of the arch-Thatcherite policies from the 1970s, which is now utterly unsuitable for the 21st century when we have a housing crisis and supply that is nowhere near enough to meet demand?

Cathie Craigie: I am surprised that the minister got to his feet to embarrass himself by not even understanding the changes that were made to the right to buy during the previous Administration—supported by the majority in Parliament. When is the minister going to give us information on how that policy is working?

We have to continue to meet housing demands and our priority must be to increase availability of high-quality affordable housing. Housing impacts on so many aspects of our lives, as we know.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Cathie Craigie: I am in my last minute. People need to work in partnership with councils and housing associations, as happens in my constituency, where people have moved into their new housing association houses in the past month and owners are working with local authorities and housing associations to improve their housing. It is not either/or; it is a partnership that can suit everybody's needs.

09:57

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): As one of the people who has been referred to not by name but just as a bank bencher, I am very proud to be a member of this party of Government. Collectively, the unionist parties have an absolute cheek to lecture anyone on housing. Let us look at their record.

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

Sandra White: I am sorry; I have just started. With the introduction of the right to buy, the Tories single-handedly scheduled the social housing market and completely skewed the situation, making it very difficult for social rented accommodation to be made available to people who could not afford the right to buy. It is a disgrace that the Tories want to further that right: I will not take a lecture on that from Mary Scanlon or anybody else, particularly when her party is backed up by the Labour Party, as she mentioned.

Let us have a wee look at Labour and the Lib Dems. What can I say about them? The Liberals propped up the Labour Party on the housing stock transfer to the Glasgow Housing Association—an absolute monster about which the previous Labour-Liberal Executive did nothing.

Margaret Curran: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, Margaret; I have only four minutes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should use full names when referring to other members in the chamber.

Sandra White: I apologise, Presiding—Deputy Presiding Officer. [*Laughter.*]

Only now that the Liberals and Labour are in opposition do they complain about the GHA: they bleat about second-stage transfer and Robert Brown bleats about wanting an Audit Scotland investigation. What did you do when we were propping up the Labour Party to make that second-stage transfer? Absolutely nothing happened and yet you have a cheek—sorry, Presiding Officer. The Liberals and the Labour Party have a cheek to try to lecture us. Where were their members when the housing associations, owner-occupiers and tenants held meetings and went to constituencies and offices to complain and talk about their concerns about the situation with the GHA? No one from the Liberal and Labour parties turned up. It was left to the SNP Opposition of the time to take up those people's concerns. I am pleased that the minister listened to us about those concerns. I ask Robert Brown: please do not pretend to be on the side of the owner-occupiers and tenants of Glasgow because it is the SNP that is on their side. It was the SNP that brought concerns about the GHA to the chamber, while the Liberal-Labour Executive did nothing about them.

We are now celebrating one year of an SNP Government, which is absolutely fantastic. Let us look at what has happened—much more than the other parties ever achieved—since the SNP took control. The GHA has been taken to task, 16 local housing associations have been given approval to move to second-stage transfer and there are another 17 in the pipeline. After just one year, that

is worthy of congratulations. Liberal and Labour members who were in government for years did nothing to help the people of Glasgow, apart from introduce the monolithic GHA. We are now ending the right to buy—the proposal to do that received the support of 94 per cent of respondents to the Scottish Government consultation on housing.

I say to David McLetchie and the Tories that even one of their councillors, Jim Millar, has said that his party's defence of the right to buy is simplistic. If the Tories want more information about that, they can look at his blog, which contains lots of other bits and pieces.

The SNP Government has also increased investment in housing and regeneration and has set a target for increased building. There is also the recent announcement that Scottish local authorities will be given £25 million to build new council houses, which is a step towards the future. I congratulate the SNP Government on what it is doing.

10:02

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister's amendment begins with the words:

"respects the democratic right of tenants to determine the ownership of their homes".

The minister stated in a recent intervention that he condemns the "arch-Thatcherite" policy of the right to buy as being totally unsuitable in today's housing crisis. However, the Government will not even move towards abolishing that policy. Sandra White castigated stock transfer, but today the minister said that he welcomes new stock transfers. That goes to the heart of the difficulty of SNP housing policy. Its "Firm Foundations" document is built on sand.

In my constituency, council housing stock was transferred in 2002 from the Scottish Borders Council to the Scottish Borders Housing Association. It was the next stock transfer after Berwickshire stock was transferred. The move was opposed tooth and nail by the SNP, which did not just voice opposition, but campaigned consistently against it and continued to oppose the Scottish Borders Housing Association. That was the case until May 2007 when the minister took office—if he is listening. The SNP then said that it fully supports housing associations and new stock transfers; indeed, the minister said in his speech today that he was very happy to see them.

The minister's contribution to the debate this morning was extremely complacent and disingenuous. Again he attacked the previous Government for building only six council houses, which gives the impression that only six affordable homes were built under the previous

Administration. Up until 31 March this year, the previous Lib Dem-Labour Government provided an outturn budget of £8.631 million with 76 units approved in the Borders alone. In 2006-07, the outturn budget was just over £7 million and last year's figures equate to a 200 per cent increase from the year in which I was elected.

I joined the minister when he took delight in opening new social rented homes in Galashiels in my constituency last year. The challenge to his Government today is absolutely clear: it must ensure that the Borders continues to be recognised as an area of particular pressure, as it was when Margaret Curran was Minister for Communities and working with Eildon Housing Association, me and others to stress the particular pressure that the Borders faces. Eildon Housing Association was provided with additional funds by the previous Government to take an innovative land-banking approach, delivering more homes for the same funding. Those were real results from real investment; now there are questions about the future. "Firm Foundations" proposes a regionally centralised lead developer that may not be in the Borders, and which would focus on an Edinburgh and Lothians approach away from the Borders.

The Government has revised its rental assumptions—assuming higher rental income from tenants—and it is top-slicing that from HAG, which will mean that fewer homes will be built. The revised guidance for local housing strategies has been horrendously delayed and there is huge concern locally that resource allocation for housing grant will not take into consideration population growth and rurality in the Borders.

We need less complacency and more action from the minister. He has on his desk the allocation drafts for 2008-09—housing associations and councils need to know that information. The minister refuses to give a figure for how many houses he expects to be built, but he knows exactly what the figure is. He should tell Parliament the figure—he should not be as disingenuous as we have heard him being this morning.

10:06

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): I have been an MSP for quite a number of years, but I have rarely heard a debate in which the speeches of SNP back benchers lacked evidence and argument as much as they have in this debate. The minister finds himself not so much on "Firm Foundations" as on shaky foundations, because the housing sector today faces serious challenges.

This welcome Conservative debate on housing follows quickly an earlier Labour housing debate, a

number of questions from which remain outstanding. Certain requirements go with holding ministerial office: you have an absolute requirement to answer questions from the Parliament; it is a principle of democracy that you answer Parliament's questions. I hope that you will do that in your summation.

As Jeremy Purvis pointed out, there are a number of issues around your lack of decision making. You will know that the housing sector is deeply concerned about it. When will housing association grants actually be allocated? You said in your speech that Nicola Sturgeon would announce them very soon. Can we be told what "very soon" actually means in SNP-land? You know that some people are worried about real cuts, and you need to address that immediately.

There is, too, the issue of the lack of accountability. On 20 March, Parliament agreed a motion that required you to come back to Parliament and answer on where the first-time buyers grant—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to become a bit more non-you.

Margaret Curran: I apologise. I will repeat what I said. The minister was required to come back to Parliament and tell members what was happening with the first-time buyers grant. Where is that statement, minister? You should do that straightaway.

There is also a lack of transparency. Where is the first-time buyers grant? It is reasonable, particularly in the current housing market, that first-time buyers, who I presume voted SNP because of that wonderful offer, should be told what is happening to that grant. If it was such a central part of your policy for the election, where is it now? If you cannot tell us, it is reasonable to conclude that it was just an election con. You still refuse to answer those questions.

Over the weekend and today, we heard the great announcement of £25 million, as if it were somehow the answer to Scotland's housing problems. We have learned quite a bit about the SNP today. When we asked for a precise figure on how many houses that sum will translate into, the answer was

"a hell of a lot".

It is no wonder that some of the Government's figures go awry, if that is its idea of precision.

We have tried to model how many houses would result from £25 million. If the minister wishes to challenge this model and contradict me, he can do so. We estimate that about 100 new houses would result from £25 million. We have SNP back benchers telling us that the right to buy is at an end, and about the terrible onslaught on housing

and the crisis that the right to buy has created. The sum total of the great masterstroke from the SNP is that the £25 million will result in 100 new houses. To the SNP, those 100 houses represent a fantastic policy, but the SNP denies recognition of the 36,000 houses that were built by the previous Labour-Lib Dem Administration. In addition, it is an insult to the housing association sector not to acknowledge its contribution. You can give warm words in your speech, minister, but if you deny recognition of that sector's record and deny it the means to continue that record—the housing associations think that is what you are doing—it will take that insult seriously.

We have had no answer on the first-time buyers grant—we have a lack of decision making from the minister. We have had no plan of investment for those who are in greatest housing need, and no answer on stock transfer. One year on, it is a grim record: no vision and no grasp of the strategic issues that the housing sector faces. Robert Brown was right to say that housing is one of your weakest areas, minister. Your complacency is deeply shocking. I tell you: you have got serious answers to face.

10:10

Stewart Maxwell: I tell you this, boy—sorry, Presiding Officer.

It is particularly ironic, I feel, that we are having this interesting debate today of all days. Today, of course, is 1 May, which is May day—and international workers day. The Labour Party in Scotland has decided to recognise the day by fighting tooth and nail in defence of the arch-Thatcherite policy of selling off council houses. Generations of comrades must be proud as they watch Wendy Alexander's new socialist party stand shoulder to shoulder with the Tory party in defence of Thatcherism. However, before Labour decided to come to the aid of the Tories in opposing the end of the right to buy for new-build social housing, perhaps it should have checked who it was up against.

On one side of the argument are those who oppose abolition of the right to buy for new-build social housing, such as the Labour Party, the Tory party and—actually, that is about it. That is the complete list of those who oppose the policy. However, in favour of our policy to abolish the right to buy for new-build social housing, we have local authorities, big and small housing associations, housing lobby groups such as Shelter and housing commentators. In fact, the whole housing sector approves our policy. It even won support from a certain Wendy Alexander. *The Herald* of 22 October 2007 stated:

"The abolition of the right to buy council houses came a step closer yesterday after ... Wendy Alexander indicated

that her party would look favourably on proposals by the government.”

I do not know whether the Labour Party is coming or going on this issue. Unfortunately, neither does it.

Robert Brown asked how much will be spent on housing over the spending review period. Perhaps the member should have checked the budget. Over £1.5 billion will be spent over the spending review period, which is an increase of £131 million on the previous Executive's plans. That is a 19 per cent increase over the next spending review period versus the 2005-08 plans. It is clear that much more money is going into housing over the next three years.

I thought the speeches of Stuart McMillan and Jamie Hepburn were good. They clearly expressed the supply problems that we face. David McLetchie and others said that the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory policies on housing are a huge success, but still talked about the crisis that housing faces, particularly the social rented housing sector. Their policies cannot have been a huge success, given the housing crisis that we face today. It is clearly the case that this is a huge inherited problem, which we now have to face up to.

David Whitton talked about the homelessness crisis in his area—what a success his party's policies have been over the past few years. He talked about “dodgy” documents. I will take no lessons from the Labour Party on dodgy documents. We know fine well about dodgy documents from the Labour Party; it has had far too many over the past few years.

Margaret Curran talked about the fact that there has been no statement to Parliament. As I said, there will be a statement to Parliament in the coming weeks. We have said that that will happen, and we will ensure that it will happen. On the discussion about the £25 million for new council houses, that is but one policy on housing—it is not the only policy on housing—and it has been widely welcomed. We are in negotiation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities as to exactly how that policy will be implemented.

Both Johann Lamont and David Whitton talked about the dire, desperate, doom-and-gloom housing situation and the collapse of the housing association movement—I think that that sums up their views on our proposals. However, just this week, the Scottish Housing Regulator's financial digest published the fact that housing associations have cash deposits in excess of £300 million, and a gross surplus of £113 million. There is clearly not a crisis in, or a collapse of, the housing association sector.

Jeremy Purvis said that our proposal will cause rents to rise. It will not, because the changes that

we are making reflect exactly the performance that housing associations have reported to the Government. Therefore, our proposals are exactly in line with those of the housing associations.

Cathie Craigie welcomed the fact that the Conservative party had chosen to use its debating time to discuss housing and claimed that the Government had not had any housing debates. I gently point out to her that we had a housing debate in the Parliament in the first month of our government, in June 2007. Our second housing debate took place in October 2007. We will have another debate or statement very soon. We will have had three housing debates in our first year in government, whereas Labour failed to have a housing debate in the Parliament in its first year in government either in 1999 or 2003.

I ask members to support the amendment in my name. Clearly, we need to tackle the problem that we inherited from the frankly disgraceful Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive.

10:15

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)
(Con): During the first parliamentary session, the SNP's Christine Grahame and I were taken on a tour of Glasgow's worst housing areas by the *Evening Times*. The vast difference between the desperately deprived council areas and the improved areas that had been taken over by housing associations was glaringly obvious to both of us. Why, in that case, is the SNP returning to the failed policies of the past in encouraging councils to build? Councils have proved themselves to be poor landlords. We would prefer housing associations to be given the funding to build new social housing for rent in Scotland. Furthermore, we maintain that the SNP must recommence housing stock transfer in Scotland so that councils can take advantage of Treasury money to eliminate Scotland's £2.2 billion housing debt. What is the point of £25 million over three years compared to that?

As my colleagues David McLetchie and Mary Scanlon said, the Scottish Conservatives have real concerns about SNP ministers' rhetoric on council house building. Where is the proof that local authorities are best placed to build houses for rent at the most competitive prices and in successful mixed communities? Do ministers not realise that housing associations the length and breadth of Scotland have expertise and experience and are ready and willing to deliver effectively affordable housing in diverse communities? Should not the priority be to support our housing associations? Having spoken to many people at the National Landlords Association reception in Parliament last night, I know that the desire of the private sector to help with affordable

housing is plain to see. Why does the Government not engage more with the private sector to come up with a solution?

On the right to buy, the Scottish Conservatives will always be proud that our policy transformed the lives of tens of thousands of ordinary people in Scotland, providing them with the best advance ever in their lifetimes. The SNP's proposal to curtail the right to buy is a clear indication of its dogmatic anti-aspirational agenda. We will resist that wherever we can. Why should a new generation of social tenants be denied the right that is enjoyed by current tenants?

In a recent written answer, the Minister for Communities and Sport revealed to me that Scotland has more than 100,000 properties that are classified as vacant dwellings or second homes. Of those, housing experts suggest that 87,000 could be empty properties, which equates to 3.8 per cent of our housing stock and is a higher rate than the UK average. Many of those empty properties are in rural areas. All members would surely agree that bringing back into use even a small percentage of those redundant or dilapidated houses would, at the very least, ease the affordable housing crisis that many of our communities face.

The Government has said that the rural empty properties grant scheme is one way of tackling the number of empty properties, yet another recent answer from the Minister for Communities and Sport confirmed that only 101 properties in the whole of Scotland have benefited from the grant since 1998-99. That is a drop in the ocean. The Scottish Conservatives are positive about the rural empty properties grant scheme, but the scheme obviously needs to be improved if it is to have a better impact.

Along with the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, we are also positive about the rural homes for rent grant scheme, which recognises—as we have long argued—that the private sector is well placed to provide affordable rented housing. However, the scheme is small in scale and will provide only 100 properties for rent by 2011. Again, on behalf of our hard-pressed rural communities, we look for more from this new Government.

As I have, members will have received a useful briefing today from Leonard Cheshire Disability. One in four households includes a person with a disability, and there are real concerns about the availability of social housing for young disabled people. Can the minister say what his Government will do to involve disabled people in the planning, design and management of homes in the future?

The Scottish Conservatives will continue to press the Government to take fundamental action

to ease Scotland's affordable housing crisis. That means providing effective reform of the planning system, addressing development constraints, working with housing associations, utilising effective shared-equity schemes and—crucially—working closely with the private sector to create a dynamic rented sector.

I agree with Robert Brown that "Firm Foundations" contains serious flaws. As David McLetchie rightly said, £25 million over three years is peanuts. What could housing associations do with £2 billion, though? We continue to support whole-heartedly the transfer of local government housing to communities. Such housing should be run by locally accountable housing associations, co-operatives and companies—a process that was started by our party. We believe that that makes housing officials more accountable to tenants and provides more local management. The SNP seems to have a policy-free zone on stock transfer. Perhaps the minister can enlighten us on what its policies actually are.

While he is at it, perhaps the minister can confirm that the first-time buyers grant that the SNP pledged while in election mode—and which most people in the housing sector believe would be an inflationary measure—will be scrapped, if it has not been scrapped already. Will he also consider scrapping the single seller survey, which is set to become another unnecessary hurdle for the housing sector despite the disastrous pilot scheme? The single seller survey will be costly and will lead to multiple surveys, so it will not even achieve its intended result. That is not just my opinion but the opinion of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, whose representatives I met only the day before yesterday.

Food Security

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1803, in the name of John Scott, on food security.

10:22

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer and I refer members to the register of interests for my other farming-related interests.

In considering food security, it is important that we analyse how we have reached the current position of emerging global food shortages before we look at what can be done to address the problem. The second world war is perhaps the best starting point. As we all know, Britain was almost starved out of the war by German U-boats, so “Dig for victory” and rationing became the order of the day. In the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, huge increases in food production were achieved in Scotland and throughout Europe, as politicians of all countries feared that Europe would have insufficient food to feed its then 350 million population. Milk lakes, butter mountains and wine lakes followed in the mid-1980s, which resulted in common agricultural policy reforms being introduced. Essentially, the reforms reined in food production by encouraging alternative land use policies, particularly environmental enhancement.

From 1988 to 2008, we have had, in an almost biblical way, 20 years of plenty, but the situation has now changed. Once again, the spectre of food shortages has emerged, with world grain prices rising by 60 per cent in the first three months of this year and China buying land in Russia and South America to feed its growing population.

The problems that we are contemplating today have come about for three main reasons. First, oil has—unexpectedly—reached \$120 a barrel, largely because of the growing awareness that oil is a finite resource and because of concerns about peak oil. That has encouraged farmers worldwide to grow crops for biofuel production on land that was previously used for food. In Brazil, for example, 90 per cent of new cars can now run on ethanol.

Secondly—and, again, unexpectedly—global warming is taking more and more land out of agricultural production both north and south of the equator. Australia has suffered a seven-year drought and much of southern Europe and north Africa is a virtual desert in terms of food production. Sea levels are beginning to rise, too. Although no one can tell us by how much they will rise, we know that a 1m rise in sea levels—a distinct possibility within the next 100 years—

would reduce by a third the land that is available to feed an already hungry world.

The third reason for the problems that we are examining today is population growth and rising standards of living. Man has been the most successful species since the dinosaurs, and the world’s population is heading towards 9 billion by 2050. Increased living standards, especially in China, India and Japan, have resulted in those countries moving to western styles of food consumption, based on consumption of meat rather than rice or grain. That has put still more pressure on grain growing, so that animals can be raised for human food consumption.

The perfect storm is emerging, due to rising oil prices, global warming and world population growth. Today, we must acknowledge those facts and start to consider what we in Scotland can do to help to feed a daily more hungry world.

It is self-evident that we must encourage our farmers to do all that they can to grow more food. That will have to be done in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive way, but—to use a metaphor—growing two blades of grass where one grew before will again become important in food protection terms, as now Europe must not only start to feed itself for the first time but feed other, less favoured, parts of the world as well. Europe, the United Kingdom and Scotland are not even self-sufficient in food production at the moment.

Increasing production will require investment in research and development, to increase crop and animal production. Research into enhanced food techniques, some of which could take place in Scotland, will need to be carried out on behalf of developing countries, as they have neither the expertise nor the finance to carry out research to bring into production the huge swathes of potentially fertile land in, for example, sub-Saharan Africa. Land that is serviced by rainfall will become even more precious and water storage and irrigation systems will need to be further developed in Europe. That is the case even here in Britain, especially in England, as predictions suggest that Kent will have little agricultural value in 25 years’ time unless irrigation systems are in place by then.

In Scotland, we can all help by wasting less food. At the moment, 40 per cent of food that is put into the supply chain is wasted, lost or thrown out unused, with 30 per cent of our shopping baskets thrown out weekly and 10 per cent of food damaged or lost before it reaches the point of sale. It is vital that we play our part in avoiding food shortages by addressing food wastage in the home and in the catering trade.

“Dig for victory”, the slogan that encapsulated our wartime need to maximise food production from our own resources, may again become the order of the day. In our back gardens and allotments, recycling domestic waste and grass cuttings into growing vegetables could again become important, as food price inflation reaches almost 12 per cent. On average, families are paying £750 more this year for their staple diet than they paid last year. Conservatives have long advocated a policy of buy local, eat local where reasonably practical, to increase sustainable and socially responsible food consumption. Greater public procurement of local food and drink must be encouraged, as must greater collaboration in the development of the food supply chain. Agricultural support systems, which were recently agreed until 2013, may have to be revisited before then, as the Scotland rural development programme already looks out of date and is the product of thinking that did not anticipate oil prices of \$120 a barrel, peak oil or the consequences of global warming.

The issues to be addressed are now stark. I have given the Conservative party's thoughts on how we might proceed. I hope that others will bring ideas and suggestions to the debate to help to inform the Government on how we in Scotland can best move forward from here. As Annabel Goldie announced yesterday, Scottish Conservatives will work with colleagues in the UK and Europe to produce a report over the summer that will try to chart the way forward. We will also be happy to work with other parties to find the right sustainable solutions. In that spirit of co-operation, we will be happy to accept the amendments that have been lodged by other parties today, to allow the Parliament to speak with one voice on this matter.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its concern at the potential for global food shortages; notes the recent cost increases in many basic food products here in Scotland, with food price inflation now exceeding 6%; further notes that many developing countries are experiencing growing social unrest as a result of food pressures, and calls on the Scottish Government, Her Majesty's Government, the European Union and other relevant bodies to work closely, and with the appropriate urgency, to seek solutions.

10:29

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I thank the Conservatives—not something that members will hear me say often—for bringing this important debate to the chamber this morning. John Scott set out his stall well, especially in relation to local food procurement.

In recent months, food security has raced up the political and public agenda here in the UK, but for many people in the world it has been an all too familiar struggle for far too long. There are no easy

solutions, but it is key that we ensure that farming across the world is sustainable and able to meet the challenges of the coming decades.

Our amendment focuses on two issues: the reality of climate change and the rush to biofuels. Fluctuation of the temperature of both land and sea and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events will have a pronounced impact on food supply. Here in Scotland, we need to assess how our crops and livestock will cope with those changes and how we can adapt our farming processes to deal with the challenges that we undoubtedly face. New animal diseases are arriving on our shores, and we need robust mechanisms to deal with those. Farming is also a key part of the process of reducing our emissions. How can we use technological change to our advantage? Can we use slurry more effectively? Are there on-farm solutions that reduce emissions and can be supported and developed quickly? The CAP has a role to play in facilitating change, which will be achieved through joint working. Will the Minister for Environment indicate what progress has been made and what steps he and his colleagues will take to facilitate change in the coming months?

In the developing world—in countries such as Malawi—we can see just how extreme weather events are impacting on food security. In 2005, I saw at first hand how devastating drought had been to food production in Malawi. This year, the food supplies of many people have been placed at risk by flooding. Malawi contributes little to our emissions, but her people suffer disproportionately. Both here and in countries such as Malawi, food security is intrinsically linked to poverty. The poor in Scotland suffer most from rising food prices, which force them to limit their food intake and to reduce the variety of foods that they eat. In Malawi, it is the poor who face starvation as their crops—their only source of food—are wiped out. Can members really imagine what it would be like not to know where their next meal was coming from, or whether it would ever come?

Tackling climate change is crucial and reducing emissions is paramount, but the consequences for the rest of the world of solutions to those problems must be more thought through than the perverse rush to biofuels has been. I say “perverse” because it is undeniable that biofuels take food out of the mouths of starving people and divert it to be burned in the car engines of the world's richest people. In the words of the United Nations' special rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, that is nothing less than a “crime against humanity”. Are we really prepared to sit back and say to the world's starving millions, “We'll burn your food in our cars while your children die around your feet.” Next year, the amount of corn used for ethanol in

the US is forecast to rise to 114 million tonnes—nearly a third of the projected crop. American cars now burn enough corn to cover all the import needs of 82 nations that are classed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as low-income food-deficit countries. If that is not perverse, I do not know what is.

In many places in the world, food is being priced at the same level of fuel. The fact that increasing quantities of food are being sought by energy markets for biofuels has again pushed up prices for the world's poor. Targets on biofuels were not designed to do that. I welcome Gordon Brown's comments last week in *The Scotsman*. He said:

"Now we know that bio fuels, intended to promote energy independence and combat climate change, are frequently energy inefficient. We need to look closely at the impact on food prices and the environment of different production methods and to ensure we are more selective in our support. If the UK review shows that we need to change our approach, we will also push for change in EU bio fuels targets."

The UK Government has also called on the World Bank to examine the impact of biofuels production on food markets. Those are welcome steps, but we need consistency of approach. I encourage Scottish ministers to play their part in facilitating the change that has been proposed.

Food security is an issue of social justice, both at home and abroad. In the consensual spirit of the debate, I welcome the other amendments that have been lodged. The right to food at a price that people can afford is a basic human right. This debate gives us an opportunity to develop our ideas, but there is no doubt that we will return to the issue in the months ahead. I have pleasure in moving the Labour amendment in my name and urge the chamber to support it at decision time.

I move amendment S3M-1803.1, to insert at end:

"that take account of the growing pressures on agriculture from both climate change and the rush to biofuels".

10:34

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): We are moving from an era of food surplus to one of food shortage. The global population is growing fast. Our farmers and food producers in Scotland are struggling with increases in the price of animal feed, fuel and other raw materials.

The issue is undoubtedly serious and it is commendable that the Scottish Conservatives brought the debate, so it is disappointing that the motion is somewhat banal, to say the least. During the past year, under a minority Administration that is scared to introduce legislation, we have had to

debate some fairly inoffensive Government motions. However, for a party that is supposed to be providing opposition and which claims to harbour ambitions of forming a Government, at Westminster if not in Scotland, to lodge a motion that calls on

"the Scottish Government, Her Majesty's Government, the European Union and other relevant bodies ... to seek solutions",

without offering an indication of what the solutions might be, is hugely disappointing.

John Scott: Mike Rumbles did not listen to my speech.

Mike Rumbles: I am talking about the motion in John Scott's name.

It is no wonder that the Government is not interested in opposing the motion. For that reason, the Liberal Democrats lodged an amendment that adds beef and suggests practical ways forward, to add to the warm words in the Conservative motion.

Members: Where are the Liberals?

Mike Rumbles: The minister should look behind him—where are the Scottish National Party members?

It is clear that the best way to ensure food security in Scotland is by recognising the role that our primary food producers can play in ensuring the long-term capacity and capability of our food supply. We all know that Scottish produce is of the highest quality, but there can be no doubt that there has been a change in eating habits in recent years and we have become used to having whatever we want at any time of year, regardless of where it has been imported from.

Progress has been made on the issue in recent years and I am sure that most of us make a point of buying Scotch beef, for example. However, at a time when our pig industry is facing its toughest challenges, how many of us check the bacon and pork products that we purchase at the supermarket to ensure that they are Scottish and not German, Dutch or Danish imports? In that context, why has the Scottish Government failed to apply to the EU, as the French have done, for assistance for our pig industry after it incurred losses as a result of the foot-and-mouth debacle? That failure to act is simply a disgrace.

We can all do our bit by buying Scottish produce, but the Scottish Government has a role to play. Our amendment calls on the Scottish Government to encourage the development of local supply chains through public procurement. The Scottish ministers could and should be taking action—I am sure that members remember the word "action"—to encourage public sector bodies

to take the lead by purchasing local, seasonal food. Instead, ministers have carried out yet another exhaustive round of discussions. Scotland has some of the best food in the world, so ministers need to make sure that more of it ends up on Scottish plates. However, if that is to happen, ministers need to give a lead and take action.

There is nothing in the Conservative motion with which anyone could disagree, but we desperately need specifics, which is what the Liberal Democrat amendment provides.

Karen Gillon: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: I do not have time, unfortunately.

Reducing the regulatory burden on our farmers would help. Do members remember the SNP's commitment to take away a regulation every time it imposed a new one? I hope that the minister is listening. Every month, the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee creaks under the weight of the new regulatory burdens that the current Administration imposes on our farmers but, despite their promises, ministers—in particular the Minister for Environment—have failed to tell us that even one regulation has been removed. Ministers have not done what they promised to do.

By taking steps to ensure that Scotland's primary food producers are recognised and assisted, we can guarantee food security for Scotland, which will assist efforts to prevent global food shortages. The first steps towards achieving that must be taken by the Scottish Government. I therefore urge the Parliament to support the Liberal Democrat amendment, which makes clear to the Scottish Government exactly what we expect it to do.

I move amendment S3M-1803.2, to insert at end:

"recognises the role of Scotland's primary producers in ensuring the long-term capacity and capability of our food supply; and further calls on the Scottish Government to encourage the development of local supply chains through public procurement, address the imbalance in power between the big supermarkets and our food producers, reduce the regulatory burden on farmers, and ensure that our primary producers operate on a level playing field with foreign competitors."

10:39

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a member of the Soil Association.

I thank John Scott for bringing the debate and I thank Karen Gillon for a sensible speech from the Labour benches. As for Mike Rumbles, who's like him?

It should come as no surprise that the Greens' amendment acknowledges the growing pressure from peak oil—a concept that some people still find difficult to comprehend. The head of the Oil Depletion Analysis Centre, Dr Colin Campbell, who is a former vice-president of several major oil companies, including BP and Shell, said that the concept of peak oil is quite straightforward and is easy for any beer drinker to understand. He said:

"The glass starts full and ends empty and the faster you drink it the quicker it's gone."

Scotland's oil supplies from the North Sea peaked in 1999 and the global supply is expected to peak at some point during the next few years. Estimates vary, but the French Government's conservative view is that global oil output will start to decline in five years' time. In the meantime, our society's thirst for oil continues—we keep using the stuff like there's no tomorrow. Government's responsibility is to prepare for the age after oil: to build an independence from oil and not to rely on independence built on oil.

Environmentalists and geologists have been sounding the alarm on peak oil for some time, but there is growing consensus among economists and capitalists that the global production of crude oil will soon reach a maximum rate, or peak, and then decline. Despite warnings from geologists and bankers, no Government of any party has made serious preparations for a life after oil.

The consequences of peak oil and of our failure to prepare for it are wide ranging. One of the biggest impacts will be on our food production and distribution. Food security and energy security are inextricably linked. On food commodities, the United States investment bank Goldman Sachs warned this year of rising energy costs and the centrality of agriculture in the equation. The rush to biofuels, which Karen Gillon talked about and which is mentioned in the Labour amendment, is a reaction to peak oil that risks aggravating food shortages as well as accelerating climate change.

Scotland's food industry is overreliant on oil. Our only viable future is a low-carbon one, which means that we must rethink and relocate our lives. We must think about how we produce and consume our food. Driving miles to the supermarket to buy food that has been transported from around the world on oil-based transport will have to be rethought. Farming that relies heavily on fertilisers and mechanical processes will have to be rethought. Overpacking our food and carrying it home in plastic bags will have to end. Modern agriculture has been described as

"the use of land to convert oil into food".

One way or another, that will have to change.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): No more bananas.

Robin Harper: If we are to avert the worst impacts of climate change and peak oil, we must now gear up our economies to make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

I am not sounding the death knell for the quality or enjoyment of our lives—despite mutterings from the Conservative benches. Indeed, what I am talking about is quite the reverse. It is about grasping the opportunity and acknowledging how much innovative work needs to be done.

Communities throughout Scotland are putting the Government to shame. Transition towns are emerging throughout Scotland to face up to the reality of peak oil and what that means. The challenge for us all is to respond by making Scotland the world's first transition nation, to embrace the benefits and to avoid the appalling consequences of the current approach. Economics as if there is no tomorrow risks fulfilling that prophecy.

I move amendment S3M-1803.1.1, to insert at end:

“, as well as the peak in oil production.”

10:44

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): I am standing in for Richard Lochhead. I am sure that the whole chamber will join me in offering congratulations to Richard and Fiona on the arrival of their son, Fraser, who was born on Monday. *[Applause.]*

The Government congratulates John Scott on bringing the motion to the chamber, which we will support at decision time. We will also support the amendments, even the Liberal Democrat amendment, despite the very hard work that Mike Rumbles put into trying to stop members voting for it.

We welcome the debate, which is an important debate on an important subject. At the outset, I will quote the great Hamish Henderson, who, in “The Freedom Come All Ye”, said:

“So come all ye at hame wi’ Freedom
Never heed whit the hoodies croak for doom
In yer hoose a’ the bairns o’ Adam
Can find breid, barley-bree an painted room”.

In the Scots mind, the connection is made between freedom and food, and between our domestic concern for food and our international concerns. I will explore that in what I say today. Scots are citizens of the world. We care deeply about what happens elsewhere and it is absolutely right that we should discuss how to respond to the emerging global food crisis—how we should do that at home and what we can contribute internationally. First and foremost, supporting and developing our food production capacity is in our

national interest. It helps to build a sustainable economy; we must put our intellect, entrepreneurial skills and great experience to good use to cultivate better and more environmentally friendly ways of producing food for domestic and international consumption.

I am conscious that no one in the chamber has seriously experienced hunger or famine. However, we should never take food for granted. That is why the Scottish Government is developing the nation's first ever strategic food policy to ensure that we have a fully joined-up, consistent and coherent approach to food production and consumption. We set out that vision for food in Scotland in the national food discussion paper, “Choosing the Right Ingredients: The Future for Food in Scotland”. As we say in the paper, food should make the nation healthier, wealthier and smarter, with production making communities stronger and consumption respecting the local and global environment.

The discussion period on the paper lasted from January until last Friday. The paper got a very strong response and we have a lot of interesting material to consider. It is a pity that Mike Rumbles chose to belittle that in what he said today. There was an amazing level of engagement and we will carry that forward as we develop the policy. We are reflecting carefully on what we have heard—which is what Governments should do—but we are also concerned to take action—

Mike Rumbles: Ha!

Michael Russell: It is distressing to hear Mr Rumbles laugh at the concept of Government action. Of course, he is the member of a party that was in government for eight years and did nothing. Fortunately, we have learned that lesson.

We need to look at both domestic and international concerns. As John Scott said, the context has changed since last year. Food security is now firmly on the agenda. If anyone doubts that, the fact that annual food price inflation was 6.6 per cent in January 2008, compared with a rate of 4.1 per cent for all items, should give them cause for concern.

In that context, it is important that the Government should help people by ensuring that they retain as much of their own money in their own pockets. We are doing that, for example, by freezing the unfair council tax, reducing prescription charges and doing much else. Of course, the current increase in food prices is due to a range of factors including higher consumption and low stock levels, adverse weather effects, climate change and rising energy costs. However, if people are to respond to shortages, they need to have the resources to meet them. Higher market prices present signals to farmers to increase

production and to consumers to switch to less expensive substitutes and to think about growing more of their own food. I am pleased to say that, on Sunday, I was planting potatoes and onions in my garden. I hope that others are doing the same.

Increased wealth and growing populations in developing nations have led to increasing global demand, including for food. Climate change is impacting on crops and will continue to do so. We have to take concrete steps to help those in the poorest countries. There are a number of things that we are doing, but we have to do more to improve trade, help developing countries to increase agricultural production, provide appropriate technology and research, consider the appropriateness of biofuels—there is now a debate on that—and provide the necessary financial support.

Above all, we have to work together. Let the whole chamber send out that message today, despite the divisiveness of one member—I hope that his is the last divisive contribution. Let us put our heads together and work out how to solve this problem at home and abroad.

10:49

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the debate. I hope that the idea of food security for this country can be translated on to a global scale, as our food security cannot be premised on insecurity for people across the globe. How we achieve that has to be part of the national food policy conversation. I will dwell on some of these issues in my speech, given that they fit into the subject matter of the Conservatives' motion. I agree that, at the outset, we are looking for action at the Scottish, British and European levels, but we have to go on to challenge the World Trade Organization. We have to ask about the right of people to have a fair deal for their produce rather than free trade in food.

If we are debating national food policy—as the minister said, there has been an enormous response to the paper—we must ask, as NFU Scotland did, “What is on your plate?” The answer to that, above all, will determine whether we are doing as much as possible to feed ourselves in this country, both in terms of both quantity and quality. In that respect, I am glad that the Government is supporting more local food production and, in particular, the public procurement of more locally sourced food. That lead will encourage more people to grow more food locally and to have it bought in a secure market.

The Government has held a supermarket summit that allowed discussion with the large combines on the issue of local food sourcing. We

saw an example of that in the Parliament last week. Fundamentally, we have to tackle the issue of labelling and the way in which supermarkets display their goods. Although Scottish meat may be well labelled as such on supermarket shelves, it is laid out next to the Brazilian stuff. If people are poor and on a tight budget, they will always go for the cheaper product. That cannot be allowed to be the basis on which a Scottish food policy is built. Our engagement with the supermarkets has to include dealing with the issue of labelling. We have to have the statutory controls to ensure that labelling requirements enjoy the kind of backing that will make the supermarkets come to heel.

The NFU wants a European model of agriculture to continue after 2013. In the debate on the national food policy, we should define what that model will be. As I have hinted, the kind of food security that we want, with more local production, has to take account of the ways in which we produce our food. I will therefore have to focus on biofuels. We have heard the arguments on this displacement crop. As Oxfam has pointed out in its report “Bio-fuelling Poverty”, once people lose their land to the biofuel producers, they lose their livelihood. Oxfam says:

“Many end up in slums in search of work, others will fall into migratory labour patterns, while some will be forced to take jobs on the very plantations which displaced them and where labour standards can be horrific.”

That is the downside of biofuels. Scotland's biofuel capacity from oil-seed rape could instead produce cattle cake; it could become a local source of animal feed and the like. We have to build that into the policy. I ask members to ensure that, when we come together, we base our efforts on

“Maintaining the diversity of the animals bred and plants grown.”

The principle that

“For both historic and economic reasons we must preserve the biodiversity of the land”

should be at the root of any food policy. It should be applied not only in this country but across the world.

10:53

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Like others, I welcome the debate and the fact that John Scott chose to promote this subject. I congratulate him on his thoughtful speech. As Karen Gillon said, the issue is racing up the political agenda. It is good that the Parliament is addressing it in the comparatively early days of the debate on the subject in Scotland.

We tend to take our food for granted. We go to the supermarket or shop and it is there on the

shelves, waiting for us to purchase it. When we run out of food, we return to the supermarket and—lo and behold—as if by magic, the shelves have been restocked. As a society, we understand very little about how food gets on to the shelves or where it comes from. It is a scary thought indeed that, one day, we could go to the supermarket or shop and find that there is not enough food on the shelves or that the food on display is above the price that most of us can reasonably afford.

More than any other generation, this generation is far removed from an understanding of how food is produced. Nowadays, virtually no one is self-sufficient in food; no locality in this country, or in Europe, is self-sufficient in food. In part, today's debate is about ensuring that when we go to supermarkets and shops in future there will be food at prices that we can afford and that food will be locally available wherever we happen to live. It is about highlighting the potential risks to the cosy existence that we take for granted; it is not about advocating that we all go for "The Good Life" style of living, although moving in that direction might not be a bad thing.

It is important to take policy initiatives that will help to combat the big changes that are taking place in the world. As Karen Gillon said, the developing world understands that far better than we do. It has always faced food shortages. I do not want to repeat the good points that Karen Gillon made, but around the world we are seeing massive changes and massive challenges to all that we have previously taken for granted. There are food riots not only in undeveloped countries but in comparatively developed countries. There are riots because of shortages, but also because of the price of certain commodities. There is also an increase in the number of failing harvests around the world. John Scott rightly said that the big drought in Australia is having an impact worldwide. Climate change is contributing to the problem and grain and cereal production is falling, so shortages are emerging, which is leading to price rises around the globe.

Other members have referred to some of the changes in world agriculture. Rob Gibson mentioned that, in large part, biofuels are driving the big series of changes that are taking place. More land is being used for crops for fuel rather than for food. Potentially, biofuel crops reach a higher price than food crops, because the rise in oil prices means that the price for crops for biofuels is also rising. If farmers get a better price for that than for food crops, that is what they will grow. Therefore, more people are moving out of food production, the problem is compounded and we are in a cycle of difficulty. It is a complex international policy issue, but our domestic policy needs to take it into account. Not so long ago, we had land in set-aside because of the surpluses in

Europe. We thought that we could build on that land, but we must rethink that policy.

We set targets for biofuels and I am glad to say that Gordon Brown is talking about rethinking that, as we must keep people in food production. Notwithstanding the fact that I did not agree with the tone in which Mike Rumbles presented the case, the pig industry is a classic example of a Scottish industry that is suffering because of world trends. I hope that we can do more about that.

That all points in the direction of us doing much more locally to produce food, which plays into the Government's strategy on local food—I wish it well in that and I hope that it goes further than it has so far planned to do. We must think about how we produce locally more effectively in Scotland. We must also think about how we engage people to address household poverty and food poverty, and how we encourage people to cook more in their own homes, think more about local food and search for the answers to the profound questions that face our whole world society.

10:58

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): In the five years that I have been a member of this Parliament, awareness of the issues that we must face up to in order to achieve a sustainable future for the world in which we live has grown rapidly.

We have begun to accept the need to tackle the effects of climate change, we are beginning to realise that fossil fuels are a finite resource and we are waking up to the fact that although the absolute level of food production around the globe is still rising, the world's population is increasing faster, which is leading to real concern about food security. We now have a global problem that can be overcome only by co-operation among Governments and other relevant bodies, as John Scott's motion proposes.

In four minutes it is impossible to deal with all the complexities surrounding food security, so I intend to focus on our local situation. We must face up to the fact that food is becoming more expensive and that we are significantly less self-sufficient than we were a decade ago. Coupled with that, we are constantly reminded that the health of our nation is being compromised by an increasing incidence of obesity, with the resultant problems of conditions such as type 2 diabetes, which now affect people in younger age groups.

I am old enough to remember the rationing of food just after the second world war. There was little or no imported food, vegetables were locally grown and available only in season and there was little choice in the shops. Mangoes and pineapples were virtually unheard of, I was married by the

time I ate an avocado and grapes and bananas were almost luxury items.

I was fortunate, because my father was a keen gardener with an allotment, so we had a variety of home-grown vegetables that were unknown to many of my contemporaries. Overall, we had a healthy, if basic, diet and we had few problems with obesity.

By the 1970s, we had got used to a wide choice of cheap imported food, with fruit and vegetables available all year round. Since then, home cooking has increasingly been replaced by ready-prepared meals, which are available in abundance in the supermarkets, are convenient and are relatively cheap, but that situation cannot continue indefinitely. In recent years, our dairy industry has taken a huge knock and, as has been said, the pig industry is now having major problems because of the high cost of feed. If Mr Rumbles were in the chamber, I would say to him that I look for the Scottish label on pork.

Michael Russell: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. If no member of a party that has an amendment is in the chamber, does the amendment fall?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): No. That is not a point of order.

Michael Russell: I note that no representative of the Liberal Democrats is in the chamber.

Nanette Milne: I attended a meeting yesterday with Scottish road hauliers. They are facing such serious problems because of high fuel prices that a number of them no longer transport livestock or milk. That puts further strain on our agricultural industry and carries the threat of scarcity and high prices for consumers.

As a nation, we are currently wasteful of food. No longer do we see the clean plates expected of my generation when we were young; food is now picked at and thrown away. We could save enormous amounts of money if we bought only the food that we intend to eat, and if we put more effort into preparing food, we might be less likely to throw it out.

The other day I heard the encouraging comment from a garden centre that more people—particularly young people—are buying vegetable seeds and seedlings rather than flowers. There is also a large and increasing demand for allotments, with councils being pressed to make many more sites available, and the farming industry is making efforts to bring children into the countryside to show them where their food comes from. Increasing efforts are also under way to encourage the recycling and composting of food waste. Farmers have an opportunity to get back to their main interest, which is growing food. They

will need Government help with reduced regulation, better food labelling and the achievement of realistic prices at the farm gate, but the potential is there. We must also give people incentives to minimise waste, in the interests of both food security and combating climate change.

Now that food prices are increasing and there is a growing awareness of the need to reduce our carbon footprint, the time is right to promote home-grown food and home cooking and to encourage the already increasing interest in high-quality Scottish produce. That will not solve the global problem, but it would be a small step forward, and it would help our people to become healthier and, indeed, greener.

I fully support John Scott's motion and I hope that the rest of the chamber will too.

11:02

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): At the first Rural Affairs and Environment Committee away day last summer, we discussed, among other matters, the possibility of a food policy inquiry. At the time, it was felt that there was little urgency and that we should get on with more pressing matters. Mike Rumbles was involved in those discussions and I do not recall him arguing differently at the time—he has clearly developed a degree of hindsight. That fact makes his contribution to the debate even more inappropriate—we have all had to learn about this subject. Fast forward to March 2008 and the UK Government's new chief scientific adviser warned us that a food crisis will take hold before climate change. We seem to be in a whole new world of trouble.

There has been no escaping the recent news stories linked to problems with the food supply. Governments are now threatened, which in turn threatens regional and global stability. Hardship is being experienced in much of the developed world, and even on our own doorstep people are beginning to remark on the frequency with which food prices are rising and the effect that that has on the choices that they make.

The issue poses a huge challenge to us all. If the escalating cost of rice has forced a number of countries to limit their exports of that grain, we know that in the near future we, too, will all be paying a great deal more if rice is what we want to eat. I take on board the points made by Robin Harper about that.

We need to address many key issues; I will flag up three of them. The first is biofuels, which a number of members have mentioned. Last year's next best thing is rapidly turning into this year's nightmare as we contemplate the wholesale

switch from food production to fuel production to reduce our reliance on oil—a switch that has led directly to food shortages and higher food prices. To paraphrase one commentator, who has been quoted already, we are now taking out of the mouths of babies in order to keep our cars on the road. There is no finger of blame here: everyone bought into the biofuel idea. We all thought that it was a great idea, but we had not thought through the consequences of an unregulated market and we now know better. We will have to address the problem before even more tracts of good land are put to that use. What do they say about the road to hell? It is time to rethink the targets and what we consider to be a good biofuel and what we do not.

The second topic I will discuss is land use. At a Rural Affairs and Environment Committee-run event on housing last year, I listened to people who knew something about the history of the planning system and understood clearly for the first time that much of it was drawn up in the aftermath of world war two, when food rationing was still in force and there was a strong desire to ensure that agricultural land stayed in agricultural use. It became a mantra that one of the obstacles to house building was that we could not get more land rezoned for housing. However, here we are potentially facing some of the same food security issues that had to be addressed post war, so who now would argue too strongly for removing land from food production? Instead, we should think about increasing domestic food production and how that knocks on to building the number of houses that we need in Scotland. It also has implications for the future of flood management, as we have discussed in the committee.

My third point is about food sufficiency, which Peter Peacock touched on. We will never be self-sufficient in bananas in Scotland, but can we be self-sufficient in some basic foodstuffs? As boring as that might be to contemplate, there may now be an argument for Government establishing levels of food sufficiency and working towards achieving them if that goal has not already been achieved.

It seems appropriate to raise the fact that Perth, in my constituency, is Scotland's first cityslow town, and is now being joined by Linlithgow. All MSPs should encourage that movement in their own towns and villages, and I hope that they will.

11:06

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): It is probably worth going through some of the reasons for the food price increases that are affecting people around the world, not only in Scotland. The first is increased demand for food, which arises partly from population pressures but also due to changing patterns of expectation. Affluence in places such as China is leading to

increased demand for meat and dairy products, which in turn affects grain supplies, because grain is used to feed animals that it was not previously used to feed.

We have climate-change pressures. John Scott mentioned the drought in Australia, which has had a particular effect in that part of the world. However, in many parts of Africa and Latin America, soil erosion and deforestation are affecting the fertility of land, which has an important impact on the amount of food that is produced.

So far, members have not mentioned the amount of speculation that is taking place in commodities. In the past, the financial markets speculated in other things, whether financial products or other types of commodities, such as metals. There is now greatly increased speculation in food, which is driving up prices.

Increased energy costs are a factor. They affect not only farmers but food distributors. The costs of transportation, as well as the costs of production, are increasing.

Finally, there is the drive to biofuels, which has a perverse impact on food security. It is paradoxical that the drive towards biofuels is generated by another security fear: the fear of fuel insecurity. There is a direct substitution. Karen Gillon referred to the huge proportion of US corn and maize that is now being used for biofuels. The bread-basket that fed the world in the hungry years of the 1930s and 1940s is now being used to provide fuel for cars and, in the process, is driving up emissions and exacerbating the pressures that lead to climate change. That is also happening in Britain: wheat that would have been exported from Britain is now being converted for use in biofuels.

Countries such as Brazil and Indonesia—huge countries with massive populations and a significant proportion of the world's forest—are engaged in massive deforestation, which is also associated with increased use of biofuels such as ethanol. There, and in places such as South Africa—countries where there is a food shortage—crops are being planted specifically for biofuels. The expansion of sugar cane production and the planting of jatropha—a tree that grows in poor soil and arid conditions—in southern Africa will substitute for food production.

The food supply is being undermined and it is right that we reconsider the current target for biofuels. The Department for Transport is reviewing the renewable transport fuels obligation, which is currently at 5 per cent and which the European Community wants to double to 10 per cent by 2020. I am not against biofuels in principle; the issue is their sustainability. We need to find a sensible approach to developing biofuels

production, where that is appropriate and sustainable, and food production. We need to consider the indirect impacts of a drive towards biofuels on food availability as well as fuel availability.

We are faced with two perils: food insecurity and fuel insecurity. We need to ensure that we have a balanced approach to both.

11:11

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): I welcome the debate and congratulate John Scott on securing it.

One question can make even the most seasoned politician squirm in their seat. It is the moment at the end of an interview when the journalist, with a glimmer in his or her eye, leans over and cheekily asks, "One last question: how much is a pint of milk?" Every member present is perfectly aware not only that the average price of milk is around 40p a pint in our local supermarkets, but that it has gone up by around 31 per cent. As we all know, a broad range of wider macroeconomic and social consequences is attached to that rise.

I would prefer that we were back in the days when whether one knew the price of milk was a frivolous journalistic question rather than the serious question that it is now. Now, especially for people on lower incomes, the question is foremost in people's minds locally and around the world.

As we have heard, put simply, the global market is failing and prices are soaring. For example, the average world price of rice has gone up by 217 per cent. That is one thing for those of us who enjoy curry dishes—as at least one or two of the members present do—but it is quite another for the more than 500 million people in India and China who, despite their countries' economic growth, according to the United Nations still live on the equivalent of \$1 a day.

We have gone over the causes already: the effect of high oil prices on fertility and transportation; droughts and poor harvests that may or may not be related to climate change; the growing middle classes in some parts of the world spending money on larger and richer diets, particularly in China, where there is a growing demand for meat products, which, of course, consumes other basic products; and the poor implementation of biofuel expansion, which draws on land that was previously used for farming. It is a sobering fact—to add to the other facts—that the amount of maize needed to fill one tank of petrol is the same as the average African eats in a year.

There are lessons from history that many Governments so far have not learned. The famines of the 1980s and the debt crisis that

began then—which, despite the fantastic efforts of the make poverty history movement, still plagues most of the developing world—all stem from a first great wave of movement in agriculture away from growing food towards growing cash crops such as cotton or coffee. The idea was that those luxuries would raise more money, which would allow the farmers to buy food with room to spare. Of course, the price of coffee went down and the price of grain went up; and the poor stayed poor and hungry.

I am glad that the Parliament is discussing the matter. It is as weighty and immediate as it is domestic and global. I am pleased to see that we have been remarkably consensual—in fact, almost unanimous—in the face of it. We must also look beyond the causes and determine what can be done. Anyone who has seen the television pictures of the situation in Haiti, where starvation is now a real prospect for many people who, although poor, until now largely were able to buy the food that they needed to sustain themselves, knows that we all have a responsibility to consider it.

Even here in Scotland, we must think about the plight of a pensioner in Alloa who squints at the shelves to find something that she can afford. The situation exists in our local communities, so we must think of solutions, which is not easy. I agree with the Conservatives that we require Government action at all levels, including in Europe, which I am pleased to see mentioned in the Tory motion. Such action must include influencing a system that has been governed and failed by a free market.

John Scott presented a compelling picture of what he eloquently described as the coming of a perfect storm, and he asked for ideas. Where necessary, we should allow Government intervention. We should increase aid to developing countries to allow them to improve their infrastructure and production. In my view, we should oppose the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization when they make unreasonable demands for poorer countries to cut their subsidies while saying that the richer ones may continue with their own. We should not allow the problems of growing first-generation biofuels to make us abandon all renewable and alternative fuels. In my view, climate change is likely to cause more shortages. If it does not, the ever-increasing price of oil definitely will, as we heard from Robin Harper.

We must support local producers, as I recently did in my constituency, in conjunction with the *Alloa & Hillfoots Advertiser*, when we highlighted local suppliers to the local population. People are willing to support local retailers, but it helps to make them aware of where the local suppliers are.

There are public concerns about the role of supermarkets, and I am delighted that the First Minister recently met representatives of supermarkets operating in Scotland to discuss the various issues.

There are some ideas about what we can do, and I am delighted to support the motion.

11:16

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): There has been a wide welcome for the debate that the Conservatives have chosen today. It comes at a stage when we can all identify a number of issues on which there is broad consensus. However, that consensus is not complete and there are areas where we diverge. John Scott described humanity as the most successful species on the planet, and he highlighted population growth. The issue is sensitive, but it is unavoidably linked to food production and consumption and environmental impacts such as climate change, as well as the energy issues that we raise in our amendment.

John Scott is a long-standing advocate of many things that we, too, are keen on, such as farmers markets and changes to procurement practices. However, the consensus breaks down at a certain point. The call for renewed determination about

“growing two blades of grass where one grew before”

gives me cause for concern. The pursuit of intensive production methods and the changing of our food chain into an industrial process form part of the problem. We should not risk repeating the mistakes of previous generations in response to the problems that they have left us with.

Karen Gillon properly identified the important links between our plates, shopping baskets and consumption and the impacts on some of the poorest people in both developing and developed countries around the world. She acknowledged the problems with the current policy on biofuels, both in her amendment and in her speech. It is clear that, unless the policy is dropped, the impact will be most severe on the poorest people in the world.

The Oxfam briefing, as well as my motion of last month, outlined many of the problems with biofuels. If we are agreed that the policy is ill thought out and must change, what is the alternative? It was designed to increase fuel supply and energy security, but our best opportunity to achieve that now lies where it always did: in reducing consumption and reducing waste. In both of those, our approach to food is crucial.

In speaking to the Green amendment, Robin Harper outlined clearly the growing concern over peak oil production and its connection with the food security debate. He also mentioned the

dominance of supermarkets, a subject that the Greens brought to the chamber in the previous session. Our concerns were dismissed at the time, but they are now widely shared—but, sadly, not by the Competition Commission, which responds to supermarkets’ dominance by calling for an easing of planning restrictions to allow even more of them to open. As someone who was also brought up on the produce of a local allotment, I hope that Nanette Milne will encourage her party at Westminster to object to the Competition Commission’s recommendations.

For me, Mike Rumbles’s contribution was the only disappointing one. He seemed to imply that the only thing that Opposition parties ought to do is to attack others, rather than open up new space for debate. I do not agree.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: In a moment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute left, Mr Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: I do not agree with other parties 100 per cent of the time, and I agree with Mike Rumbles significantly less frequently than that, but I certainly welcome the debate. It allows different solutions to come forward, and we should be open to it and welcome it with a constructive tone.

May I allow a brief intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly please, Mr Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles: The member missed the point that I was making. I was calling on the Government to take some action. It has been in power now for a year.

Patrick Harvie: I come now to the Government. Michael Russell began by welcoming the cabinet secretary’s recent contribution to population growth. I hope that he enjoys fatherhood, of course, and I wish him well. I also wish that, when he returns to the office, he devotes the same commitment and enthusiasm to taking the Government’s food policy to another level. The Government’s discussion paper does what John Scott’s speech did, in a sense: it opens up space for debate and it mentions many positive things that we would all support, although it fails to articulate the transformational approach that, from listening to Rob Gibson’s speech, I think many SNP members would welcome. We need a more radical approach. We need a transformation of our food culture as well as of the economic activity that supports it.

11:20

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): We have recently seen how

fragile our economy is, with a fortnight of concern caused by a two-day walk-out at an oil refinery. There was some panic buying, and who in the chamber will deny that they filled up their tank, just in case? Farmers in my constituency were unable to get red diesel for four days, despite the First Minister saying that there was an abundant supply. Scotland is overreliant on oil.

As with fragility with fuel, so it is with food. The two are, of course, connected. Biofuels are not a black-and-white issue. Local biofuel policies are positive; the real problem has arisen with the international trade in biofuels and the international pressure on many developing countries. The UN World Food Programme's executive director, Josette Sheeran, refers to a "silent tsunami", with high global food prices threatening to plunge more than 100 million people into hunger.

There have been a number of reasons for the high price rises, but the connection with energy policies is clear. With their higher economic growth and increased purchasing and use of energy, the two biggest nations on earth have a disproportionate effect on global processes and food prices. Already, China has decided that her priority is to feed herself. Further exports of fertiliser have effectively been blocked by the imposition of an export tariff of between 100 and 135 per cent—effective this week. Not surprisingly, that caused the nitrogen price to rocket by a further \$100 overnight.

Feed prices now fluctuate as oil prices do, with a futures industry in wheat and grain that the industry and the consumer structure are ill equipped to accommodate. Oil price fluctuations affect a small number of very large organisations, and the consumer sees the effects on the forecourt. Small farming units—tenant farmers in my constituency and elsewhere—are operating in an already perilous cash-flow situation and cannot absorb such fluctuations. The issue is not theoretical. Feeding wheat was £96 a tonne a year ago; this week, the price stands at £155 a tonne. Milling wheat was £101 a tonne a year ago; this week, it costs £183 a tonne. This time last year, oil-seed rape, which Rob Gibson mentioned, cost £160 a tonne; this week, it costs £326 a tonne.

Last week, Josette Sheeran told the UK Parliament:

"The response calls for large-scale, high-level action by the global community, focused on emergency and longer-term solutions."

Scotland's response will affect our own policy choices and consumer demand here.

One of the largest employers in my constituency is Glenrath Farms. The company has grown from a small operation to become one of the leading egg producers in the UK. That highly professional

company is faced with having to adapt to the new 2012 deadline for changes to hen cages, and it needs to expand. Inevitably, that means new planning applications and investment in enriched cages and free-range sheds. In response to consumer demand for more free-range eggs, some retailers such as Marks and Spencer now market all their egg produce as exclusively free range. It is estimated that nearly a quarter of egg producers will leave the business before 2012, as a result of not only the high costs of the business but the change in consumer demand.

The Scottish Government has a role to play, and the requirement for a robust food policy is urgent. If the policy is robust, it will get a fair wind from the Parliament, but it must be short on words and firm on action. That is why our amendment asks for the Government to be more robust, with local procurement targets and genuine understanding on its part. As Rob Gibson said, we need action on labelling and marketing support. A campaign on local procurement is being led jointly by the Conservatives and, in the south of Scotland, my colleague Jim Hume, and moves on local procurement and the consensus around that must be backed up by Government, perhaps through legislation.

We cannot isolate ourselves from global considerations, nor can we alone solve the global crisis, but we can play our part. That is the people's expectation of our Parliament and Government. We need action, both locally and in playing our part in the world.

11:25

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

This has been an excellent debate, with knowledgeable and insightful contributions from across the political spectrum. I congratulate John Scott on the motion, which was excellent. I hope that my congratulations do not damage his political career, but I liked the stress on the international aspects of the issue.

We have all seen the images of this global problem. Keith Brown was quite right to talk about the incident in Haiti, in which four people were killed in food riots. In Italy, mothers have marched against the increase in the price of pasta and, in Bolivia, there have been violent protests against the doubling of food prices. The World Bank has forecast that 100 million people are facing starvation. What has caused the crisis? Many members have speculated about that, suggesting reasons such as climate change, dietary change in China, global overpopulation, biofuels and even the credit crisis, which has brought about speculation in commodities futures following the collapse of the financial derivatives market.

Do we now need, as the World Bank and the United Nations have said, a new deal for food? A recent *Economist* editorial said:

"Agriculture is now in limbo. The world of cheap food has gone. With luck and good policy, there will be a new equilibrium."

What can be done on the international stage? A number of members, such as Rob Gibson and Peter Peacock, have come up with innovative suggestions. However, it is clear that we need to refinance the World Food Programme, which is the world's largest distributor of food aid—the barrier between hungry people, such as those families in the developing world who exist on a dollar a day, and starvation. The purchasing power of the World Food Programme has been slashed because of the rising cost of grain. To distribute the same amount of food this year as was distributed last year would cost an extra \$700 million. Oxfam has argued that we need to act earlier. For example, in 2004 and 2005, early warnings alerted the world's donors that Niger needed aid in order to avert famine, but delays and inaction caused the death of thousands of children.

As many have said today, we need to reassess the mandatory biofuel targets and highlight more responsible and sustainable policies. We must be careful about taking agricultural land out of production.

John Scott gave a good speech. Like others, I liked his analogy about the perfect storm and his encouragement of farmers to grow more food in sustainable ways and consumers to waste less food. I particularly liked his quote about digging for victory, which was relevant—clearly, he has been watching his Winston Churchill tapes again over the weekend.

Karen Gillon spoke well about the need for farming across the world to be done sustainably. The stress on climate change is important.

I do not have time to touch on a number of speakers' comments, but I thought that Mike Russell gave a well-made speech. His promotion—albeit temporary—is well deserved. I am sure that, like me, he will be supporting Labour's plans to extend paternity leave in the United Kingdom.

At the end of 2006, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published an interesting report on food security. It said that the real issues extend beyond the UK, beyond agriculture and beyond food, and that food security cannot be the object of a single policy, but needs to be supported by a range of cross-cutting strategies, such as strengthening energy security, developing international research and

development and looking into the impact of climate change on global food potential.

Food security is an international issue. The developed world can play a key leadership role in refinancing the World Food Programme and advocating fair trade and aid, and can light a candle to snuff out the darkness of hunger, malnutrition and death in the developing world.

11:29

Michael Russell: I congratulate John Scott on bringing this debate to the chamber. Indeed, I congratulate every speaker, with two exceptions, for contributing positively and enthusiastically.

I did not agree with everything that I heard, and the Government will not support every proposal that was put forward. However, Patrick Harvie was absolutely right to say that it is important in such debates to air ideas, show the depth of experience that exists across the chamber and focus on real and important issues.

Alas, the two exceptions were Liberal Democrat speakers, who were the only Liberal Democrats present during the debate. Indeed, at one stage—as I pointed out in a point of order—no Liberal Democrat was present. Would that that had continued. If it had, we would have had a better debate.

I note that in the public gallery is my friend, Norman Leask, the former chair of the Crofting Foundation. He lives in Shetland, and we have had long conversations about why people continue to support the Liberal Democrats. I find it amazing, too. To be fair, he makes the strong point that the Liberal Democrats contributed an enormous amount to the Highlands and Islands, particularly in relation to the establishment of the present crofting system. It is sad to see that they have fallen so far, and that the diet of opposition does not agree with them in any way. We have heard endless sour grapes and not a single positive idea. During the consultation period on "Choosing the right ingredients: The future of food in Scotland", Mr Rumbles did not submit any ideas at all. That is a tragedy—

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: I will not take an intervention from Mr Rumbles, who was not present during any of the back-bench speeches—I want to put that on record. That was very unfortunate.

I will now address the serious points that were made by serious politicians.

Biofuels have been a constant and extremely serious issue in the debate. The Gallagher review into the indirect impacts of biofuels will report at the end of June. Food security is the prime issue,

and I know that many of the non-governmental organisations acting in the area have made submissions to that review.

Currently, biofuels make up only 2.5 per cent of the mixture of fuels at the pumps in this country. There is a prospect of what are called second-generation biofuels, which can be made from the chemical processing of both agricultural and forestry waste. They are currently being researched, and are some 15 to 20 years off. However, it might well be that the prospects for those sustainable biofuels are being adversely affected by the genuine worries that exist about the cultivation of crops for fuel. We should keep our eye on the fact that using waste material to produce biofuels might provide some answers for us. We must be cautious about how we address that issue.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am sorry, but I said that I would not take any interventions from Liberal Democrats in my summing-up speech, and I continue to say that.

John Scott made the point that there needs to be flexibility in the Scottish rural development programme. I can guarantee that there will be that flexibility. It is a flexible programme that can react to market changes.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I would like the minister to address the issue of flexibility with regard to regulations. Clearly, we need a level playing field for the farming industry, and we need to take our environmental obligations seriously. Does the minister have some fresh thoughts on that issue?

Michael Russell: I have some very fresh thoughts on that, because the issue of regulation is something that concerns me and all my colleagues at all times. We have to distinguish between the regulations that come to us largely from the EU and are transposed into Scots law, and the regulations that we make. We want to ensure that we do not add to that regulatory burden and that we continue to simplify. Of course, there will always be regulations. Interestingly, the things that the Liberal Democrat amendment calls for would require regulation. We bear the issue in mind constantly, and I assure Sarah Boyack that we will continue to do so.

“Choosing the right ingredients: The future of food in Scotland” represents a genuine consultation on the national food policy. The document seeks information and takes a consensual approach to the issue. It is fascinating that the issue has become even more important since the document was published at the start of the year. The issue is an ever-changing one, but I

hope that our final policy will reflect the concerns that we have heard in this chamber.

Page 11 of the document, which is concerned with the actions of the Government, shows that there are too many such actions to list. Those actions are a precursor of a food policy that will not only embrace national and international issues but take account of all the constructive comments that we have heard in this vitally important debate.

I again congratulate John Scott on securing this debate, and note the degree of experience that he brings to this issue.

Roseanna Cunningham mentioned the cittaslow movement. It is individual actions—people working together in ways that are exemplified in that movement—that will make all the difference. I have visited Perth, and look forward to Linlithgow being one of the cittaslow towns. As long as people are prepared to work together, think together and act together, we will get through the difficulties.

11:34

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

It is my great pleasure to close this debate on behalf of the Conservatives. I am sure that all of us on the Conservative benches would want to send our congratulations and best wishes to the cabinet secretary on his new arrival. I have to say that, even in the era of SNP-Tory co-operation, we did not expect him to go so far as to give his son the excellent Christian name of Fraser, but that is nonetheless welcome. On that note, I say to David Stewart that, having recently had the benefit of two weeks of paternity leave, I am not sure that I would necessarily rush to extend that period.

This has been an excellent and well-informed debate on all sides. It was largely consensual, with the usual exception of Mr Rumbles, who never disappoints with his ability to get the tone of the debate completely wrong. Having upset the whole chamber, he disappeared for almost the entire duration of the debate, no doubt to issue a press release about how he was entirely right and everybody else was wrong.

Throughout the debate, we heard pretty grim statistics on food from members of all parties. World grain stocks are at a 35-year low. We have only 52 days' supply of grain in the world. The price of food has been rising for the past two years, which reverses a 30-year downward trend. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization predicts a 55 per cent growth in demand for food between 1998 and 2030. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has warned that food prices could increase by between 20 and 50 per cent during the next decade. Here in Scotland, it is estimated that food

inflation will push up the average family's food bill by £750 this year alone. The UK's self-sufficiency has dropped from 72 per cent in 1996 to 60 per cent.

I am sure that all members agree that those statistics make grim reading. Behind the statistics, some of the poorest people in the world are unable to pay for food, real lives are being lost, and there is the possibility of new famines in developing countries.

As the debate showed, the causes of rising food prices are varied and complex. As John Scott and others said, countries such as India and China are changing to western-style diets, which is creating a massive increase in demand for meat products. I suspect that even the First Minister's frequent visits to curry houses cannot balance out the changing diets of the people of India. Further factors that are driving price rises in food include the loss of land due to climate change and the growth in demand for biofuels, as well as rising oil prices and rapid increases in the global population.

Our motion mentions solutions. What can be done? We are, of course, a devolved Parliament, but it is possible for us to lead the debate and underline to the UK Government and the EU the urgency of the matter. Here in Scotland, we can take action and set an example to other countries on what can be done to try to stop the emerging food shortage. For a long time, it was Government policy to reduce food production at home, but today's new circumstances need a new approach. The Conservatives believe that the Government must respond to the issue by encouraging our farmers to increase production once again to meet growing local and worldwide demand.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I will not. If Mr Rumbles had bothered to stay for the debate, I might have been more sympathetic and taken an intervention.

The Government must be on the side of the farmers. It must stop forcing red tape on them and start cutting it instead. I have had many conversations with farmers in Angus and Perthshire, and many of them tell me about the pressures that are placed on them and their struggle to keep their businesses viable and worth while under the burden of bureaucracy.

On that point, I welcome the news that, just the other day, the Competition Commission recommended that the supermarkets should have an independent ombudsman to oversee relationships between retailers and suppliers. Scottish farmers have been understandably reluctant to produce more food while they are not getting a fair price. They will produce more food if

they receive a fair price for it. Our supermarkets have been using their excessive power in the marketplace for too long, and that has dissuaded our farmers from increasing production. I hope that the new ombudsman will police the supermarkets and ensure that there is fairer trade between supermarkets and farmers. I call for the ombudsman to be set up as soon as possible.

We must encourage more Scottish consumers to buy local produce. I am wearing a badge for the Conservatives' buy local, eat local campaign, which I encourage members to support. I opened a newspaper this morning and saw the headline

"Grow your own vegetables, says MSP".

It refers, of course, to my colleague John Scott. However, we need to be a little bit careful in encouraging self-help. I recall that a previous Conservative politician, Edwina Currie, got into trouble for urging pensioners to wear woolly hats and socks in bed in order to cut down their heating bills. I know that the mental image that is conjured up when I use the words "Edwina Currie" and "bed" in the same sentence will upset the stomachs of many members, but there is a serious point to be made. As Nanette Milne said, we need to grow more of our own food, and I hope that members will lead by example.

I hope that the debate will kick-start a wider debate in Scotland and encourage the Government to take action. I hope that, at decision time, notwithstanding the best efforts of the Liberal Democrats, the Parliament will unite to support the motion and amendments. The issue must be taken seriously.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Capital Projects (Funding)

1. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to abolish public-private partnerships as a means of funding capital projects. (S3O-3134)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Public sector organisations have various funding routes for major capital projects available to them, including various forms of partnership delivery with the private sector. We have further developed the non-profit-distributing model and we have not started a standard private finance initiative project since May last year. We will introduce the Scottish futures trust to take a further step towards more cost-effective means of delivering major infrastructure projects.

Andy Kerr: Presiding Officer,

“With no detail on how SFT would be capitalised, structured, governed and crucially, managed, it is not possible to comment specifically on the financial viability of SFT at this stage. There is however a clear danger that SFT could prove to be a more expensive method of delivery than we already have and that would be to the benefit of no-one.”

Those are not my words, but the words of the Bank of Scotland on Mr Swinney's proposal. Likewise, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities says that it does not have the powers that it would require, and most of the private sector is baffled about why anyone would get involved in the Scottish futures trust.

Is Mr Swinney prepared to commit his Government—as the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and others in the Cabinet have done—to match brick for brick Labour's pledge to build 250 new schools, including 100 by the end of 2009?

John Swinney: The Government will set out its proposals on the Scottish futures trust in due course. We examined with interest the information that came back in the consultation exercise. I saw a lot of encouraging remarks from various authorities, including Labour-led East Renfrewshire Council, which made an encouraging contribution. Ministers will set out our proposals in due course.

On the question about schools, the Government is taking forward the investment programme that

we inherited. We gave a commitment that we would match brick for brick the previous Administration's commitment on school building, and that is precisely what the Government will do.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The cabinet secretary is fully aware that the commitment gave the impression that we would have new schools being delivered in Scotland, rather than just the completion of schools that had already been started. Recently, Audit Scotland told the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee that it was aware of no new school building programme being commissioned under the Government in the past year. Audit Scotland called on the Government to produce a financial strategy on how it intends to fund such programmes. Will the Government produce such a strategy?

John Swinney: As I said in my answer to Mr Kerr, we will set out our proposals on the Scottish futures trust in due course. I am sure that Mr Purvis is aware that, at the end of March, I published the Government's infrastructure investment plan, which sets out the approach that we will take to schools investment. Obviously, the Government will continue to invest in the fabric of Scottish society and the infrastructure of our country. Our proposals are set out in the infrastructure investment plan.

Voluntary Sector Funding

2. Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how much funding the voluntary sector will receive in the 2008-09 financial year. (S3O-3131)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government will support a number of third sector organisations in 2008-09. The number and identity of organisations, together with associated levels of funding, cannot be determined at this stage, particularly as many funds are competitive in nature. Historically, the Government has collated and published levels of support to the third sector retrospectively, and it will continue to do so.

We have committed to £93 million of direct investment by our third sector division between 2008 and 2011, which represents an increase of 37 per cent on the previous spending review. That investment will build capacity and sustainability in the sector. It underlines our commitment to the development of the third sector, including support for the social enterprise business model.

Hugh Henry: The minister is aware of concerns about funding across the voluntary sector in Scotland, and of stories of impending redundancies. I have a simple question for the

minister. Has he instructed his officials to find out how many redundancies are occurring in the voluntary sector, or is he not bothered?

John Swinney: On a weekly basis, my officials meet representatives of COSLA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers—if Johann Lamont would stop muttering during every one of my answers I would complete the sentence—and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, which is the representative body of the voluntary sector in Scotland. We engage in discussions on a weekly basis on the roll-out of funding to the voluntary sector, in order to monitor the impact of the arrangements that we have put in place through the concordat.

I am clearly interested in the health and vitality of the third sector in Scotland. The Government has put formidable resources into the sector. Into the bargain, we encourage local authorities to continue that support at local authority level. In some of the information that I am receiving, some of the publicly expressed concerns about a possible negative impact on individual voluntary sector organisations are not coming to fruition. I welcome the fact that local authorities are co-operating to substantially support and fund voluntary sector organisations.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): That is the second time that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has accused me of muttering, which is not an accusation that has ever been laid at my door previously.

The cabinet secretary may recall Rob Gibson's explanation of the Government's strategy on the voluntary sector—that it was a means of getting rid of the dross and dealing with the poverty industry. Will the cabinet secretary define "dross" and "the poverty industry"? Would he be willing to come to my constituency to meet local organisations that are experiencing funding cuts to tell them why those cuts are being made?

John Swinney: Any objective observer of the comments that I have put on the public record about the third sector since I became minister last year could only be convinced that I have the strongest possible support for the third sector and that I deliver that support. In a very tight financial settlement, I have delivered a 37 per cent increase in funding for the third sector. The Government has put its money where its mouth is in terms of investment in the public sector.

I would be delighted to visit the Glasgow Pollok constituency and to see voluntary sector organisations in place. I am sure many good organisations are active in that constituency. Clearly, there is always change in the provision for third sector organisations. That has not just

happened since the concordat came into place; there is change every year, as local authorities and other organisations configure services to meet the needs of individuals. I would be delighted to learn more about that in Glasgow Pollok.

Kinship Carers (Support)

3. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what support is available to grandparents and other relatives who bring up children. (S3O-3099)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): Estimates suggest that there are more than 10,000 grandparents and other relatives who have responsibility for looking after children. For the first time, the Scottish Government has made resources available for local authorities to pay a weekly financial allowance to the kinship carers of more than 2,000 looked-after children. In addition, local authorities have existing powers to provide support to children in need.

All kinship carers will benefit from the Scottish Government's funding of a national advice and information service by Citizens Advice Scotland and our work with United Kingdom ministers to improve access to benefits. In addition, we are developing jointly with COSLA an early years framework, which will include support for families.

Robert Brown: I recognise the complexity of the issue and welcome the extent of the progress that has been made on it by both the previous Government and the present one. May I press the minister a bit further, particularly regarding dates? In the information note that was circulated to members today, the minister indicated that

"The Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed that sufficient resources have been included in the total financial settlement"

to meet the commitment to pay foster care level allowances to kinship carers of looked-after children. Why did the same note go on to say that it was

"up to local authorities to ... prioritise and allocate funds ... to meet their commitments locally"?

Is there not a contradiction between national commitment and local discretion? Will there be a national legal minimum payment for kinship carers? Why do councils such as Glasgow, with more than 25 per cent of such children, say that they do not have the budget to meet the scheme's expectation? The figures bear them out on that.

Maureen Watt: COSLA and the councils will work with the Scottish Government to deliver the commitments that are set out in the concordat. Obviously, local authorities will implement the commitment as soon as they possibly can. They have been provided with early guidance on

implementation. It is up to local authorities to provide support for kinship carers. Where a looked-after child is already living with a kinship carer and the authority's approval process is in place, local authorities have some discretion on the provision of funding to kinship carers.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the Government anticipates that local authorities will make direct payments to kinship carers of looked-after children at the earliest opportunity during the three-year concordat? Does she also agree that that will mean additional support to kinship carers of 2,000 looked-after children—there are more than 550 in Glasgow alone—that the previous Executive failed to deliver? Does she further agree that there is nothing to prevent local authorities from supporting other kinship carers in any way that they see fit?

Maureen Watt: The member is correct; those families are being supported. The previous two Executives had eight years in which to help those kinship carers; they have not been helped in the past, but they are receiving help from the Government now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee

5. Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how and when it intends to commence planning appropriate celebrations in Scotland to mark the diamond jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen in 2012. (S3O-3067)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Government's process of planning appropriate diamond jubilee celebrations in Scotland for 2012 has not yet started. The Scottish Government will liaise with Buckingham Palace on the content and timing of any such celebrations.

Jackson Carlaw: Her Majesty remains in robust health. I accept that her jubilee will in all probability be celebrated after the present Government has left office. Nevertheless, it will fall on the Government's shoulders to ensure that planning for fulsome but not ostentatious celebrations is undertaken in a timely manner. The people of Scotland will wish to pay tribute to Her Majesty's service over 60 years to the United Kingdom, just as the peoples of Australia, Canada and her many other realms will wish to do. Most of those countries are entirely separate from the United Kingdom—a circumstance in which, the minister may wish to confirm, the overwhelming majority of Scots appear not to wish to find themselves. Given the new monarchical enthusiasm sweeping through the Government, as evidenced in many

ways by the First Minister, can the minister assure us that Scotland will lead the way in 2012 in celebrating Her Majesty's jubilee in what will inevitably be a busy year?

Linda Fabiani: We will, of course, liaise with Buckingham Palace on the content and timing of any such celebrations. We would wish to involve a representative cross-section of the population of Scotland in the planning for any such celebration. I am more than happy to outline such details to the chamber at the appropriate time.

Public Buildings (Out-of-hours Access)

6. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has any plans to monitor the effect on the public of seeking out-of-hours access to public buildings that have been private finance initiative or public-private partnership funded. (S3O-3091)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Contracts for the provision of public buildings, whether PPP, PFI, or any other kind, are specified, procured, and monitored by the relevant public body. Under standardised PFI contract forms, for many years it has been possible for the public body concerned to specify the requirements needed to meet user interests, including the effect on the public of seeking out-of-hours access to public buildings.

Gil Paterson: The cabinet secretary is well aware that we are trying to encourage children to engage in sports and activities. That is a good initiative, but increasingly we find that people cannot access the facilities that we, the public, have paid for. I hope that the cabinet secretary can devise a scheme to free up those facilities so that we can engage with children, get them off the streets doing useful exercise, and help the community in general.

John Swinney: Mr Paterson makes an entirely fair point. It is essential that we use all Scotland's public infrastructure to maximum effect, particularly in providing opportunities for young people to exercise and be involved in extracurricular activities. Mr MacAskill has taken several decisions on the distribution of resources through the proceeds of crime funds that have been designed to create exactly the type of circumstances to which Mr Paterson refers. The Government will encourage all public bodies to ensure that, as part of their integrated planning for the use of public facilities, they take into account the issues and concerns that Mr Paterson fairly raises.

Southern General Hospital

7. Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits it considers will accrue by paying for the

new Southern general hospital by traditional procurement methods. (S3O-3088)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has sought to ensure that the project is deliverable, affordable and sustainable and that it represents best value for money for the taxpayer.

Christina McKelvie: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the traditional procurement method has its place along with the Scottish futures trust, prudential borrowing and the non-profit model in providing Scotland's public services?

John Swinney: I agree with Christina McKelvie. The Government is taking sensible and pragmatic decisions on refurbishing Scotland's public infrastructure. The decision to invest in the Southern general hospital through traditional procurement methods indicates that there is confidence in the Government on the long-term planning for Scotland's infrastructure—confidence for which the Government should be applauded.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): In that confident vein, will the minister set out for Audit Scotland the papers that are associated with the decision that he has made, particularly those on the management of risk, so that Audit Scotland can test whether traditional procurement methods or alternative methods are a better way of handling the risks that are associated with such a major capital project?

John Swinney: Audit Scotland can make any request that it desires to the Government for information—it is not my business to set out Audit Scotland's agenda. With all the Government's capital infrastructure projects, we are determined to ensure that we work at all times to protect the public purse and deliver projects efficiently and effectively. That will be a significant improvement on the situation that we inherited from the previous Administration.

Tourism Industry

8. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support Scotland's tourism industry. (S3O-3130)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government's purpose is to create a more successful country, through increasing sustainable economic growth. A strong, vibrant and growing tourism industry directly supports that purpose and our strategic objective to realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities. We will continue to work closely with the tourism industry, individual tourism businesses, agencies and local authorities to help them grow revenues by 50 per cent by 2015.

As part of that approach, I was involved in meetings as part of Scotland week to promote Scotland as a tourism destination. The First Minister and the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture highlighted 2009 as the year of homecoming during their meetings in the United States of America. We have acted to reduce the costs that thousands of small tourism businesses face, through our decision to reduce business rates. Those are just two examples of the range of efforts by the Scottish Government and VisitScotland to maximise the economic opportunities in the tourism sector.

Iain Gray: We support the 50 per cent growth target, which is shared between Government and the industry. In the minister's discussions and meetings with the industry, surely everyone will tell him that raising skills levels in the tourism workforce is central to achieving the growth that we want. However, how can that possibly be achieved by the sudden ending of adult apprenticeships in hospitality, travel and tourism, with no programmes to replace them?

Jim Mather: There are modern apprenticeship opportunities for 16 to 19-year-olds in the hospitality sector. The sector is working together with much greater cohesion than was the case previously. The Scottish Government, VisitScotland, EventScotland, VisitScotland.com, local authorities, Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and enterprise agencies are pulling together £90-plus million. There is also the industry's investment, which includes investment in its training requirements.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am delighted to say that His Excellency Dr Kuban Mambetaliev, the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, has joined us in the Presiding Officer's gallery for First Minister's questions. Ambassador, I warmly welcome you on behalf of the Scottish Parliament.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Questions to the First Minister will be answered by the Deputy First Minister.

Engagements

1. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I begin by wishing the First Minister a full and speedy recovery and welcoming the Deputy First Minister, who is taking his place.

To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-718)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I now have very different engagements from those that I had planned first thing this morning. As Wendy Alexander said, the First Minister has been laid low with a bug. He has cancelled his public engagements for the rest of the day, but he will chair, by phone from Bute house, the Cabinet sub-committee on the on-going fuel situation. The First Minister expects to be back in business tomorrow. I am sure that we all want to wish him well. Later today, other ministers and I will have a range of meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ms Alexander: That is heartening news all round, on the First Minister's health and—in relation to Grangemouth—on the fact that when the Government wants the union to work, it does work.

Today is significant for pupils throughout Scotland, because it is the start of their exams. I am sure that the Parliament will want to join me in wishing the very best of luck to everyone who is sitting exams today. Of course, exam success requires more than luck. It requires hard work, dedicated staff and a committed Government.

This Government made five key education pledges last May: £210 million to reduce class sizes; £30 million for additional support needs; £46 million for sports facilities; access to a nursery teacher for every nursery child; and a programme to match, brick for brick, Labour's programme to build 200 new schools. Why has the Scottish National Party Government failed to fund a single one of those five promises?

Nicola Sturgeon: I say to Wendy Alexander that it is getting a bit predictable—another week, another baseless, inaccurate scare story from Wendy Alexander. No wonder her personal approval ratings are plummeting—minus 39 per cent and falling. I say to the Parliament and to the country that not only has this SNP Government in

its first year in office made considerable progress towards meeting all its election commitments, but it intends to continue to meet all those commitments.

I say to Wendy Alexander that everybody in Scotland will welcome the key education commitments made by this Government. Education in Scotland is free again, unlike the situation under the previous Administration. We are building new school buildings and we are employing new teachers. All in all, that is not a bad record for the first year in office, but we are intent on achieving much more.

Ms Alexander: That is the SNP for you—a PhD in poll ratings and dunces on education. We know that the SNP is good at making promises; the problem is the delivery. Just look at the five promises that the SNP made last year. There is no dedicated money for class sizes, no extra money for additional support needs, no cash for nursery teachers and not a single SNP school brick has been laid.

The problem is getting worse. There is not just a raft of broken promises; there are education cuts all the way when it comes to SNP local government. Yesterday in Aberdeen, it was announced that five schools are to be closed and £8 million is being cut from the budget. The problem is not just in Aberdeen: £10 million has been cut from education in Edinburgh; £4 million in Highland; £3 million in Renfrewshire; £2.5 million in Fife; and £1 million in West Dunbartonshire and East Lothian. How does the SNP justify £30 million of education cuts in councils where it is in power?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have been thinking about Wendy Alexander's approach to First Minister's questions. The fundamental weakness in her approach is that the basis of all her questions is untrue.

Wendy Alexander accused me of giving her a PhD thesis on poll ratings. I was only getting started on them. The reality for her is this—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Now—one year after the historic election of Scotland's first SNP Government—more people than a year ago say that they would vote SNP, whereas the poll ratings of Wendy Alexander and Labour are plummeting.

I will tell Wendy Alexander what the Government has delivered on schools. In addition to restoring the Scottish principle of free education, we have delivered more teachers and a concordat with local authorities to reduce class sizes to 18 or fewer in primaries 1 to 3—she has even abandoned that policy. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Wendy Alexander asked about school building. Since the Government's election, seven projects, which encompass 45 schools, have been signed off and completed. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Aberdeen City Council and Falkirk Council are working on 12 new and two refurbished schools under the non-profit model, which provides much better value for money than the private finance initiative model that the previous Administration pursued. In this parliamentary session, we will have 250 new or refurbished schools. All in all, the Government has a good record on education. If I can coin a phrase, that can only get better still.

Ms Alexander: As we have come to expect, the opening line is always about the SNP's poll ratings and never about what is happening in Scotland. The SNP is more interested in its poll ratings than in what is happening in Scotland's schools. We know that the First Minister does not answer the question, but I had hoped that the Deputy First Minister could do better on the day when Scottish schoolchildren must provide exam answers. I asked about five promises, but the only answer that we heard was the claim that school projects that were started under Labour were in some sense a step forward by a party that has commissioned not one single school in a year.

We learned this week that, in Aberdeen, not one probationary teacher will be taken on in a primary school next year. A headteacher in East Lothian has written that he fears that he will be unable to fill permanent posts next year. Edinburgh school budgets are being cut. Parents are up in arms throughout the country. Given that, does the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning—I am not sure whether she is here—who has presided over that mounting chaos, still have the full confidence of her Cabinet colleagues? To use a phrase that Ms Sturgeon used to employ—yes or no?

Nicola Sturgeon: Oh yes. The problem is not that Wendy Alexander is not receiving answers to her questions, but that she does not think about her questions before asking them. When she receives the answer at the first time of asking, she really should ask a different question. She got the answers about new schools, more teachers and class sizes coming down. The Government will continue to deliver on education, as on all other matters, for the people of Scotland.

It is breathtaking that Wendy Alexander mentions in the chamber the three words "Aberdeen City Council", because administrations that the Labour Party led in Aberdeen were jointly responsible for a £50 million overspend by that

council, which the current administration is dealing with. It would be better for her and her colleagues to take some responsibility for the dreadful mess that they left when they left office in Aberdeen.

I will return for just a moment to Wendy Alexander's favourite subject—poll ratings. Poll ratings are about what is happening in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: While Labour moans, girns and offers nothing positive for Scotland's future, the poll ratings show that the people of Scotland approve of what the Government is doing. That is why we will continue to do it and why we will continue to win in the poll ratings while those of Wendy Alexander continue to go through the floor.

Ms Alexander: The Deputy First Minister said nothing about why support for independence is at an all-time low. She claims that she is answering the questions; in a moment, she will have the chance to decide whether she will deliver her pre-prepared script or listen to the real concerns of real parents. I am talking about parents such as Fiona Wilkie, who fears that her daughter, who attends Gleniffer high school, will not be able to study the subjects that she needs to study to do medicine because only two advanced higher options will be offered next year instead of five. I am talking about parents such as Lydia Jack, who is the chair of Renfrew high parents council—Renfrew high school is a stone's throw from the Deputy First Minister's constituency. Lydia has complained about cuts to moneys for tackling indiscipline, supporting homework and improving results; she says that such cuts

"can only be detrimental to our children".

Will the Deputy First Minister address the concerns of Paisley grammar school's school council? That council has called an emergency meeting tonight to discuss its fears that the school will not be able to deliver a full curriculum next year. What will the Scottish National Party do to address the fears of hundreds of anxious parents who are expected to attend crisis meetings tonight on the SNP's education cuts?

Nicola Sturgeon: Wendy Alexander, reading from a pre-prepared script, said that I was reading from a pre-prepared script. My, oh my.

Wendy Alexander should listen carefully, because I will directly address the point that she made about Gleniffer high school. Her latest scare story about the number of advanced highers offered being reduced to two is absolutely untrue. I ask her to think about withdrawing that smear. The reality, of course, is that advanced higher subjects are decided locally on the basis of uptake in individual schools. That is the right approach for

pupils and parents and is in the interests of local accountability. Wendy Alexander and her Labour colleagues are so desperate and inept that they have had Simon Pia phoning around Renfrewshire this morning trying to stir up this story. The headteacher of Gleniffer high school was so concerned by Labour's scaremongering that he phoned the leader of Renfrewshire Council to complain about Labour's tactics. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Wendy Alexander has again been exposed. She has come to the chamber and done nothing but try to scaremonger. She has no facts to back up what she is saying. It is a good job that she has asked her final question, because otherwise she would have been well advised to deploy the no-further-questions approach.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I, too, am sorry to learn of the First Minister's indisposition. Personally, I blame the opinion polls. There are sometimes aspects indigestible; of course, there are sometimes aspects more palatable, which are welcome. However, I hope that he makes a speedy recovery.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-719)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The First Minister has no plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland at present.

Annabel Goldie: This morning, we were greeted by disturbing headlines about the alarming toll of underage youngsters with alcohol problems. We know that the underlying causes of such problems are complex and diverse and that many of the solutions will take a generation or more to succeed, but there are things that we can and must do now.

In 2006, there were more than 17,000 liquor licences in Scotland and more than 1,300 licensing offences were recorded, but—this is a significant but—only 30 licences were suspended. Is the Deputy First Minister, like me, surprised by that?

Nicola Sturgeon: I, the First Minister and the Government share Annabel Goldie's deep concern about the picture reported in the papers today. She is right to bring such a serious question to the chamber and absolutely right to say that there are no overnight solutions; we are dealing with a long-term challenge. It is important that we all come together to face up to that challenge and give it the serious attention that it deserves.

I will say a word or two about actions that the Government is taking before addressing her point

about what comes next. As Annabel Goldie knows, the Government is already cracking down on rogue retailers by introducing tougher penalties and rolling out alcohol test purchasing throughout the country. We are taking steps to strengthen alcohol education in schools by establishing an expert steering group on substance misuse education. Crucially and significantly, the Government will invest an additional £85 million to tackle alcohol misuse over the next three years. It is the single largest increase ever for tackling the problem in Scotland and it is in addition to the current baseline of £12 million. I hope that Annabel Goldie and the whole chamber accept that this Government takes the issue very seriously and that we have already signalled our obvious intent in the area.

Annabel Goldie is right to press for even further action. That is why, over the next few weeks, the Government will produce a new action plan to tackle alcohol misuse over the coming years. That plan will be radical and innovative and will not shirk from the challenges that we face. The kind of issues that Annabel Goldie raises today will be covered in that action plan and I look forward to debating it in Parliament in due course.

Annabel Goldie: The Deputy First Minister might not be aware that for many years my parents ran a licensed grocer's. Yes, I am a grocer's daughter. I can tell the chamber that my parents knew one thing—just one breach of the law and they could lose their licence. Ten days ago, the Scottish Conservatives revealed that one in seven premises sold alcohol to underage youngsters during test purchasing. Unbelievably, there were premises that failed that test a second time.

Does the Deputy First Minister find it acceptable that those who flagrantly break the law and endanger our children should continue to hold a liquor licence?

Nicola Sturgeon: No, I do not, is the short answer. In my answer to Annabel Goldie's first question, I hope that I gave her a real sense that we take the issue seriously. Alcohol misuse should not divide parties in the chamber; we should come together on the issue. I give the member an assurance that if any party represented in this chamber has ideas or suggestions to make, the Government will listen very carefully to them.

The member is right to highlight some of the current weaknesses in the law, which will change further in September. It is also important that we look carefully at what more we need to do to address some of the weaknesses that Annabel Goldie spoke about. That is why we are publishing an action plan in the next few weeks; it is why we want to debate that plan fully with all interests in the chamber and around Scotland. I hope that the

chamber will be able to come together to agree a radical set of proposals that, over the medium to long term, could see us making an inroad into the kind of figures that Annabel Goldie and I find so appalling.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): I also wish the First Minister a speedy recovery.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-720)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Nicol Stephen: The First Minister gave a BBC interview last week. He was asked why the Government had dropped its promise to write off student debt. In reply, the First Minister said:

"We've published a consultation document on student debt, which is out for consultation at the present moment. I am sure that's available to read."

Is anything that he said in those two sentences true?

Nicola Sturgeon: Everything that the First Minister says is true. I thank Nicol Stephen for giving me an opportunity to reiterate the great progress that the Government has already made in improving the lot of students in Scotland. Thanks to the action of this Government with—I say this with all due grace—the assistance of the Liberal Democrats, we have abolished tuition fees in Scotland, restored the principle of free education and saved graduates in Scotland more than £2,000. I hope that everyone in the chamber, even those parties who did not support it, will welcome that action. We will consult on further proposals to reduce and tackle student debt. It is outrageous that, under the previous Labour-Liberal Administration, levels of student debt in this country soared. That is why this Government sees it as a priority to reverse that trend and improve conditions for students in our country.

Nicol Stephen: The First Minister was very clear last week that he had published a consultation and that it was available to read. However, we made a request for the document under the freedom of information legislation and we got the following back from the Government:

"We believe that releasing information on the policy proposals would not be in the public interest at this time."

What is it with the Government and this policy? Four weeks ago, Fiona Hyslop appeared on STV to deny that she had ever promised to write off student debt in the first place. The First Minister

has now been on the BBC to fabricate an entire Government consultation. In the interview, James Watson from Glasgow, the father of a student, asked him,

"Why do you have to lie to the people to get voted into power?"

Can the Deputy First Minister give Mr Watson an honest answer?

Nicola Sturgeon: The only person that I have seen fabricating anything on the BBC during the past few days was Nicol Stephen fabricating a story about fuel chaos the length and breadth of the country. Perhaps he should take the opportunity today to apologise for that misinformation and to congratulate the people of Scotland on their responsible behaviour.

In the interests of consensus and friendliness, I congratulate Nicol Stephen. He is making a name for himself by using these clever debating points. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am the last person to criticise that since, as Jack McConnell will testify, I used to do it quite a lot myself.

In all seriousness, I ask Nicol Stephen to listen very carefully. I hope that he does because, unlike Labour and the Tories, the Liberals agree with us on the central issues that are facing students today. The Government is committed to tackling student debt. We have already taken a significant step towards that by abolishing the graduate endowment, and saving students more than £2,000 a year. The Government will move to consult people on the further steps that we can take to continue to make progress.

I understand all the brouhaha at First Minister's questions, but on the essential point about improving conditions for students in Scotland, I hope that Nicol Stephen and I can, for once, be on the same side.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a couple of supplementary questions but questions and answers must be brief.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): The Deputy First Minister might be aware of my constituent, Donna McLeish, who is currently a prisoner at Cornton Vale and is seven months pregnant. Does the Deputy First Minister share my concern that my constituent was shackled to a Reliance officer while attending Stirling royal infirmary for in-patient and out-patient appointments? Will the Deputy First Minister outline her Administration's position on the handcuffing of pregnant prisoners? What action is she taking to address the matter with Reliance, the Scottish Prison Service and health boards?

Nicola Sturgeon: I share Johann Lamont's concern. The Government's position is very clear. We consider the handcuffing of pregnant women in hospital to be absolutely unacceptable and I hope that everyone in the chamber agrees with that.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice is meeting Johann Lamont this afternoon to discuss the issue and the particular case of her constituent in more detail. I hope that, during that conversation, she will be reassured that the Government takes the matter very seriously indeed.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): What will the Government do to address serious concerns in my constituency about the future of the Harris tweed industry, following this week's announcement that Kenneth Mackenzie Ltd's mill in Stornoway intends to lay off half its workers, with the threat of consequent additional loss of work for weavers?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Alasdair Allan for his question. I appreciate the anxiety that is caused by the situation in his constituency. Highlands and Islands Enterprise will be closely involved with the company and the community, and the workers will be supported in the normal way by the Government. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will be happy to meet Alasdair Allan to discuss the matter in more detail.

Free Personal Care

4. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government will take to implement the recommendations of the Sutherland review of free personal care. (S3F-739)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): We have made clear our continuing commitment to the policy of free personal care. We will take the actions necessary to address existing concerns about the policy, to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable older people and to prepare for the challenges of our ageing population. We have welcomed Lord Sutherland's report—which we commissioned—which provides helpful commentary and recommendations on those matters.

Next week, I will update Parliament on our formal response to Lord Sutherland's report and on the outcome of our constructive discussions with local government. I note the strong support from a former Labour First Minister, as well as from members of other parties in the Parliament, in favour of Lord Sutherland's conclusion that the £30 million attendance allowance funding that was withdrawn by the United Kingdom Government

should be returned to Scotland. I will comment next week on how best we can reflect that shared concern to the UK Government.

Roseanna Cunningham: Does the Deputy First Minister recall the Health Committee's care inquiry in 2006, the recommendations of which have mostly been echoed by the recent Sutherland review? Does she agree that the previous Executive missed a huge opportunity to tackle some of the problems that were already being experienced at that time?

I welcome the Deputy First Minister's comments on the attendance allowance. Will she now take the issue forward in company with all those who support the return of those moneys, including Lord Sutherland, Henry McLeish and local authorities? That would be welcomed by many, including Labour Party members—even if some of them will not admit that.

Nicola Sturgeon: In response to Roseanna Cunningham's last point, I hope that all members will now agree that the decision to withdraw the attendance allowance funding was plainly and simply wrong and should be rectified. I look forward to progressing that argument with the support of all those who share our view.

I recall the Health Committee report to which Roseanna Cunningham referred. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to that committee, which, particularly during the period of her convenership, undertook some important and serious work on the subject that convinced me and the Government that we should ask Lord Sutherland to carry out the review that he has now completed.

I agree that the previous Government could have taken action and did not, but it is important that we move forward by building on what has been a very successful policy. We need to sort out, in partnership with our colleagues in local government, some of the issues that have been undermining the policy. That is the approach that I am taking. I look forward to updating Parliament further next week.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): In recommendation 10 of the "Independent Review of Free Personal and Nursing Care in Scotland", Lord Sutherland states:

"The ... future costs of long-term care means demand must be reviewed and re-modelled regularly and be reflected accurately in future local government finance settlements".

Given the demographics of the Highlands, how does the Deputy First Minister marry that recommendation with the present reality whereby Highland Council is required to make cuts in social work services of the order of at least £400,000 in this financial year?

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that Jamie Stone has been taking lessons from Wendy Alexander on scaremongering. Local authorities are not making cuts. Local authorities have a higher share of central Government funding now than they did under the previous Administration. That is the reality.

We will take forward all the recommendations of the Sutherland review. As well as making recommendations on what immediate action needs to be taken on free personal care, Lord Sutherland makes some helpful recommendations about how we properly plan for the demographic changes that will take place over the next number of years. I assure the member that the Government will seek to do that.

Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama

5. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government will take to resolve the funding situation at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama to ensure that Scotland's reputation for arts and culture remains of international standing. (S3F-726)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I recognise the important contribution that the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama makes to Scotland's international reputation for arts and culture. However, as the member knows, any decisions on the funding of individual institutions and the mechanisms used to allocate funding are the responsibilities of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. Direct interference by ministers is prohibited by legislation. Surely even George Foulkes would not encourage us to break the law.

Pauline McNeill: Presiding Officer, I welcome students from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama who are in the public gallery.

The Deputy First Minister will be aware that students from the academy are protesting outside the Scottish Parliament in a way in which only they can. Decisions by the funding council have resulted in cuts, courses being frozen and compulsory redundancies, which will impact on teaching at the academy and on its world-class reputation. Given that the Government is always keen to ally itself with Scottish cultural success, does it not realise that, unless it is prepared to act, such success will be less likely in the future? Surely the Deputy First Minister will not wash her hands of the issue, given that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning claimed credit for brokering a deal for the Crichton campus, which set a precedent in this area? What is the difference between the two cases? On behalf of students and staff at the academy and of

all those who care about Scotland's future as a nation that is able to produce great actors, performers and musicians, I ask the Government to act in Scotland's cultural interests by intervening today.

Nicola Sturgeon: If Pauline McNeill had listened to my initial answer, she would be aware of the legislative framework within which the Government is operating. Incidentally, that framework was put in place and supported by the Labour Party when it was in government; of course, Pauline McNeill forgot to mention that.

I, too, welcome students from the academy to the public gallery. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning met student representatives earlier this week—on Monday 28 April—to hear their concerns. Officials will meet representatives of the Scottish funding council today to ensure that it is aware of those concerns. As members will be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning made clear in her strategic guidance to the funding council the importance that she places on ensuring growth in graduate and postgraduate numbers in the performing arts. I hope that all members will see that as a signal of how seriously we take the sector.

I say as gently as I can to Pauline McNeill that the Government will continue to deal with the issue in a constructive and meaningful way. That will probably reap more benefits than the hectoring that we have just heard from the member. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr McAveety. That concludes question time. I apologise to Mr Purvis, whose question we did not reach.

12:32

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health and Wellbeing

Efficiency Savings

1. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made within the health and wellbeing portfolio on efficiency savings. (S3O-3133)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The health efficiency savings target for 2005-08 was £531.1 million. The current forecast of savings achieved to end March 2008 is £613.7 million—an overachievement of £82.6 million. Of course, all savings have been retained locally for reinvestment.

The first set of efficiency delivery plans for 2008 to 2011, setting out where we expect to make the required efficiency gains, were published on 15 April 2008. They include plans identifying efficiency savings of £225.94 million in health and wellbeing for 2008-09, against a target for the year of £215.2 million. The outturn report, setting out what has been achieved in 2008-09, will be published in October 2009.

James Kelly: The success of the efficiency savings programme has been given more prominence as a result of the announcement of the planned spend on the new Southern general hospital, which commits the Scottish Government to £550 million and Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board to £270 million. In which financial years will the spend occur? Will the cabinet secretary give a breakdown of the specific spend for the Government and the health board?

Nicola Sturgeon: The spend will be over the next five financial years.

I am extremely proud that Scotland's biggest ever hospital project will be delivered entirely within the public sector by this Scottish National Party Government. Is that not an amazing achievement? It is undoubtedly the case that, had Labour and the Liberal Democrats still been in government, the hospital would have been delivered under the discredited and expensive private finance initiative model. That is just one more reason to be delighted that we now have an SNP Government in power in Scotland.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Will any of the efficiencies that the cabinet

secretary referred to in her original answer apply to the Scottish Ambulance Service?

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the incident in my constituency in which a young man lay dying while a paramedic who was on the scene was prevented, to her great distress, from taking any action to help him, because she was out as a single-person crew. Because of the circumstances, and because of the great distress caused to the family, I have called for an inquiry into the incident. I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree to hold an inquiry, so that the family and the public can know exactly what happened.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): That question is very far from being a supplementary to the question in the *Business Bulletin*. However, if the cabinet secretary wants to answer it, she may.

Nicola Sturgeon: Given the seriousness of the issue, I am more than happy to respond.

I understand entirely the distress of the family concerned. The case was horrific, and I am sure that everybody in the chamber wants to send their thoughts and condolences to the family.

I have looked very carefully into the circumstances of the case. Although they were horrific, I hope that Margaret Curran will agree that any action taken by the Scottish Ambulance Service was taken to ensure that its personnel, as well as being able to respond to the case, were protected. I know, or I assume, that Margaret Curran would not advocate the sending of Scottish Ambulance Service personnel into situations that were deemed dangerous to their safety.

I will always look into individual cases to ensure that any lessons that can be learned are learned. I will also continue to work with the Scottish Ambulance Service to ensure that the service, as a whole, continues to improve its performance.

National Health Service (Absence Rates)

2. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what its targets are for absence rates within the NHS and what efforts it is making to meet them. (S3O-3116)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government has set a challenging target of 4 per cent sickness absence for NHS boards in Scotland. For the Scottish Ambulance Service and for NHS 24, we have agreed slightly higher targets of 5 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. The date for achieving those targets is March 2009. All boards have agreed to that as part of their local delivery plans for 2008-09.

NHS Scotland has a range of progressive policies in place to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of its workforce, including an innovative occupational health project known as OHS extra and policies to support good work-life balance. There are numerous examples of NHS boards actively working in partnership with their staff to achieve sustained improvements in absence rates.

Claire Baker: The cabinet secretary might be aware that, as of November 2007, NHS Fife had a rolling average absence rate of 5.8 per cent. That rate is above the national average, and above that of comparable NHS boards. Can she confirm whether NHS Fife is on track to meet the target of 4 per cent? If she cannot, can she outline the efforts that the Scottish Government will make to ensure that absence rates in NHS Fife at least meet the national average? Will she examine the reasons behind the absence rates of NHS staff in the region and those of the rest of Scotland's hard-working NHS staff?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said in my original answer, the target that we have set for absence rates—4 per cent, to be achieved by March 2009—is, rightly, very challenging. All boards will be expected to achieve that challenging target by the due date, and they all have policies in place to achieve it.

When I chaired the annual review of Fife NHS Board last year, I was happy to discuss with it some of the work that it is doing to improve performance in that area, and I will continue to monitor that closely, as I will with all health boards.

I also said in my original answer that all health boards are expected, and have agreed, to outline in their local delivery plans for this year exactly how they intend to make the requisite progress towards the target. I hope that all members will support the actions that boards are taking to achieve the target because that will enable resources to be freed up and spent on front-line care, which I know all members support.

Suboxone

3. Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to extend the availability of Suboxone in the treatment of drug addicts. (S30-3065)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The final decision on which substitute treatment to prescribe rests with the individual practitioner, in liaison with the client and based on the client's specific health needs.

Ted Brocklebank: Does the minister agree that treatment of opioid dependence with drugs such as Suboxone reduces cravings and the use of

heroin? Does she agree that Suboxone appears from some trials to be less addictive than methadone, which often results, sadly, in patients swapping one addiction for another? Does she further agree that all alternatives must be carefully examined as part of the overall national drugs strategy?

Shona Robison: On 12 March 2007, Suboxone was accepted for use as a substitute treatment for opioid drug dependence in NHS Scotland, within a framework of medical, social and psychological treatment. Around 500 patients throughout Scotland are currently being treated with Suboxone. Ultimately, of course, it is a matter for the clinician, because whether the treatment is appropriate is a clinical decision.

Within the drugs strategy that the member referred to, we are taking forward a strategy that is based on recovery from whatever drug is being used to help someone come off their opiate-based drug dependence.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I associate myself with Ted Brocklebank's comments about Suboxone. I know that he has, like me, visited the Drug and Alcohol Project Levenmouth, for which I have the greatest respect. It is clear that it believes that Suboxone is not being prescribed in the right quantities and to the people who need it. I ask the minister to reconsider the matter, and I invite her to join me in visiting the project to hear at first hand from an organisation that helps drug addicts and their families in the area.

Shona Robison: We will, of course, continue to monitor the use of Suboxone and the statistics that will follow on. I have outlined the number of patients who are already being treated with Suboxone, and we will keep an eye on how the situation develops. I am aware that a new consultant has recently been appointed in Fife and is prescribing Suboxone as an alternative treatment for drug misuse. I am happy to take up Tricia Marwick's offer to visit the local drug project that she mentioned, and I will make arrangements to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 was not lodged.

NHS 24 (Remote and Rural Areas)

5. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the performance of NHS 24 in meeting the needs of patients in remote and rural areas. (S30-3102)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Everyone in Scotland has the same access to the full range of NHS 24 services and

resources. In 2007-08, 96 per cent of calls to NHS 24 were answered within 30 seconds, against a target of 90 per cent. NHS 24 is committed to on-going partnership working with local NHS boards to ensure the effective delivery of out-of-hours services in remote and rural areas.

Liam McArthur: Will the cabinet secretary accept that the experience of too many people in remote and rural areas such as my Orkney constituency is that when they contact NHS 24 they face not only the problem of having to deal with cumbersome questioning and requests for information that has already been given—which, no doubt, urban callers also experience—but the additional concern that NHS 24 staff will not understand the need to take the local geography into account in dealing with the call? Will she undertake to sit down with general practitioners and patients' representatives from remote and rural areas to review how we can best provide 24-hour care in those challenging parts of Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: I recognise the important issues that Liam McArthur raises. There is already a very good working relationship between NHS Orkney and NHS 24. Liam McArthur may be aware that Dr Peter Baxter, the associate medical director for the north for NHS 24, is currently on secondment to NHS Orkney as medical director. That demonstrates the commitment of NHS 24 to working in partnership with the board and ensuring that there is the understanding of remote and rural communities that Liam McArthur rightly talks about.

I am also pleased to note that the chairman of NHS Orkney will visit the NHS 24 centre in Aberdeen on 22 May. That will be useful in ensuring that the mutual understanding exists that is vital if people in parts of the country such as that which Liam McArthur represents are to be properly served by health services.

The Government is absolutely committed to ensuring that people in remote and rural areas get the same level of access and quality in their health services as people elsewhere in the country. That is why, in the next few weeks, I will launch the report of the remote and rural steering group, which will go an awful long way to securing the sustainability of remote and rural services.

I take Liam McArthur's points about the questions that people are asked when they phone NHS 24. However, he will understand that those questions are asked for good clinical reasons and that it is important, when anybody calls NHS 24, that the staff ask the right questions so that they can ensure that the person is passed to the appropriate part of the health service as quickly as possible.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome the new NHS 24 service that offers psychological support, using cognitive behavioural therapy, to people with low moods and depression in Orkney. How will that initiative be audited? Does the cabinet secretary have any plans to roll it out to other rural and island areas, as I hope she will?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Mary Scanlon for welcoming that important service development in NHS 24. It will be audited in the same way as any service that NHS 24 or any other health board delivers. She is aware that we have rigorous standards of audit and performance management in the national health service, and those will apply to new services as well.

Mary Scanlon has raised the issue on many previous occasions in the chamber and is right to have done so. I give her an assurance that we intend to up the game of the NHS in terms of cognitive and behavioural services. If we are to meet some of the other challenging targets that we have set—for example, in the health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment targets framework—it is vital that those services are in place.

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): Has any work been undertaken to evaluate the working practices of NHS 24 and the impact of the inappropriate call-out of ambulances? If not, is such work going to be undertaken? I recently met front-line ambulance crews in Livingston, and I believe that that may be an issue.

Nicola Sturgeon: Angela Constance will appreciate that there may be some specific issues behind her question. If there are specific concerns that either Angela Constance or the ambulance service has around any NHS 24 practices, those should be brought to my attention. I assure her that I will examine them carefully. I know that the management of NHS 24 would also be pleased to discuss any specific concerns with the ambulance service.

Smoking (Students)

6. Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it is aware of recent United Kingdom-wide research by the University of the West of Scotland that indicates that, contrary to reality, most students believe that their peers are smokers, thus revealing the potential for social norms interventions to reduce health-damaging behaviours. (S3O-3096)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): I am certainly aware of that research and await with interest the final report, which I understand will be published later this year.

Bill Wilson: I am aware of and welcome the potential inclusion of the social norms approach in

the Fife-based multicomponent project to tackle alcohol abuse. However, will the minister consider establishing a purely social norms-based project in Renfrewshire to tackle alcohol abuse and smoking? Such a move would have the advantage of the proximity of the academic experts in the field, who are based at the University of the West of Scotland, and the information technology expertise of Youth Media, which is based in Glasgow. Without confounding approaches, it would also allow proper assessment of social norms methodologies.

Shona Robison: I have discussed the issue with my officials and colleagues from the Scottish Association of Alcohol and Drug Action Teams, and we are developing a pilot study that we aim to carry out in at least one Scottish institution. We are very much interested in learning from the University of the West of Scotland's experiences and are grateful for its input and knowledge, which has helped us to develop some of the detail of the pilot. No decision has yet been made about its location, but I will certainly keep the member informed of progress.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (Statistics)

7. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to improve centrally available information on the number of patients diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. (S3O-3076)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): Recently published Scottish Government guidance for commissioners of services for people with autism spectrum disorder aims to assist local identification, diagnosis and management and emphasises the importance of local authorities and health boards working in partnership to meet the local population's needs.

Willie Coffey: "The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities", which was published by the Scottish Executive in 2000, concluded that we have no detailed information about the number of people in Scotland with learning disabilities. As the minister will be aware, eight years after the report's publication, there is still widespread frustration about the issue, and research indicates that more than half of all adults in Scotland with ASD do not receive enough support to meet their needs. Is she confident that the Government's steps will help to close the information gap locally and nationally and ensure that any future service delivery planning is well informed?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability has carried out a considerable amount of work on developing national data standards for people with learning disabilities and

autism spectrum conditions. Over the next year, the eSAY project will continue to work with health and social care partners to roll out the collection of information across Scotland. I hope that the member will be reassured to learn that improvements in information gathering should lead to more robust service planning to ensure that services meet the needs of people with autism spectrum conditions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Local Health Care Provision

9. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what role local health care provision can play in building a healthier Scotland. (S3O-3075)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Our "Better Health, Better Care" action plan will ensure that health care is tailored as far as possible to local communities' specific health needs. By building healthier communities, we will build a healthier Scotland.

Aileen Campbell: Will the cabinet secretary confirm that in contrast to the previous Executive, which presided over the closure and downgrading of local health facilities in Law and Stonehouse, this Government remains committed to supporting NHS Lanarkshire in implementing all the local health projects, including a new health centre in Carluke and a minor injuries unit in Lanark, that were identified in "A Picture of Health: A Framework for Health Service Improvement in Lanarkshire"? Will she further confirm that such projects are not under threat as a result of the decision to retain Monklands hospital's accident and emergency unit?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am happy to give Aileen Campbell that assurance. As she will be aware, I have consistently stated that many of NHS Lanarkshire's original proposals in "A Picture of Health" had much to commend them, and I am very pleased that the board is moving towards delivering the necessary improvements in hospital and community services. I point out not only to Aileen Campbell but to the chamber that, at a time when we are experiencing the tightest ever financial allocation from Westminster, NHS Lanarkshire will over the next three years enjoy a 7 per cent increase in its capital allocation.

It is, of course, for the board to plan and deliver necessary service developments. I understand that at its meeting on 29 March the board approved £108 million-worth of new-build projects, including the Carluke resource centre and the Lanark community casualty unit, which forms part of the second phase of capital investment.

All of that demonstrates that, as a result of decisions by the SNP Government, the people of Lanarkshire will not only get the much-needed primary care and community facilities that they want but retain an excellent accident and emergency service at Monklands hospital.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): What proportion of health budget spending goes to the voluntary sector? Does the cabinet secretary project that to grow over the coming period?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that I will be able to provide Margaret Curran with specific figures, but I do not have them to hand.

I assure Margaret Curran that I value very highly indeed the contribution that the voluntary sector makes to the delivery of health care services in Scotland, and I am sure that if she speaks to people in the voluntary sector, they will echo that that message has been given to them. It has been made clear to NHS boards in "Better Health, Better Care" and in my discussions with them that I want the health service's relationship with the voluntary sector to grow and become more constructive. Working together, health boards and the voluntary sector can provide the best and most innovative services to the public.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary believe that the introduction among older men of a screening programme for abdominal aortic aneurysm would help us to achieve a healthier Scotland? An undiagnosed abdominal aortic aneurysm led to the death of my father and, earlier this week, to that of the broadcaster, Humphrey Lyttelton. Nicola Sturgeon's counterpart at Westminster is exploring the possibility of introducing such a scheme in England and Wales. As AAA is the third-biggest killer of older men in Scotland, the introduction here of a screening programme would be welcome.

Nicola Sturgeon: As Jackson Carlaw knows, I have said previously that the Government follows expert advice on screening matters from the National Screening Committee, and I am sure that all members would agree that that is the appropriate way to proceed. I confirm that we are advancing plans to introduce screening for AAA. Further detail of our plans will be revealed later this year.

Autism (Managed Clinical Network)

10. Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to develop managed clinical networks for autism. (S3O-3105)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government will continue to support initiatives to develop managed clinical

networks when there are tangible benefits for patients. It is for health boards and local authorities to identify the need for such networks on the basis of their pressures and priorities.

Hugh O'Donnell: The fact that, coincidentally, two questions have been asked about autism today tells people how high up the priority list the condition is. What is likely to be the future of the national ASD reference group?

Shona Robison: The national reference group is an important part of the structure of autism services in Scotland. We have provided funding for a number of organisations, including the Scottish autism service network, which provides a national overview of the services that are available.

We are interested in hearing from local partners who might wish to develop managed clinical networks for autism. It might be possible to make available pump-priming funding for such networks in their early stages, if local partners desire to develop them. I reiterate that decisions on the matter are based on the availability of clear evidence that adopting such an approach would have tangible benefits for people who would use those services. I am keen for such services to be developed, and we look forward to finding out whether suitable bids are made.

Dentists' Waiting Lists (Highlands)

11. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to address the length of waiting lists to see dentists in the Highlands. (S3O-3112)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): NHS Highland is planning or has in progress a number of developments to increase access to national health service dental services in nine areas across Highland. By establishing a new dental school in Aberdeen, we hope to retain a high number of dental graduates outwith the central belt.

Jamie Stone: Although I do not doubt the sincerity of the minister's intent or that of NHS Highland, the fact remains that, despite the best of intentions, the additional investment that she mentioned, and the Lochshell dental facility at Wick, we still have long waiting lists, which is rather baffling to my constituents. In the interests of working together, will she meet me and possibly my constituents to discuss what can be done to make the situation more understandable for people and to ensure that they can get to the top of the list more speedily?

Shona Robison: I am always happy to meet members and their constituents if it will help to move matters forward. NHS Highland is working very hard to increase its salaried dental service,

with additional surgeries planned for Thurso, Tain, Dingwall, Invergordon, Kyle, Portree, Inverness, Nairn and Grantown. There are 23 additional surgeries coming on stream and another eight or nine in the pipeline. I suggest to the member that they will go a long way towards tackling the waiting list that is of concern to his constituents and to the Government. That is why we support NHS Highland in its initiative.

National Health Service (Absence Rates)

12. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to address sickness absence rates in the NHS workforce. (S3O-3066)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I refer Margaret Mitchell to the answer that I gave to Claire Baker's question. However, I reiterate the point that all NHS boards, with the exception of the Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS 24, which are working to higher targets, have been tasked with meeting a 4 per cent sickness absence target by March 2009. To achieve that target, all NHS boards have in place a range of progressive policies to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of their workforces. NHS boards are working in active partnership with their staff to achieve sustained improvements in absence rates.

Margaret Mitchell: Will the cabinet secretary confirm that there was a 4 per cent target last year and tell us whether that target was generally met, given that NHS Lanarkshire's absence rate in the year to March 2007 was 6.34 per cent? What measures does the Executive intend to put in place to ensure that this year's target of 4 per cent is achieved and maintained in Lanarkshire and elsewhere?

Nicola Sturgeon: The previous Administration set a target sickness absence rate of 4 per cent but, as with so many of its targets, not only did it fail to meet that target, the figures were travelling in the wrong direction when the new Government took office. We therefore had to consider the target again and set a challenging but achievable target of 4 per cent by March 2009. Margaret Mitchell asked what the Government is doing to achieve that. I will of course be held to account on that target as I will be on any other, but I am sure that she appreciates that the work of NHS boards on the ground will determine whether the target is met.

Margaret Mitchell might be aware of some of the innovative schemes that are being used around the country. For example, a flexible annual leave system has been introduced in Lothian and a phased return-to-work policy that is proving to be very effective has been introduced in Forth Valley.

Lothian also has a traffic-light system that provides a more structured approach to managing sickness absence and ensures that appropriate interventions are made when they are needed. In Grampian, which will be my final example, absence management is embedded in the objective-setting process for individual managers.

All that sounds very technical, but what I see in my travels around the country to chair annual reviews and speak to people on the ground leads me to be confident that all NHS boards will maintain progress towards the target, meet it and thereafter sustain it. The prize is a great one because it is estimated that, if the target is met, £62 million will be freed up to be reinvested in front-line patient care, and I know that all members will support that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 13 has been withdrawn.

Community Radio

14. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to health-based community radio stations. (S3O-3080)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Executive does not provide direct support to local community-based projects. However, local voluntary organisations can apply to national health service boards in their area for grant funding under section 16(b) of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978. Funding is limited, so applications will be considered on their merits and against all the other applications that are received. Some hospital radio stations that are located on hospital property will also benefit from other kinds of support such as rent-free accommodation.

Kenneth Gibson: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, in my constituency Three Towns FM in Saltcoats recently began broadcasting under a new five-year community licence and Garnock Valley FM in Kilbirnie recently completed its first, highly successful, 28-day broadcast. Does she agree that health-based community radio stations are an excellent and highly cost-effective way of involving local volunteers in putting over simple, straightforward health messages? Will she therefore agree to consider further how health boards and community planning partnerships can provide increased assistance to community radio for health?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree whole-heartedly with Kenny Gibson about the important role of community radio. Indeed, I was delighted to have a starring role in Southern general hospital radio's "Desert Island Discs" programme just a couple of

weeks ago. Unfortunately, members will not have been able to listen to that programme, but I am told that the patients appreciated my choosing "Wake me up before you go-go". Not all my choices were that bad, but I am, after all, a child of the 1980s—which probably means that I am younger than any other member in the chamber.

On more serious matters, the issue that Kenny Gibson has raised is a matter for NHS Ayrshire and Arran. However, I understand that it is proposed that future projects of that kind will be steered towards community health partnerships to ensure that such matters are built into their formal work plans and link with local health care services. It is important that all local partners are fully involved in the process. I assure Kenny Gibson that we take the issue very seriously indeed.

Commonwealth Games 2014 (Royal Commonwealth Pool)

15. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will fully fund the upgrading of diving facilities at the royal Commonwealth pool in Edinburgh for the 2014 Commonwealth games, as indicated in "People, Place, Passion—Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games Candidate City File". (S3O-3097)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): The Scottish Government does not intend to fund the refurbishment of the royal Commonwealth pool in full. However, I was pleased to announce recently that the project will be one of the first recipients of Commonwealth games legacy funding, as it will be allocated a further £1 million in addition to the £4 million that it has already been allocated under the national and regional sports facilities strategy. When Scotland submitted its bid document for the 2014 Commonwealth games, it was necessary for the Scottish Government to give a guarantee that the diving competition facility would comply with the regulations that are set out by the Commonwealth Games Federation. At no point did the previous Scottish Executive or the current Scottish Government commit to fully funding the upgrading of the royal Commonwealth pool.

Robin Harper: I thank the minister for his answer, but there appears to be a considerable gap between the sums to which he has referred and the sum that is specifically mentioned on page 39 of volume 2, theme 8, of the candidate city file. The sport and venues section on that page states clearly that the royal Commonwealth pool will be used for the sport of diving and that the commitment for the £28.8 million cost is "100% Scottish Executive". Can the minister explain the disparity between what he has just said and what appears in the bid document?

Stewart Maxwell: Yes, I can. The situation arose as a result of the conflicting timetables for submitting the bid and for sportscotland's consideration of the funding application for the works at the royal Commonwealth pool. The Scottish Government undertook to guarantee the cost of those works for the purposes of the bid, but it was always clear that such a guarantee was required only because of the timing of the submission of the bid as against the timing of sportscotland's consideration of City of Edinburgh Council's application for funding. It was equally clear that it was not intended that the City of Edinburgh Council would exercise the Scottish Government's guarantee instead of finding the funding itself. That was fully understood by City of Edinburgh Council officials at that time.

Drug and Alcohol Misuse (North-east Scotland)

16. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will support drug and alcohol misuse services in the north-east. (S3O-3115)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government has provided £2,014,386 to NHS Grampian and £1,816,885 to NHS Tayside specifically for the provision of alcohol treatment and support services and for the delivery of brief interventions. It is for health boards, local drug and alcohol action teams and other partners to commission services in line with local need. Some £94 million has also been made available over the next three years within the justice portfolio for tackling drug misuse throughout Scotland. The majority of those resources will be allocated to health boards to provide drug treatment and rehabilitation services.

Richard Baker: I am sure that the minister will be aware of the excellent services that are provided for people with alcohol misuse problems at Albyn house in Aberdeen. Due to the withdrawal of funding by Aberdeen City Council, those services remain under threat. Will she confirm that, although the intervention of NHS Grampian is welcome in ensuring that the unit remains open in the short term, it is essential that a long-term solution is found as soon as possible, to ensure that Albyn house can continue to provide its excellent and invaluable services in the future?

Shona Robison: As the member noted, NHS Grampian has agreed to fund the shortfall to keep the centre open for four months while an existing review of the facility is completed. That is part of a general examination of the facilities and arrangements that are in place for dealing with drunk and incapable individuals throughout Scotland, to establish what works effectively and offers value for money. The Scottish Government will commission an evaluation and identify a range

of solutions to address the challenges that are presented by different locations and events. Members should be under no illusion about the Government's determination to tackle the problem of alcohol in our society and to ensure that appropriate services are in place to help people who require them.

Social Rented Housing

17. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive to what extent it is meeting its target for building social rented housing. (S3O-3114)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): The Scottish Government has established an ambitious target of 35,000 new-build houses by the middle of the next decade. We will work with the private sector, housing associations and local councils so that all can contribute to reaching that goal.

Jackie Baillie: I want to press the minister on two points. First, how many of the new affordable houses are for social rent? Secondly, one month after the start of the financial year, housing associations are still awaiting news of their grant funding. This morning, the minister said that they would receive that news soon. I invite him to say exactly when they will receive it.

Stewart Maxwell: This morning, I said that they would receive the news very soon. The grant allocation will be announced in May.

Jackie Baillie: It is May.

Stewart Maxwell: Exactly—it will be announced this month, so it is very soon.

Within the overall target, we have a range of affordable housing investment programme opportunities, not just for social rent but for low-cost home ownership. The split between those opportunities will be announced soon. In addition, we are negotiating with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on our wonderful announcement of £25 million over the next three years to kick-start the council house building programme. I know that that upsets the Labour Party, because it managed to build only six council houses in the past four years. We will negotiate with COSLA, local authorities and housing associations to ensure that the plans that we have set out in "Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland" come to fruition. We will build many more houses, because more supply is required in all tenures to meet the demand for housing in Scotland.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): First, will the minister confirm that, when the grant allocation statements are made, they will come with an estimate of the number of units that are proposed, including in the

social rented sector? Secondly, will he confirm that the £25 million that has been announced will be available to registered social landlords, including those in the Borders, which does not have council housing because of stock transfer? If so, how much will be added to RSLs in the Borders, on top of the grant allocation?

Stewart Maxwell: The member has misunderstood the announcement. The £25 million is to kick-start a new programme of house building by councils, not by RSLs. The announcement of funding for RSLs will comprise the vast bulk of the affordable housing investment programme over the next three years. I remind him that in excess of £1.5 billion will be invested in total—a 19 per cent increase on the like-for-like plans of the previous Executive.

Mental Health (Children and Young People)

18. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in implementing the commitments outlined in the framework for promotion, prevention and care. (S3O-3138)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Improving mental health and wellbeing for children and young people is a priority for the Scottish Government. We continue our work with NHS boards and other partners to deliver the specific objectives and commitments that we have set for children's and young people's mental health. There has been progress in our attention to training and workforce planning, better early intervention, supported transitions, improved primary care and improved planning and delivery of specialist care, including age-appropriate in-patient care. NHS Lanarkshire is investing an additional £650,000 in specialist services this year.

Tom McCabe: In the meeting on mental health and wellbeing that took place in the Parliament earlier this afternoon, a range of professionals came together to discuss dynamic psychotherapy, primarily for children but also for adults. The themes that emerged from the professionals' comments were the fragility of the service and the lack of succession planning. It was acknowledged that central Government has good intentions, but it also came across strongly that those intentions are not being transmitted to local health boards. There was concern about health boards' hugely inconsistent application of funding for child psychotherapy. Will the cabinet secretary take action to ensure that good intentions at central level are put into practice locally?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said, we are working with NHS boards and other partners to deliver the objectives that are set out in the framework on the mental health of children and young people and in

other policy documents. Through on-going visits and meetings with local partners, attention is being paid to and progress is being made on the published child and adolescent mental health commitments. A steering group and a wider reference group of experts in CAMH care have been set up to offer advice and input on all aspects of the agenda and to act as local, regional and national champions.

I take seriously the general comments that Tom McCabe made. If he has specific examples that back them up, I will be more than happy to discuss those examples in detail. I hope that we can all agree that the issue should not divide us politically and should be given our utmost attention and priority.

United Kingdom Budget

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1814, in the name of John Swinney, on the impact of the United Kingdom budget on Scotland.

14:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government's Budget (Scotland) Bill received royal assent on the day of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on the 2008 budget. It is fascinating to compare the budget that the Scottish Parliament passed with that of the United Kingdom Government.

The Scottish Government's budget addressed the needs of the people of Scotland. Our spending plans provided a clear statement of priorities, which was based firmly on the social democratic contract that we offered the people during the election campaign. The contract's central purpose is increased sustainable economic growth, the fruits of which should be enjoyed by all parts of our society and nation—north and south, strong and disadvantaged.

In contrast, the UK Government's actions will result in some of the poorest people in our society paying more tax and in one of our premium industries, the Scotch whisky industry, which employs thousands of people in Scotland, facing significant increases in duty and the danger of loss of competitiveness. All that comes at a time when tax revenues from the North Sea oil and gas industry continue to support the UK's public finances. During the next six years, the Treasury's figures show that North Sea tax revenues will contribute more than £55 billion to the UK Exchequer—the highest nominal level of revenue from the North Sea in more than two decades. The relentless appreciation in oil prices will lead to further increases in revenues that will benefit the UK Treasury.

In addressing the UK budget, I focus first on a key issue that has been debated in recent weeks: the abolition of the 10p starting rate of income tax. Although the policy was announced in the 2007 budget, its impact has only just been felt. The chancellor had ample opportunity to reverse the approach at the 2007 pre-budget report stage and in his 2008 budget, but no changes were made to the original proposition. The Scottish Government estimates that even if we account for the more generous tax credits that were announced at the same time, approximately 500,000 households in Scotland are worse off as a result of the abolition of the 10p starting rate. That will have a

disproportionate effect on people on low incomes, with people earning less than £19,500 losing out. The effect is further compounded by recent rises in food and fuel prices. Claims that the hike is offset by tax credits are without substance. Many people on low incomes are ineligible for tax credits while others are put off by the complexities of the tax credit system and, as a consequence, do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

In contrast, the Scottish Government is delivering for the people of Scotland a council tax freeze, reduced prescription charges, the abolition of the graduate endowment, and increased payments for free personal and nursing care. All those measures help to put money back into the pockets of hard-pressed individuals and families in Scotland. Furthermore, the abolition of the unfair council tax, and its replacement by a local income tax that is based on the ability to pay, will see the poorest 20 per cent of Scottish households gaining an average of £350 each year.

Although, we welcome in principle the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement last week of his plans to investigate ways in which to compensate low-paid workers and pensioners who will suffer from the loss of the 10p rate, we must see the detail of what is proposed. People on low incomes are affected by the change—they are affected today. It is important that any package is put forward as soon as possible. Furthermore, any changes must ensure that all households in Scotland that are adversely affected by the change are adequately compensated by the measures that are put forward.

An interesting contrast can be made between the chancellor's decision on the 10p tax rate and this Government's proposals to introduce a local income tax. It is a choice between the UK chancellor's approach of abolishing the 10p rate, which will see members of the Scottish Parliament gain £300 on their tax bill, and the Scottish Government's proposal for a fairer local income tax, which will see MSPs lose about £600, while people on the lowest incomes—our pensioners and families under financial pressure—will be among the biggest winners. That is the contrast between the different positions that the Administrations north and south of the border take on taxation. At a time when UK tax bills are up, food and fuel bills are up and the cost of living is increasing, ministers in the Scottish Government are doing all that we can with the measures that we have at our disposal to benefit the families of Scotland through the council tax freeze and the other measures that I mentioned a moment ago.

I turn to the business community. Our economic strategy sets out how we will support businesses to create a more successful country, using all the levers that are available to us. This Government

wants to make Scotland more competitive—we make no apologies for that fact. That is why we have reduced and will remove business rates for thousands of small businesses. Abolishing rates for 120,000 business premises in Scotland will set our small firms free to create new jobs and new growth in the Scottish economy.

However, Scottish businesses are feeling the impact of the measures that were announced in previous UK budgets. Since 2007, the small companies' corporation tax rate has increased year on year, rising to 22 per cent in 2009. That will have a disproportionate effect on the many small and medium-sized enterprises that are the bedrock of the Scottish economy. This Government believes that a lower corporation tax rate would boost economic growth in Scotland, as exemplified by the success of other small European Union countries, such as Ireland, that have taken a similar course. The approach that this Government has taken on competitive taxation to encourage the business community to grow and invest is the right approach for Scotland.

One industry that has been severely affected by the budget is the whisky industry, which is one of Scotland's most significant industries. In 2006, the spirits industry's overseas exports were worth more than £3 billion and the Scotch Whisky Association estimates that its members support more than 41,000 jobs in Scotland, both directly and indirectly. However, following the UK budget, duty will increase by 9 per cent—6 per cent in real terms—with further increases of 2 per cent per annum above inflation over the next four years. It is estimated that that will put 59p on to the price of a bottle of Scotch whisky. That runs the risk of encouraging international competitors to introduce punitive tariffs and threatens not only our ability to export but the jobs that the industry sustains.

The UK budget represents a backwards step for the Scotch whisky industry, at a time when whisky is taxed more heavily than any other alcoholic drink. The challenge for the chancellor was to introduce a fair alcohol tax regime, combat the discriminatory tax on Scotch whisky and take proper measures to tackle alcohol abuse.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): As a matter of fact, my understanding is that vodka, gin and other spirits are taxed at the same level as whisky.

John Swinney: I will come on to the point about the budget failing to have an impact on tackling the significant issue of alcohol misuse, which I have just raised. We want to ensure that there is a mature debate about alcohol content and taxation. Unless we tackle the issue, we will not create a situation in which one of our premium industries, which none of us believes is at the heart of the problems of binge drinking in our society, can be fairly and properly treated.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Has the Scottish Government done economic modelling on any proposals to increase the drinking age to 21 in Scotland?

John Swinney: I am not aware of any economic modelling that has been undertaken, but I give Mr Purvis a commitment to examine the issue and give him the appropriate response in due course.

The approach taken by the Treasury in the budget was an easy one, which simply targeted boosting tax revenues for the Treasury. The budget failed to mention the need to tackle alcohol misuse and overconsumption and failed to incentivise producers to develop and market low-alcohol alternatives. It is questionable whether the blanket increases in duty will contribute to a reduction in consumption and associated harm or whether big retailers will ask producers to absorb the cost.

An opportunity has been missed to act to protect and improve public health and address wider alcohol-related harms. We believe that a more comprehensive approach is required that considers issues related to the costs and impacts of alcohol misuse. Therefore, in the summer we will publish for consultation proposals for a long-term strategic approach to tackling alcohol misuse. If this Parliament and this Government had responsibility for alcohol taxation, we would not have introduced proposals that do too little to discourage binge drinking and too much to harm a vital Scottish industry. We need flexibility in alcohol taxation so that we can tax high-alcohol, low-price booze, influence behaviour and support a premium Scottish export industry.

The final issue that I will raise is fuel. The impact of continuing high fuel prices, in particular on household energy bills, has been felt throughout Scotland. The price increases are having an effect on efforts to address fuel poverty in Scotland. The Scottish Government is doing all that it can to combat fuel poverty. Our housing is more energy efficient than housing south of the border and we are investing in energy-efficient programmes throughout Scotland, but not enough is done in the budget to tackle fuel poverty, nor is enough done to tackle the significant effects of road fuel duty that are felt in rural Scotland and within the haulage industry. I am proud of the efforts of my colleagues in the House of Commons, who have long promoted a road fuel regulator to remove some of the worst impacts of increasing petrol and diesel prices. I have written to the UK Government on the issue and the Scottish Government will continue to exercise pressure to seek a more favourable regime.

The debate highlights the central problem: key decisions can still be taken that harm Scotland's interests. This Government will not allow that to

happen and we will assert the Scottish interest at all times.

I move,

That the Parliament is disappointed with some of the decisions taken in the 2008 UK Budget and their damaging impact on the Scottish economy and households; in particular regrets that action was not taken to reverse the 2007 decision to abolish the 10p tax rate; notes with concern the increase in the small companies' rate of corporation tax; believes that the blanket approach taken in setting alcohol duty is too simplistic and does not address the wider social and health issues around alcohol; regrets that the measures aimed at tackling fuel poverty are insufficient, and further regrets the lack of appropriate measures to moderate the impact of rising fuel prices.

15:08

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

The first question that many will have is why the debate is happening and why this Parliament seeks to take an interest in what look like reserved matters. There are several reasons why it is right for us to do so. Whatever our view on the constitution and wherever we think the boundary should be drawn between devolved and reserved powers, most Scots would expect the Scottish Government to make representations to the UK Government when Scottish interests might be affected. Any genuinely unionist UK Government would listen carefully to such representations to avoid playing into the hands of the nationalists.

Although this Parliament has very limited powers over taxation and no influence over the content of the UK budget, the knock-on impact of policy decisions made at Westminster must surely influence policy judgments in Scotland. The Scottish Government cannot reasonably be expected to pick up all the pieces in the Scottish economy if the UK Government gets it wrong, but it can surely be expected to act to mitigate the negative impact of bad policy decisions and to argue the case when Scotland will be badly affected by decisions made on a UK-wide basis. That is why, for example, I proposed the acceleration of the business rate cuts in the Parliament on 21 November and, thereafter, in the Scottish budget to limit the damage that Labour's tax rises are doing to the Scottish economy and small businesses in particular.

It is reasonable to expect the Scottish Government to argue against tax changes that would hit Scotland especially hard, and when the chancellor targets a key Scottish industry for tax rises, we do not expect the Scottish Government to sit idly by and pretend that nothing is happening. That view is taken not only by the Conservatives. We can say that with some confidence because it is the approach of not only the current Scottish Government but its predecessor.

We know that the previous Scottish Executive made representations some years back on the taxation of the oil and gas industry. Although the content of those representations is not in the public domain, we can draw one of two conclusions from the fact that it exists: either—this is not as far-fetched as it seems—the previous Scottish Executive was hell-bent on political suicide and wanted higher taxes on the oil industry that is critical to the Scottish economy, or it argued strongly against them and was ignored by the current Prime Minister when he was chancellor. One of those two things must be true. I use that example to illustrate that the debate would be relevant even if the Scottish National Party were not in government, and that concern about the content of UK budgets and their impact on Scotland is not limited to those who happen to be in opposition at Westminster at the time nor to any particular industry.

Anyone who is interested in working out what the UK Government's budget means in practice long ago gave up listening to the content of the budget speeches and spends their time instead looking at the reams of detailed paperwork that are published the minute the chancellor sits down. Helpfully, the Treasury publishes each year a table that outlines the changes in tax revenues arising from each of the policy decisions that are taken. In that table, we can see the budget's real impact. It may have taken Labour MPs 11 years to work it out, but it is better late than never, and having seen an £11 billion increase in tax targeted on the low paid, even the most on-message of Labour MPs must wonder whether their message was not fatally flawed.

Much of the controversy has centred on the abolition of the 10p starting rate of income tax. After all the fuss about it, the chancellor wrote to the Treasury Committee and said:

"The 10p rate was introduced in 1999 as a transitional measure to help low income households"—

except that anyone who read the budget speech or any of the associated documents at the time or subsequently would be unable to find any hint that it was a transitional measure. As members will recall, Gordon Brown announced it with some fanfare—not unsurprisingly, as it was a key pledge in the 1997 Labour manifesto, not as a transitional measure but as a long-term commitment.

The scrapping of the 10p rate means that many low-paid workers will be worse off, as their income is taxed at the basic rate. That should come as no surprise to Labour MPs, because it is precisely what happened to low-paid workers in the 1999 budget when Gordon Brown introduced the 10p rate to begin with, because it was used as a cover for a substantial increase in the income that was taxable at the basic rate, which was targeted at

the low paid too. There was, of course, no fuss at the time from Labour MPs. Perhaps the political situation did not lead them to take such a keen interest in the affairs of the low paid, but we must surely be grateful that they are now paying closer attention to the impact of their taxation decisions on those who can least afford them.

As well as taxing low-paid workers, the budget contains some ill-considered decisions in other areas. The changes to capital gains tax also impact on many Scottish business owners. As it happens, the taper relief that the chancellor has now abolished was introduced in 1998. The then chancellor—now the Prime Minister—was very pleased with it. He said that it would

"explicitly reward long-term investment"—

something with which I am sure we would all agree—and that

"a 10p long-term rate for capital gains tax"

was aimed at

"those who build businesses or stake their own hard-earned money in them".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 17 March 1998; Vol 308, c 1101.]

After his recent decisions, rather than paying an effective rate of 10 per cent on any hard-earned money that they raise, those investors will pay 18 per cent. That change was announced with no consultation, no warning and no thought to the impact that it would have on the economy, in particular at this time, when the global outlook is so uncertain, as the chancellor keeps reminding us.

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Derek Brownlee is quoting figures from 1998. Perhaps he could shed some light on why Peter Lilley denounced the introduction of taper relief as

"a revenue-increasing measure and a further tax burden".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 April 1998; Vol 311, c 348.]

Derek Brownlee: The member will recall that taper relief was substantially accelerated in later budgets, which made it much more attractive. Taper relief is an interesting area, and I know that the Liberal Democrats have previously stated that they do not believe that it is the right way to approach capital taxation. That is a reasonable argument to advance, although I saw in the 18 January edition of *Taxation* magazine—a magazine that has had its fair share of articles to write since the present Government came to power—an article in which Vince Cable, the erstwhile temporary leader of the Liberal Democrats, attacked the abolition of taper relief. He said that it was "hamfisted", and that

"the Government has been inept in its withdrawal of taper relief".

Perhaps if the Liberal Democrats took a more rounded view of taper relief and were a bit more consistent about it, they would have a bit more credibility on the matter.

One of the unforeseen, or perhaps foreseen, consequences of the reduction—or increase, for those who have businesses—in the basic rate of capital gains tax to 18 per cent was that tax on second-home profits was reduced from 40 per cent to 18 per cent. Even Tony Blair did not try that one.

Let me turn now to excise duty, in particular the impact on the Scotch whisky industry. Tax rises on whisky are nothing new: they were first imposed by the previous Scottish Parliament in 1644 to fund an invasion of England. Even I would not accuse the Labour Party of being to blame for that, but I will blame it for not learning from more recent history. When the Conservatives were last in government, spirits duty fell in real terms, and Ken Clarke made the first cuts to duty on spirits for more than 100 years, in the 1995 and 1996 budgets, which helped the Scotch whisky industry. When tax rates fell, tax revenues rose. The problem now is that the chancellor is using the tax as a cash cow. As the cabinet secretary said, when the industry or the UK Government is negotiating overseas against punitive tariffs, the response will be that the UK Government has done the same thing.

The UK budget increased taxes on the low paid, on small businesses and on the self-employed. In targeting one of our main exports, it was anti-Scottish; in targeting small businesses, it was vintage Labour; in targeting the poorest workers, it was socialism at vindictive best.

I have pleasure in moving amendment S3M-1814.1, to insert at end:

“notes with concern the decision to abolish Capital Gains Tax taper relief, and believes that the increase in spirits duty will needlessly damage the Scotch Whisky industry.”

15:18

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Over the past year, the minority Government has been adept at picking needless fights with Westminster. Ministers tell themselves that it is standing up for Scotland, although most Scots would prefer them to get on with the business of governing responsibly. However, the motion for debate this afternoon provides us all with an opportunity to have a square go at the UK Government. In that I include Labour MSPs, many of whose colleagues at Westminster have been in open rebellion in recent weeks about certain aspects of the UK budget—albeit aspects of a budget that the same MPs were happy to endorse 12 months ago.

The motion correctly identifies a number of ways in which the UK budget fails to address Scotland's needs properly, and I will come on to those shortly. We will doubtless hear suggestions from the SNP back-bench faithful that the shortcomings in the UK budget provide a compelling case for independence—for Scotland to be cut adrift from the rest of the UK—but that argument is grounded more in dogma than in logic. After all, with the help of the Tories, the SNP Government recently secured its own budget. I would contend that, in keeping with Mr Darling's inauspicious debut, and despite what the cabinet secretary himself said earlier this afternoon, Mr Swinney's budget also failed to address many of the needs of Scotland and of the Scottish people. However, I readily concede that the cabinet secretary delivered his budget with a great deal more style. I trust that Mr Swinney will not consider that to be damning by faint praise.

The motion is justified and measured and identifies most of the key failings of the UK budget. Derek Brownlee outlined the reasons why the debate serves another useful purpose. The Liberal Democrat amendment in my name, seeks to make small but important improvements by reflecting the impact of the serious problems that are affecting the housing market and the inadequacies of the UK Government's response in dealing with child poverty.

As the cabinet secretary and Derek Brownlee have emphasised, the decision by the previous chancellor to scrap the 10p rate of tax in last year's budget, and the failure of the current chancellor to reverse that, have captured the headlines and created the greatest sense of understandable anger. The injustice of Gordon Brown's initial £7 billion tax grab from some of the poorest in society was highlighted and criticised by the Liberal Democrats at the time.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When I was reading the 1999 budget debate, I was struck by what Paddy Ashdown had to say about the 10p tax rate:

“My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon, the Treasury spokesman, was the first person to propose it, but when we looked at it, we decided that it was nonsense.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 9 March 1999; Vol 327, c 203.]

Did he change his mind on the issue?

Liam McArthur: The 10p rate was introduced to a great fanfare. There were certainly problems with its introduction, and its removal—as a sleight of hand alongside the reduction of the basic rate of tax by 2p—has proved it to be what Nicol Stephen said that it was at the time: a piece of spin and gimmickry that results in the lowest earners paying more. Oddly, it has taken rather longer for David Cameron and, indeed, Labour back benchers to

summon up sufficient indignation to come out against the move.

Now, the Prime Minister has said that he is sorry, and that his Government is listening and learning—a triumph of sorts after 11 years in government. However, the issue has provided further evidence of how out of touch the Prime Minister is, how his indecision and dithering are undermining any residual credibility his Government has, and how ineffective or even damaging has been his obsession with endlessly tinkering with the tax and benefits system. In a Scottish context, the effects of that have been particularly acutely felt, reflecting, perhaps, wage levels in Scotland—not least in my own constituency—compared with those in other parts of the UK.

In a desperate attempt to stave off rebellion, concessions have been offered to help mitigate the effects of scrapping the 10p tax rate. So far, the rebellion has been quelled, but the mess has yet to be cleared up effectively, and we have no details. For example, Help the Aged has identified female pensioners aged between 60 and 64 as being at risk of paying more as a result of the chancellor's actions—or inaction—in the budget. The additional tax that they might end up paying could be as much as £180.

As we have come to expect, the UK budget in March was unveiled amid a great fanfare of rhetoric about poverty and redistribution. However, the substance failed to justify the billing, particularly in relation to poverty.

Last month, Liberal Democrats initiated a debate in the chamber on fuel poverty. Members across the parties rightly expressed concern about the dramatic rise in the number of households that are now paying more than 10 per cent of their income for fuel. I was delighted that Parliament endorsed the Liberal Democrat proposals for a one-stop-shop approach to tackling fuel poverty. Scottish ministers have been quick to point an accusing finger at Westminster, but I would gently remind this Government of its own responsibilities in addressing fuel poverty.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I note that Liam McArthur's amendment does not delete the other reference to fuel, which concerns the SNP's policy on rising fuel prices, namely, the fuel price regulator, which would reduce the tax rate and, therefore, necessitate public spending cuts every time fuel prices rise, which they will, inexorably.

Can the member tell us whether the Liberal Democrats believe that such a policy is consistent with commitments either on public services or on climate change and peak oil? If he does not believe that it is consistent, why does his amendment not try to delete the reference in the motion?

Liam McArthur: Patrick Harvie makes a number of interesting points, but I point out that my colleague, Alistair Carmichael, has made strenuous efforts over a number of years to press the case for differentials in fuel duty, recognising the punitive impact in parts of the country, including Orkney—my constituency—where the price of fuel has long been far greater than elsewhere.

The response of UK ministers and, in particular, the chancellor has been wholly inadequate. Mr Brown talks constantly of taking the right long-term decisions, but the decision to increase the winter fuel allowance for only one year looks, for all the world, like a short-term gimmick. Not surprisingly, Age Concern is not impressed. In the context of rapidly escalating fuel prices and their impact across the board on the cost of living, particularly for some of the most vulnerable in our communities, the budget was a grave disappointment.

In my constituency, where paying £1.30 a litre for diesel is already a distant, almost fond, memory, the problems are being felt most severely. A colder climate, a longer heating season and generally poorer-quality housing all contribute to a deeply disturbing situation, which will not be alleviated by a one-off increase in winter fuel payments that have already been more than swallowed up by recent increases in fuel prices.

In the area of child poverty, too, the UK budget has failed to deliver, with serious consequences here in Scotland. It is now fairly clear that the target of halving child poverty by 2010 will not be achieved. By investing less than a third of the amount that is required to halve child poverty, the UK Government has, in effect, abandoned its own target. The modest changes that have been announced to child benefit and child tax credits are further examples of a failure properly to walk the walk.

The motion highlights other shortcomings, notably on the rate of corporation tax for small businesses and alcohol duty. Those are both important issues, not least given the proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Scottish economy and the well-documented importance of our whisky industry.

However, I turn to the difficulties in the housing market. The market in Scotland is proving to be more resilient than the market further south, but Scots have not been entirely abstemious during the recent debt binge. As well as consumer debt, there is estimated to be £74 billion of loans secured on dwellings in Scotland. That is almost three times the Scottish Government's budget. UK ministers cannot be held responsible for the irresponsible behaviour of some lenders and,

indeed, some borrowers, but there is public interest in averting a wave of repossessions and an overcorrection in the market.

The motion and our amendment raise legitimate grievances about the approach that the UK Government has taken in its budget. Those grievances are shared north and south of the border. The Tory amendment, however, betrays the now trademark Cameronian opportunism. When Labour brought in taper relief, the Tories dismissed it as a dog's breakfast. Now, it seems that Mr Brownlee and his colleagues are only too happy to tuck their snouts into that breakfast, dismissing Lord Lawson orthodoxy in favour of the dubious radicalism of Geoffrey Robinson.

When business organisations bemoan a missed opportunity and Scottish trade union leaders criticise UK ministers' failure to address the disproportionate tax burden on low-paid workers, it is fair to suggest that the UK Government's budget has failed to deliver.

I move amendment S3M-1814.2, to insert after "10p tax rate":

"deplores the continued failure of the UK Government to provide an adequate package of measures to help families affected by the falling housing market and the absence of sufficient budget provision for the alleviation of child poverty".

15:26

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I well recall the SNP Government's reluctance to debate its own budget, yet it has brought to the chamber a debate on a budget for which neither it nor the Parliament has any responsibility whatsoever. Despite Derek Brownlee's rather tortuous justification for the debate, the UK budget is a reserved matter and we do not intend to vote on it, just as we did not vote on identity cards, defence or a European referendum.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Is the Labour Party aware that its commitment not to vote on non-devolved matters automatically gives the SNP a working majority in the Parliament?

Iain Gray: Our position is exactly as we have set it out. The Tories' problem is that discussion of the UK budget sits properly in a Parliament in which they have a single Scottish MP and therefore no voice.

The Scottish Parliament is a legislative body, not just a debating chamber. I remember that, in its early days, it undertook historic legislation on land reform and abolition of the feudal system, and cutting-edge legislation on incapacity and homelessness. The SNP Government's legislative programme is so light and so slight that the Government has to revert to Opposition tactics to

construct its business, posturing where it does not have power rather than delivering where it does.

I do not argue that the UK budget does not have a significant impact in Scotland—of course it does, which is why it has been extensively debated and scrutinised by Scottish MPs at Westminster. Indeed, those MPs are passing more legislation that is relevant to Scotland than the Scottish Government is producing here. The legislation at Westminster includes legislation to protect whisky—our national drink—in global markets. My colleague Jackie Baillie will deal with whisky later, but the whisky industry is doing well, with record exports and new distilleries opening up. There have been no job losses in that industry—quite the reverse. In other industries, however, 2,000 jobs have gone in the past year, to the sound of silence from SNP ministers. Perhaps we should have debated that today, on May day.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the member still hold the view that he expressed at the Confederation of British Industry dinner, that the increase in whisky duty was a bombshell and would not raise any additional revenue for Scotland or the Treasury?

Iain Gray: I say to Mr Neil, who was not present on that occasion, that I said neither of those things. His informant is incorrect.

Many of the measures in the budget will have a positive effect in Scotland. Some 600,000 families will benefit from increased child benefit, 300,000 families will benefit from increased child tax credit, 750,000 households will benefit from additional winter fuel payments and 87,000 workers will benefit from the increase in the national minimum wage. John Dickie of the Child Poverty Action Group said of the budget:

"This is excellent news for Scotland's poorest children and children facing poverty across Britain."

However, a mistake was made in the abolition of the 10p tax band. The extra support in the budget leaves most of those who paid only or mostly the 10p rate better off. However, it is clear that the abolition would have a detrimental effect on those who are low paid but childless and on pensioners under 65 years. That is wrong, and it should not be allowed to happen—nor will it, because a commitment has been given to compensate those groups and to backdate that compensation to 1 April. Many Labour Party MPs voiced their concern and said that they would reflect it in how they voted. The United Kingdom Government listened and responded.

Mr Swinney is right—we should compare that with what happened with the Scottish budget. Concerns were expressed that budget decisions would have a detrimental effect on some of the most vulnerable groups in society. Every day

brings more evidence that those concerns were well-founded. Amendments were moved to stop pensioners paying water rates, to protect women suffering domestic abuse and to support families living with disability. Were those concerns heard? No. Were those concerns responded to? No. Did those concerns come from any of the Government's back benchers? No. SNP members turned up like the claque at the opera and applauded whatever was put in front of them. When the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth found additional resources, did the SNP back benchers argue that the money should be used to alleviate poverty or to benefit low-paid workers or hard-pressed pensioners? No. They demanded that it be handed out to small businesses as a quicker, bigger rate cut.

The 10p rate and the impact of its abolition have been exhaustively debated in Westminster. Here is what one MP said about it:

"No one is going to reinstate the 10p band at a cost of £7 billion; we are looking for mitigating procedures".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 April 2008; Vol 475, c 106.]

That is a fair point. It was made by Stewart Hosie of the SNP. So SNP London does not support the position in the motion. SNP MPs recognise the compensation that is on offer. The First Minister went all the way to London to vote for it, not a reinstatement of the 10p band.

On fuel poverty, too, the motion fails to recognise what has happened since the budget. On 9 April, the UK Government concluded an agreement with energy suppliers, in line with the budget announcement, to increase support through social assistance programmes by £225 million over three years. On 23 April, the Government, the energy industry and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets met and prepared further concrete proposals which will be announced when election purdah in England ends. Meanwhile, the fuel poverty forum in Scotland has not met for a year; the SNP housing consultation ignored fuel poverty altogether; the SNP opposes Sarah Boyack's energy efficiency bill; and fewer central heating systems were fitted last year than in any year since 2003, and the waiting time has doubled. Those are the figures, Mr Swinney. What vow of silence have the Scottish ministers taken that has stopped them bringing forward a fuel poverty action plan? The truth is that Labour in Westminster has taken more action on fuel poverty in the past month than the SNP has taken in the past year.

Whether we discuss jobs, child poverty, pensioner poverty or fuel poverty, we should debate the lack of action here, where we can make changes, rather than debate the real action that is happening elsewhere, which we can only applaud by comparison.

15:34

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I find it strange that Mr Gray still talks about fuel poverty, 10 years after the election of a Labour Government in oil-rich Scotland. That is a damnation of Labour's record.

He says that we will hear from Jackie Baillie on the whisky industry. We have already heard from Jackie Baillie on the whisky industry. She lodged a motion in March 2006, and again in March 2007, welcoming the freeze on whisky duty. However, there was no motion in March 2008.

Let us remind ourselves what she put in her motion in 2006. The motion welcomes a freeze in whisky duty, and

"considers this to be a progressive move which helps support the industry's competitiveness and productivity; notes that a fairer alcohol duty regime helps support a key British industry in its home market and sends a message of tax fairness overseas, as distillers look to develop new opportunities in emerging markets such as China, and congratulates the Labour Government on maintaining this freeze on duty".

I presume, now that Labour has unfrozen the freeze, that all of that no longer stands.

Jackie Baillie: I wonder whether Mr Neil will share with the chamber how many SNP members signed either of my motions congratulating the Labour Government. I suspect that the answer is none.

Alex Neil: Yes, because we lodged our own motion at the time. I note that Pauline McNeill and Ken Macintosh both signed Jackie Baillie's motion, but that Mr Kerr, of course, did not.

Any budget has to be measured on two key criteria—growth, and poverty and what we do about it. I am sorry to say that the 2008 budget from Mr Darling fails on both counts.

Let us consider the impact of the UK budget on growth, jobs and investment in the Scottish economy. As Mr Swinney quite rightly said, the impact on small companies—which are the backbone of the Scottish economy—will be adverse, because the corporation tax that small companies pay will be increased. At a time when the tax rate for Shell and BP will be reduced from 30 per cent to 28 per cent, the tax on small businesses will increase from the small business rate of 19 per cent, initially to 21 per cent. It is surely perverse that when companies such as Shell and BP are making record profits on the back of record oil prices, we are imposing additional taxation on the companies that make up the backbone of both the Scottish and British economies.

Let us consider oil and an issue that is much derided by the unionist parties. We may be at or

near the peak of oil production in the North Sea, but we are nowhere near the peak of revenues. Indeed, some estimates suggest that the price of oil could go up to \$200 a barrel. That will result in a huge revenue bonanza for the UK Treasury, but it should come to a Scottish treasury.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I will in a minute, but I add that we have not yet taken into account all the oil that is still to be taken out on the Atlantic side, outwith the North Sea fields.

We should compare how we are being denuded of our oil revenues with how we are subsidising huge investment in the south-east of England. For example, as a public expenditure analysis by the UK Government shows, we in Scotland make a net contribution of more than £500 million a year to the cost of running UK departments. If that money were spent in Scotland, it could, with the multiplier effect, add well over £1 billion a year to the gross domestic product of the Scottish economy.

If we consider just three projects in the south-east—the Olympics, London crossrail and the Channel link—we see that investment from the public sector totals around £40 billion. I do not begrudge investment by people in the south-east, but it is ridiculous that that huge investment is going into the south-east when we are suffering the lowest ever revenue grant for vital services from Westminster, here in this Scottish Parliament.

Another issue is interest rates. If we were in charge of our own economic policy, our rates would be far lower than they are now, compared with the euro zone and the federal funds rate. In the United States of America, the fed rate is now 2 per cent, whereas here the interest rate is two and a half times that, at 5 per cent. A 5 per cent interest rate is not good for business or home owners, or for the Scottish or British economies.

We can reach only one conclusion: the Brown bandwagon has come off its wheels, and the reality is that, far from having 10 years of success, we are now paying the price for Gordon Brown's failure as chancellor and as Prime Minister.

15:40

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I will draw on some of the positive aspects of the UK budget. The motion deals with reserved matters, which I suggest is merely a diversionary tactic to pull the cover over the SNP's trail of broken promises.

Labour budgets have delivered a strong economy, not just this year but over the 11 years that we have been in power, with 3 million more

people in work and 600,000 fewer suffering from child poverty. The winter fuel allowance increases that were introduced in the budget will benefit 9 million pensioner households.

I will cover economic growth, but first I will touch on some of the taxation aspects of the motion and the amendments. The SNP motion comments on the increase in corporation tax for small businesses, which Alex Neil mentioned. However, the rate is lower than it was in 1997, and the main rate has reduced from 30 per cent to 28 per cent. That package of changes, taken together, will contribute to economic growth.

The Tory amendment comments on the abolition of capital gains tax taper relief. The capital gains tax system has been viewed as complex, and a one-system-fits-all policy has been introduced at a rate of 18 per cent. That will reduce bureaucracy and red tape, which I would have thought might find favour among the Tories.

We must consider what the SNP budget has delivered in terms of economic growth. One of its flagship policies is the council tax freeze, but that will deliver cash benefits to those in higher council tax bands.

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): The member has got that the wrong way round.

James Kelly: The reality is that millionaires such as Brian Souter will benefit more from the policy than will classroom assistants in primary schools in Cambuslang. [*Interruption.*] Please let me make some progress.

The local income tax policy has also been much trumpeted by the SNP, but it will drive up tax and drive talent out of Scotland. Those two aspects—the council tax freeze and the local income tax—will together undermine economic growth.

As my colleague Iain Gray pointed out, there has been positive action on the social tariff at a UK level. I have raised concerns in the chamber about pre-payment meter customers, and I have twice, during debates, asked questions about the Scottish ministers' discussions with Scottish Power on the matter.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): Does the member think that it is appropriate that the non-mandatory social tariff allocation of £150 million is a drop in the ocean compared with the £1.275 billion that the energy companies take for pre-payment meters?

James Kelly: I do not think that the member's briefing is up to date. As Iain Gray pointed out, the discussions with energy companies have resulted in £225 million being committed to the social tariff.

I want to hear what positive aspects have come out of the discussions with Scottish Power. I am still waiting for an answer from ministers.

On the back of that, I have to say that the SNP energy policy is a bit of a shambles. SNP members talk green, but they have opposed renewable energy projects totalling 900MW and have supported energy projects totalling only 600MW. They have opposed nuclear power but have supported the extension at Hunterston B. The fact is that their rhetoric does not match up with the reality.

We have to ask why the tartan Tories have been joined in their offensive by the sons and daughters of Milton Friedman on the Conservative benches. I suggest that it is not just a case of getting the SNP budget passed. The SNP's political agenda requires David Cameron in Downing Street, because the SNP thinks that that will increase support for independence from the low figure of 19 per cent, as seen in this morning's poll. The SNP would rather have David Cameron, whose political philosophy was formed in the wine bars of Islington, than Gordon Brown, whose thinking was moulded in a Scottish manse.

Labour has done a lot in the past 11 years. Unlike the SNP, we have a history of delivering lasting policies, such as the minimum wage and the working families tax credit. Labour was building the NHS when the SNP was stealing the stone of destiny. It is time to move forward with progress, forward with Labour.

15:47

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I begin by saying that James Kelly wouldnae catch me in a wine bar.

Like many members who have spoken in the debate, I find it rather uncomfortable to be here, in the Scottish Parliament, speaking in a debate that has been brought by the SNP Government on a budget that has been set by the Westminster Government. That is foreign to me. Although we often find ourselves on common ground, I will never find common cause with the main thrust of the SNP's policy; yet, I find myself talking about the same things in many respects.

First, I will talk about the decision by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, to increase significantly the tax on whisky. Most of what needs to be said on that has already been said, but I make the point that our whisky industry is, among many things, one of the most significant industries in the peripheral parts of the Scottish economy. In areas where wages are lowest and the economy is most rural, a distillery is often a major part of the local economy. Like many of our less significant industries, it is not a huge employer but it is an important employer in some areas. I regret the fact that the chancellor has reversed the practice of previous Governments—

especially Conservative Governments—by destabilising the relationship between alcohol taxation on spirits and taxation on wines and beers.

During the days of the Conservative Government—those 18 glorious years that we are so keen to talk about here—the whisky industry underwent a renaissance. During that period, distilleries that had been in mothballs for many years came back into production. We should thank that Government for that.

I move on to a couple of issues that have not yet been raised in the debate, the first of which is the proposed climate change bill—a priority of the Parliament and the Government that may yet find support from the Conservatives—and some of the legislation that will have to be passed in conjunction with it. Some issues that relate to that bill lie under the chancellor's control. That is why I am extremely disappointed that Labour has not taken action to move forward positively on two aspects. First, it has done nothing to encourage the introduction of smart metering. Electricity meters provide an opportunity for us all to see how much energy we use and to exploit it more efficiently. Encouraging electricity companies to support smart metering was in the chancellor's power, but he failed to do that.

Secondly, the chancellor has failed to take the opportunity to encourage the introduction of proper feed-in tariffs, which can give those of us who wish to invest in opportunities to generate electricity domestically through microrenewables a proper return in the marketplace. I encourage the chancellor—should he survive to see another budget—to act on those issues.

The key issue to which I return is transport. I was interested that the chancellor, who represents an Edinburgh constituency, said in his budget speech:

“I am setting aside new funding to develop the technology that could underpin national road pricing, inviting tenders to test this with the results expected next year.”

It greatly disappoints many of us that the chancellor seems to believe that the motorist can yield yet more tax revenue in the long term. Having seen the debates about introducing city-entry charges for Edinburgh and about tolls on the Tay and Forth bridges, surely the chancellor should have recognised the evidence on his doorstep that road pricing would not be popular.

Finally, I will talk about fuel duty. Our amendment would add words only at the end of the Government's motion because we do not wish to rule out anything that could deal with the problem of fuel costs in rural Scotland. The chancellor's decision to proceed with a 2p

increase in tax on a litre of fuel—albeit deferred until October again—shows that he sees the motorist, the road haulage industry and the economy that it supports as providing a tax-yielding opportunity rather than a means to stimulate development.

Worse still, the chancellor said:

“For environmental reasons we will increase fuel duty by ½ pence per litre in real terms from 2010.”

I started by talking about peripherality. We in Scotland—particularly in the Highlands and Islands—know that fuel prices here are significantly and artificially higher than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. Even before the industrial action at Grangemouth, that tendency had spread to areas that are much nearer the central belt. Scotland now suffers disproportionately from the cost of fuel. The tax on fuel is so high that it is damaging the whole Scottish economy. We should consider in greater depth how we deal with that before the opportunity to tackle it arises again.

15:53

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): It is inconceivable that the SNP will ever say that a UK Government budget is good for Scotland. I can think of no circumstances in which SNP members would allow themselves to congratulate the UK Government on its budget.

Alex Neil: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: I will in a moment.

An SNP minister will never say to the chancellor, “Thanks very much—that’s our fair share. It’s a good deal. Carry on the good work.” However, I suspect that Mr Neil wishes to prove me wrong.

Alex Neil: Absolutely. I would be the first to say that Lloyd George’s 1909 budget was excellent for Scotland.

Jeremy Purvis: Consensus is now breaking out between Liberal Democrats and the SNP. Mr Neil has taken my breath away, because I was just about to attack him. I will do so regardless.

Mr Neil said that, under an SNP Government in an independent Scotland, interest rates would be lower. The SNP’s policy is that the Bank of England would continue to set our interest rates until we adopted the euro, so as long as our currency continued to be sterling, interest rates would be pegged. Although I might agree with Mr Neil on the historical matter of progressive Liberal budgets having a positive effect on Scotland, I distance myself from the SNP’s current policy.

The public are bored of the UK Government saying that Scotland got a fair deal and the

Scottish Government saying that it did not get enough, which amounts to a continual blame game. After blaming the UK Government for not giving it enough money to pay for public services in Scotland, the SNP Government announced nearly £1 billion of tax cuts, which included business rate cuts and the council tax freeze. The cabinet secretary gave us the list.

When parents express their anger about the fact that class sizes are not being reduced, the Government blames councils for not doing so, especially now that we have the historic concordat, which means that year-on-year progress should be made. However, information released under freedom of information provisions shows that 15 local authorities in Scotland do not even have a strategy for delivering the policy, never mind one for doing so within the present parliamentary session. That must be the councils’ fault. Such problems are either the UK’s fault or the councils’ fault—members can choose—but I doubt that they will ever be the SNP’s fault.

Let us consider some of the choices that the Government has made to meet its purpose, which, as the cabinet secretary said, is to produce economic growth. In the Borders, Scottish Enterprise Borders and the local VisitScotland team are no longer Borders services; they are now a generic service for the south of Scotland. The office of Careers Scotland in Galashiels does not know whether it will form part of south of Scotland provision or part of provision for Edinburgh and the Lothians under the new national organisation, Skills Development Scotland. The business gateway service has been transferred to a highly reluctant local government sector.

In addition, under the SNP the threshold for Scottish Enterprise to give support to small businesses has been hiked up to a turnover forecast of £1 million. In written evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee this week, Jack Perry said:

“With the move of Business Gateway functions to Local Authorities we will no longer proactively support businesses that primarily service local markets.”

On page 9 of the glossy brochure that it provided us with this week, Scottish Enterprise boasts that it will work with a much smaller number of businesses. The cabinet secretary lauded the rates reduction for small businesses, but the corollary of that is a massive reduction in small business support through our enterprise structure.

It is appropriate to hold debates in the Scottish Parliament on decisions that the Government takes but, as Derek Brownlee rightly said, it is also appropriate for the Parliament to debate the implications for Scotland of decisions that are taken by the chancellor. I recall as vividly as Mr Brownlee will David Cameron’s reaction when

Gordon Brown announced his decision to remove the 10p tax rate in his 2007 budget. When Gordon Brown sat down, David Cameron's first sentence was:

"Well, the Chancellor has finally given us a tax cut."—
[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 21 March 2007; Vol 458, c 829.]

Mr Brownlee usually uses quotations from a number of highly specialist publications, but today he seemed to omit to quote the leader of his own party.

The UK is the most centralised fiscal entity in Europe. In effect, the Scottish block grant operates as a UK departmental budget. The Steel commission set out proposals to establish a structure in the UK that was more open and transparent, whereby this Parliament would be responsible for raising the budget that we are responsible for spending. It is not sustainable that candidates for election to the Scottish Parliament campaign on how we divide up the cake when candidates who are successful in a UK general election have a greater say on the ingredients that make up that cake.

Some SNP members insist that their budget is a tax-cutting budget and deny that it takes money away from public services. Others claim that there is huge growth in public expenditure in Scotland but say that they have not received enough money from the Westminster Parliament. The present constitutional framework allows that deception to continue. I hope fervently that as a result of the principles that the Steel commission has outlined and those that will be outlined in the constitutional review, consensus will develop among parties in the Parliament that it is not sustainable to allow the current constitutional framework to continue. It is no good for any UK Government to stand in the way of further constitutional change that gives this Parliament power over how we raise our budgets in addition to the powers that we have under devolution to hold the Scottish Government to account for the decisions that it takes.

15:59

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Today is a good day for this debate. In watching events down south, we see a Labour Government that has lost its way and is being punished at the ballot box. However, Jeremy Purvis will be delighted to know that I welcome some of the positive aspects of the UK budget: the increase in the national minimum wage, the increase in the winter fuel allowance and the increase in tax credits, as well as the increase in social tariffs on energy bills.

However, that is not nearly enough. Tax credits encourage employers to pay low wages, because

they know that the Government will subsidise poverty wages and keep people in the benefits trap. Social tariffs are a weak agreement; they are not mandatory and the amounts that the energy companies are being asked to put in are tiny. It is good that the winter fuel allowance is going up, but its existence indicates that our pensioners are not getting a fair deal from the pensions that they paid for.

The lack of a policy on full employment from the London Labour Government means that the minimum wage is not enough to lift people out of poverty. Perhaps that is why Gordon Brown did not vote for its introduction, why Malcolm Chisholm missed the debate in 1998, and why Alistair Darling, Donald Dewar and Douglas Alexander missed that important vote.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Christina McKelvie: I could say much more about why the budget was disastrous for the poor, weak and vulnerable, but I am sure that my colleagues will describe the disastrous effects of the doubling of the tax on Scotland's least well-paid workers.

Wendy Alexander calls it socialism. It is just as well that Scotland has an SNP Government saving hospitals, and getting rid of prescription charges, the council tax and the graduate endowment. That is neither light nor slight.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Christina McKelvie: Saddest of all is the fact that, during the eight years between 1999 and 2007, that could all have been done by a socialist Labour Party, or by a Scottish Labour Party, or even by a Labour Party that believed in social justice and did not need to wait for London's permission. Wendy Alexander could have done some of it when she was a minister. Jackie Baillie and Margaret Curran could have done some of it, too. What about Andy Kerr? He was shutting down the hospitals.

The SNP Government was elected on its promise to serve the people, and it is delivering on that promise day after day. The SNP Government is fulfilling its manifesto pledges and, quite simply, making Scotland better.

London Labour's budget is dreadful. Having been designed by Gordon Brown and delivered by Alistair Darling—two of Labour's finest, who are letting Scotland down—it is damaging Scotland. If I may quote a Labour councillor, "God bless the SNP".

16:03

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Derek Brownlee should not underestimate the electorate. It expects this Parliament to get on with its own

work and acknowledge that we elect 59 MPs. I understand that Scotland has only one Conservative MP, but I welcome Derek Brownlee's candour in suggesting that David Mundell is a waste of space.

We elect 59 MPs to work in the interests of the people of Scotland. Today, they are debating child poverty and how to tackle it, while we are debating something for which we have no direct responsibility.

Derek Brownlee: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: I am still in my first minute.

We would find it unacceptable for Westminster to debate Scottish education or the Scottish justice system. A degree of consistency from the SNP and others would be refreshing, but I do not anticipate it. Of course, the SNP's programme is legislation light—only four bills have been introduced this year.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I want to make some progress.

All we have are debates about issues for which the SNP Government has no responsibility. Perhaps it does not want us to look too closely at its programme. Despite what the Deputy First Minister or the First Minister might assert, we have witnessed a plethora of broken promises. The promises on class sizes and school buildings have been dropped. Not one proposal has been made directly by the SNP. The £2,000 home buyer grant has been dropped. The commitment to nursery teachers has been dropped.

Before Christina McKelvie gets too excited, let me remind her that not one SNP MP bothered to stay up to vote for the introduction of the national minimum wage.

Christina McKelvie *rose*—

Jackie Baillie: Christina McKelvie would not take any interventions so I will not give way in return.

John Swinney invited us—quite rightly, I think—to compare the UK budget with the Scottish budget, so let us compare what the two budgets do for children, who are the future of our country. The UK budget provides an increase in child benefit so that the first child is £20 a week better off, which will help something like 600,000 families in Scotland. The £50 a year increase in child tax credit will help 301,000 families in Scotland. Compare that with the Scottish budget: 5 per cent in the schools budget has been cut; 20 per cent in the children and young people budget has been cut; no provision for the nursery teachers that were promised; education maintenance allowance scrapped; no reduction in class sizes; and a failure

to match Labour's commitment to new schools. The real contrast is that, with the SNP, we get cuts in services for our children and young people.

Like my colleague Iain Gray, I remind members of the comments of Stewart Hosie, who is not in favour of the reintroduction of the 10p starting rate of tax. In the only SNP contribution to the debate this week, he said:

"No one is going to reinstate the 10p band".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 April 2008; Vol 475, c 106.]

Frank Field, who has worked hard with other MPs—including my MP, John McFall—to ensure that mitigation is provided for low-income households, said:

"It has already been an extraordinary debate in that the public have learned something that they did not know before today. It is that no party"—

including the Tory party—

"proposes the reintroduction of the 10p tax rate."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 April 2008; Vol 475, c 111.]

An essentially dishonest position has been taken by SNP members in Scotland and by their friends on the Tory benches. I also understand that, back in 1999, SNP MPs did not even bother to vote on the third reading of the Finance Bill that established the 10p tax rate. Such rank hypocrisy is, frankly, breathtaking.

Let me turn to whisky, in which I have a particular constituency interest—not, as some unkind members suggested, a personal one—interest, given that the industry is a key local employer. The rise in spirit duty must be set against the background of a decade of no increases. I invite Alex Neil to consider supporting me the next time that I lodge such a motion. Let us also not forget that 90 per cent of our whisky is sold overseas. When the SNP realised that incidental fact, it shifted its attack by suggesting that the duty increase would lead to swingeing tax increases in our export markets.

John Swinney: Will Jackie Baillie reflect on the fact that the Scottish Government's position—that the increases in whisky duty might lead to punitive taxation overseas—is the position that has been advanced by the Scotch Whisky Association?

Jackie Baillie: The evidence so far is entirely to the contrary. I hope that Mr Swinney will join me in welcoming the fact that, in recent weeks, the Delhi Government has moved away from introducing a planned increase in whisky duty.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear that the rise in duty was a revenue-raising measure that is designed to pay for the additional winter fuel payment of £100 for pensioners over 80 and £50 for pensioners over 60.

There is a clear contradiction in the SNP's policy. The SNP argues that duty should be levied

on all drink per unit of alcohol, but it surely cannot mean to reduce the price of all spirits. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, is clear that he wishes the price of drink to increase to discourage underage and binge drinking. However, the First Minister's oft-repeated phrase that the youth of Scotland are not bingeing on 10-year-old Glenmorangie is, frankly, facile. The First Minister must know—perhaps he does not—that cheap vodka and vodka-based drinks play a role in underage drinking. He must know—it may be that he does not—that Scotland has a spirits industry rather than just a whisky industry. The industry earns more than £3 billion each year in exports, of which at least a third comes from other spirits. The Government will not solve Scotland's drinking problem with a simplified pricing policy, although that seems to be the SNP's approach. I invite the Government to look abroad—to Portugal, Spain, Italy and France—where there is a mature approach to drinking, with no binge drinking and no drunks staggering around the streets, although the alcohol is very cheap.

16:10

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): I want to correct some misinformation that we have heard, as usual, from Labour members. I will deal with just two of the many falsehoods that we have heard so far. The first is Iain Gray's assertion regarding central heating systems. A parliamentary answer of 24 April by Stewart Maxwell made it clear that the number of central heating systems installed in the last year of the Labour-Lib Dem Executive was 10,238 and that the number of systems installed in the first year of the SNP Government was 14,377.

Iain Gray: The member must allow me to intervene on that point.

Joe FitzPatrick: I do not have to allow it, but I will.

Iain Gray: I have with me figures from the Scottish Parliament information centre for the number of central heating installations carried out in the past four years. In 2006-07, there were 14,425. In the two years before that, the figures were 16,002 and 15,207 respectively. In 2003-04, the figure was 16,788. In order to spin the figures, the SNP Government is not counting central heating systems that are installed in the social rented sector.

Joe FitzPatrick: It is interesting that Iain Gray did not refer to the figure for the last year of the Labour-Lib Dem Executive, which was correctly stated as 10,238, compared with 14,377 under the SNP.

The other piece of misinformation that I would like to correct relates to the minimum wage. It was

wrong of Jackie Baillie to say that SNP members did not support the introduction of the minimum wage. On 16 December 1997, John Swinney and Roseanna Cunningham, who are both in the chamber, voted for the National Minimum Wage Bill at second reading, along with Margaret Ewing, Alasdair Morgan and Andrew Welsh. Alasdair Morgan was a member of the committee that considered the bill and spoke in the debate at second reading. Let us have less misinformation and more facts.

I pay tribute to the previous Administration, which, in partnership with all Opposition parties, made commendable progress in tackling fuel poverty and child poverty in Scotland by using the economic powers that are available to us here at Holyrood. Our SNP Government has also taken advantage of the powers that are available to the Parliament. In the past year, it has implemented a raft of changes, which Christina McKelvie mentioned. It has moved to abolish prescription charges, scrapped the graduate endowment fee, frozen the council tax and increased payments for free personal care. Together, those changes are making most Scots better off.

Although, as has been shown, the Parliament has its hands on some of the levers of power and can make a big difference to the lives of the people of Scotland, the current constitutional set-up means that the UK budget has huge ramifications for Scots. Although there was not one mention of Scotland in the budget, it made 500,000 Scots households less well-off. The union dividend is often cited as the main argument against independence for Scotland, but it means that Scots are paying some of the highest petrol prices in the world and that our pensioners are dying of cold each year in Europe's most energy-rich country. The same union dividend cut the pay packets of a quarter of Scottish households to appease middle England in the budget.

This week there was disturbing news from the European Commission. In its latest six-monthly economic forecast, Brussels estimated that the UK's budget deficit would rise to 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2008-09, which would mean that the UK was in breach of the 3 per cent limit that has been set by the EU stability and growth pact. That is not the prudent approach to the economy that Gordon Brown promised us. It comes at a time when the UK's growth rate is expected almost to halve in the next year.

The EU is not alone in thinking that the UK economy is heading for trouble. David Blanchflower, a member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, warned only yesterday that a UK recession is on the way. It is not clear whether things are as bad as he suggests, but it is clear that the situation is not good.

Last month the FTSE 100 company Shire Pharmaceuticals announced that it will relocate to Ireland, where it will join firms such as eBay and Google, which enjoy a corporate tax rate in Dublin that is less than half the UK rate. It is likely that Ireland's competitive taxation regime was a major factor in NCR's decision to locate its European headquarters in Dublin rather than in my city, Dundee.

Jeremy Purvis: Does the member realise that the gentleman who established Shire Pharmaceuticals also established ProStrakan, in Galashiels in the Borders? The company was supported by Scottish Enterprise Borders, so does the member share my concern that his party's Government has abolished that organisation?

Joe FitzPatrick: We want as much industry in Scotland as possible, and if we had the full levers of power we could encourage more pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries to stay in Scotland. We want to provide Scottish industries with a competitive edge that will give Scotland an advantage over other countries. We can deliver that only when we have become independent and have full powers.

It is not all doom and gloom. Scotland's growth rate historically lagged behind that of the UK, but the most recent figures show that for the third and fourth quarters of 2007, under the SNP Government, the growth rate in Scotland was higher than that of the UK. That is the first time—at least since devolution—that Scotland's growth rate has exceeded that of the UK in two consecutive quarters. We should be proud of those figures, which are a pointer to the future.

The actions of the Scottish Government are making a big difference. We can imagine what we could do if we had the full powers of an independent country. What a contrast there is between the achievements during 11 months of SNP Government and those during 11 years of the dead hand of Labour at Westminster.

16:16

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I am astounded that Mr FitzPatrick appears to believe his own rhetoric.

I begin with the usual courtesy of thanking the cabinet secretary for bringing the debate. I do so not because I think that we should debate reserved issues—as my colleagues said, doing so is either an abuse or a misuse of our mandate—but because the debate gives Labour Party members an opportunity to welcome members who have joined us in the pursuit of social justice. Surely the debate is not a nakedly opportunistic attempt to undermine our Labour Government at Westminster but a genuine cry from the heart from

socially democratic parties that are committed to progressive policies on behalf of low earners, the poor and the vulnerable. After all, who would stand up for the low paid and the vulnerable in this country if it were not for the SNP and the Tories?

I hope that I have not been overgenerous. Some members suggested that the debate is an attempt to capitalise on public concern over the abolition of the 10p rate of income tax. If that is so, the SNP and the Tories appear to have missed the boat. Events have moved on since the debate was scheduled. This week we witnessed the Prime Minister's remarkable willingness not just to listen to but to act on public concern. Despite the clear benefits of the UK budget for many people, the abolition of the 10p rate was seen to be damaging some of the very households that the Labour Government wants to protect. The Treasury announced that it would take action to address the issue and to compensate the worst off, in particular people on low wages, people with no children and pensioners under 65.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that about 5 million people in the UK will lose out as a result of the abolition of the 10p rate. How many people will be compensated?

Ken Macintosh: An interesting contrast can be made between the debates that the Scottish Parliament can have and debates at Westminster, but I think that there will be an attempt to compensate all who have been badly affected—that is what the Treasury is committed to doing. I welcome the comments of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which demonstrated that the people who are worst off in our society have benefited hugely from the UK budget. We should not forget that.

Perhaps I am too sceptical about the motivation of the people who wanted this debate. Perhaps the SNP's commitment to low earners can be illustrated by its spending priorities. The UK budget sets our spending, but we should consider where we spend the money. Mr Swinney set out some of the areas of spend. The SNP mantra usually starts with the abolition of bridge tolls. The policy has benefited many people in Fife and beyond, but it was not exactly targeted at the least well off. Nor was it motivated by a desire for environmental justice, never mind social justice.

What about cuts in business rates? Such cuts are good for small businesses but they are not exactly an anti-poverty measure. Of course, there is also the abolition of the graduate endowment. We all know that the SNP promised to tackle student hardship, widen access, and dump student debt. Instead, it has directed limited resources at a specific cohort, the majority of whom tend to come from the most educated and prosperous backgrounds. Populist those policies may be, but the SNP should not try to say that

they are progressive. Its members should not pretend that their party's decisions are motivated by concepts such as fighting inequality, standing up for the underprivileged, or just plain social justice.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the member agree that anything that helps small businesses to flourish is good for employment? I am thinking in particular of those who are seeking employment. Surely anything that helps in that regard is of benefit to those who are unemployed or low paid.

Ken Macintosh: I am not going to rebut Mr Don on the point. The SNP can and does make claims of dubious standing. My point is that the SNP should not pretend to the chamber that it is somehow motivated by standing up for the underprivileged, the weak or the vulnerable. That is neither the aim nor the benefit of its policy and I particularly resent that claim in this attack on the abolition of the 10p rate and on the UK budget.

The SNP cosied up to its traditional and natural bedfellows, the Tories, to get through a Scottish budget that does nothing for the low paid and throws into reverse Labour's commitment to tackling child poverty. SNP members are again in the chamber, shoulder to shoulder with the Tories, the supposed friends of the poor and underprivileged. Why are we not debating new school buildings, how to give our probationer teachers a secure job at the end of their probationary year, or the SNP's promise of a teacher in every nursery? The Scottish Government has the largest budget that we have ever known. Those who repeatedly complain about the tight settlement add the hypocrisy of making no link between that settlement and the taxes that are raised to pay for it.

The self-styled left wingers on the SNP back benches have been allowed free rein today. At last, they have been given an opportunity to salve their troubled consciences. They are happy to speak up now, but where were they when their own party—their own Scottish Government—put through a right-wing budget on the back of a deal with the Tories? Where was the outrage when their ministers decided on a reactionary, public service-stripping agenda that was disguised with a little sprinkling of populist SNP fairy dust?

All that, and yet the SNP expects us to believe that they are the champions of the low paid and the vulnerable. Did they think that no one would notice? Do they not realise that people understand exactly what a deal with the Tories signifies? Did they believe that everyone would think, "Oh yes, the SNP has managed to persuade the Tories to vote for a programme of investment in public services. After all, the Tories have long been the champions of the low paid and of social justice"?

I remind some of those back benchers that before they take the speck of dust out of someone else's eye, they should first take the plank of wood out of their own. Teaching posts are being lost in Renfrewshire, schools are being closed in Aberdeen, classroom assistant posts are being cut in my constituency and voluntary sector posts are being lost up and down the country. Does any SNP back bencher believe that that will help the low paid?

If the SNP and its Tory friends want to try to make mischief out of a Westminster decision, they can do so—that is politics—but let them not pretend for one second that that is about standing up for the low paid. There is a right-wing alliance at work in the Parliament. We are feeling it already in our schools and local services and in the voluntary sector. No amount of misdirection will hide the long-term impact on Scottish public services. We need to stop discussing budget decisions that are taken elsewhere and try to get right the budget decisions that are taken in this place.

16:23

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): With respect, I say to Kenneth Macintosh that my only natural bedfellow is my husband.

On a more serious note, the motion gives the Parliament an opportunity to follow the lead of the cabinet secretary, stand up constructively for Scotland and defend, as and when appropriate, the interests of the people of Scotland.

As other members have said, the abolition of the 10p tax band will leave half a million households in Scotland worse off. Anyone who earns less than £19,500 and is ineligible for tax credits will be worse off. Those who earn £17,000 or less will face a higher effective income tax rate in the current financial year as a direct result of the 2007 budget. Any taxation should, of course, be progressive and based on the ability to pay. That is a fundamental principle that the SNP holds dear. The regressive move by the former chancellor and current Prime Minister has resonated sourly in my constituency of Livingston. For example, a receptionist who earns £14,000 will be a net loser while MSPs and MPs will be net gainers.

Although Livingston and West Lothian are fortunate enough to have a relatively good array of employers compared with the rest of Scotland, companies associated with silicon glen have been lost and replaced by McArthurGlen and a reliance on the retail industry. Consequently, incomes are relatively low. The 2007 "Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings" demonstrates that, as the median income in my constituency is just over £17,500.

Another factor is that, according to the last Scottish house conditions survey, 8,000 homes throughout West Lothian are fuel poor. Social tariffs are all very well, but they are not mandatory. Winter fuel payments are welcome, but they now cover less than 20 per cent of a pensioner's fuel costs. Four years ago, the winter fuel payment covered approximately a third of a pensioner's fuel costs.

The term "compensation package" says it all. Surely, if people require to be compensated for a Government decision, the original decision must have been wrong. No Government likes to lose face by doing a U-turn, but sometimes that may be the best option and the right thing to do. Instead, a bungling Mr Brown and Alistair Darling are trying and failing to compensate for bad decisions.

The Social Market Foundation rightly points out that the compensation package will compensate only one in five of those adversely affected. To add insult to injury, the chancellor, with his talk of average losses being offset over the year, has failed to give explicit reassurances and guarantees to vulnerable Scots.

Jackie Baillie: Does the member agree that it would be welcome if the SNP Government did a U-turn on the reallocation of £34 million for disabled children in Scotland, who are—as she says—vulnerable?

Angela Constance: I will speak about my experience in West Lothian. We have delivered, on the back of the historic local government concordat, record levels of investment for disabled children. That is before we even get on to reducing class sizes, on which we are making significant progress in West Lothian and in doing so are prioritising areas of deprivation. I hold up West Lothian Council as a positive example to other councils in other areas, which I could not possibly comment on.

Surely good government has to be about improving the lot of the less well-off and helping people to move forward rather than guddling about with the intricacies of an income tax and tax credit system that are surely complex enough. The sheer lunacy is that in his last budget Gordon Brown unpicked a measure that he introduced. The implementation of the 10p tax band was widely welcomed. In 2000, when Wendy Alexander was the Minister for Communities, she described it, among other measures, as putting money in the purses of mothers.

I do not often find myself quoting the former Labour minister Brian Wilson, but on this occasion I will. He stated:

"The most problematic conundrum is why a Labour government should be penalising some of the lowest-paid wage earners in our society by abolishing the 10p tax band.

As with the poll tax in days of yore, this succeeds in offending not only the victims, but also a large body of opinion that does not wish to benefit at their expense."

So much for London Labour; it has lost its way and its focus. As Christina McKelvie correctly highlighted, it is now left to the SNP to put money in the purses of ordinary Scots through the council tax freeze, the reduction in prescription charges—they are soon to be abolished—and increases in free personal care and nursing home payments.

I realised a long time ago that if you want social democracy you have to be able to pay for it. The SNP Government is rightly focused on growing our economy to meet our social democratic aspirations. Therefore, it is highly disappointing that the London Government's budget undermines our efforts to support small businesses. If we want compassion, we certainly need enterprise; they are two sides of the same coin.

Of course, it is hard for me as a nationalist to be dispassionate about Scotland and our desire for full self-determination but, as we are all agreed, we cannot turn the clock back and there is only one direction of travel. I look forward to full fiscal autonomy at very least.

16:30

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The debate has perhaps cast more heat than light on some of the arguments that are before the Parliament. I will highlight positively only two points from the speeches. One is Alex Johnstone's valid point on smart metering and the other is Jeremy Purvis's reference to the reduction of support for small businesses.

I will spend a moment making a couple of slightly more critical observations on some of the speeches starting with Alex Neil, who spoke about the lowest ever revenue grant from the Treasury. Of course, that is wrong: it is the highest ever revenue grant from the Treasury. He also spoke about lower interest rates in an independent Scotland. Jeremy Purvis dealt with him adequately on that matter.

In a slightly different context, we heard James Kelly talking about the constancy of the Labour Government. As the bulk of this debate has been about the abolition of the 10p rate that the Labour Government introduced in the first place and a number of other issues of the same sort, it seems a bit odd to talk about the constancy of the Labour Government.

A number of nationalist colleagues referred to London Labour. When we have a Scottish Prime Minister, a Scottish chancellor and Des Browne and Douglas Alexander as senior members of the Government, is there not something a bit odd in

talking about London Labour? The focus of that is not quite right.

There are two political contexts in which the debate takes place. The first is the future of the Labour Government, which the voters in the local elections in England and Wales may be determining as we speak. Every Government starts off with high hopes but gets damaged by the accumulation of events—something that the SNP should think about in its excitement at opinion polls—and ends up with a loss of momentum and direction. The Labour Government was buttressed by the sheer awfulness of the Conservative Governments that went before it but, nevertheless, there has been a growing sense in recent weeks that it has a death wish and that a long-serving chancellor is somehow diminished and forlorn as Prime Minister.

The second context is arguably more important to us: the relationship between Scotland and London. Jeremy Purvis spoke about that when he outlined the need for a new fiscal relationship, more substantial tax-raising powers for our Parliament and a new sense of partnership in Britain. Liberal Democrats support the Government motion's criticisms of the UK budget, but we do so knowing that the SNP would criticise any conceivable UK budget—with the exception of Lloyd George's 1909 budget, I accept—not because it is wrong but because it is British.

The central dispute has been the abolition of the 10p income tax rate. Liberal Democrats criticised that last year when it was announced—I did so myself—because it seemed to us to be an obvious attack on the poorest people and those in the lowest income brackets. In fairness, nobody listened at that time.

A year later, when the 10p rate abolition was due to come into effect, Labour MPs suddenly rediscovered their social consciences and a full-scale rebellion was in train. The reality is that abolition was always a disastrous and socially divisive policy but, last year, there was time to sort it, whereas, this year, there is an almighty political and administrative mess.

Gavin Brown: I cannot believe that nobody listened to Robert Brown a year ago.

The Lib Dem amendment focuses on the housing market. What specific proposals do the Liberal Democrats have on that?

Robert Brown: If I may, I will come to that a little bit later in my speech. I will stick with the abolition of the 10p rate, because it is the central point of much of the dispute about the budget.

The reality is that the whole tax system has become silted up, not least by the administrative complexities introduced by Gordon Brown. It no

longer fulfils the social reform purpose that it has sometimes been suggested that it did. The Labour Government promised to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to reduce it by half by 2010. It has made modest progress but is on course to miss the 2010 target by 1.1 million children.

We all saw the painfully damaging attacks that Vince Cable made on the Prime Minister on other issues. He warned the Government five years ago that there was a growing problem of personal debt, much of it secured against a dangerous bubble in the housing market. He spoke about the economy being sustained by binge lending. So, indeed, it has proved to be.

The whole country is now paying the price of the Government's negligent inaction in those areas. We cannot, and should not, stop lenders readjusting to higher standards of risk management, but we cannot individually or collectively afford the concomitant increase in homelessness and repossessions that has taken place in England, which will have an effect—hopefully at lesser force—on Scotland, too. Government must play its part in requiring the banks to face up to their social responsibilities. Alistair Darling's budget is practically silent on those matters, overwhelming and vital as we know them to be. The economic ills are not all caused by the Labour Government, but the UK Government does bear a significant degree of blame, and it is its responsibility to provide remedies for them and to steer the ship of state away from the icebergs. The charge against the UK Government is that it has not been up to the job in that respect.

In Scotland, we have a Government whose declared policy—albeit rejected by the Parliament and, as far as we can tell according to most opinion polls, by the people—is one of independence for Scotland. We have seen in dramatic fashion in recent days how a strike in a crucial place can halt fuel supplies and threaten the economy of the country, which has had to be rescued by alternative supplies from England and abroad. During the Northern Rock crisis, we saw how the UK Government could bring to bear resources three or four times those of the whole Scottish budget. It is a nice point to consider what might happen if similar problems were to afflict the Royal Bank of Scotland, say, in an independent Scotland, as no Scottish Government could secure resources of that size.

Scotland is not helped by the dithering and uncertainty that is increasingly the hallmark of the Labour Government. The budget was a failed budget from a chancellor with a bit of an economic mess to clear up, which was contributed to by his predecessor. The criticisms made in the motion and in the Liberal Democrat amendment are

entirely justified, and I urge the Parliament to give a united response to the UK Government's budget by agreeing the motion and the Liberal Democrat amendment.

16:37

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): We have learned during the debate that the Labour Party in the Scottish Parliament does not like to debate reserved issues. That was clearly on Labour members' crib sheets, because Labour members consistently mentioned it. What an irony it is, however, that one Labour member announced a fresh Westminster policy, hot off the press, that has not been announced anywhere else in the country. According to Ken Macintosh today, every single one of the 5.3 million people who have been hit by the abolition of the 10p tax rate will be compensated. We heard it here first. I would love to know whether they will be compensated retrospectively to when the decisions were made.

Robert Brown: Can Gavin Brown cast any light on why it is only this year that the Conservatives have discovered a social conscience on the issue of the 10p rate?

Gavin Brown: I am glad that Robert Brown asked that question. Let me read from the Conservative party's press release from five minutes after the budget in 2007. It says:

"Gordon Brown's last Budget is a tax con not a tax cut. In his stealthiest tax yet, he has paid for his 2p cut in income tax by abolishing the 10p rate ... Buried in the small print are new stealth taxes which will hit low earners by doubling his 10p tax band."

That was the very first press release following last year's budget, so we have not suddenly "discovered a social conscience".

As I was saying, we heard a fresh announcement today that all 5.3 million people who were hit by the abolition of the 10p tax rate will be compensated. I am desperate to find out how they are to be compensated.

Ken Macintosh: Does Mr Brown accept that it is a little bit rich of him to ask us to debate a reserved matter, and then to ask members of this Parliament, who have no locus on the matter, to give a commitment?

In the interests of enlightenment, however, I will quote Jane Kennedy in *Hansard*. She said:

"The Chancellor made a commitment in his letter that there are households that we want to do more to help. It would not be appropriate for the Government to commit at this stage to the detail ... However, I have taken note of the concerns that have been raised on the issue today and I will ensure that they are considered".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 April 2008; Vol 475, c 126.]

Gavin Brown: That does not sound to me like all the 5.3 million people concerned are going to

be compensated. I did not expect Mr Macintosh to make a policy commitment today, but the fact is that he did. We look forward to hearing how it goes.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies makes it quite clear that, given the package of measures that we have heard about so far—tax credits and additions to the winter fuel payment—the absolute maximum number of people that can be compensated in relation to the objectives that we have been told about so far, is 1.5 million out of the 5.3 million. Perhaps Mr Kerr will tell us, in his closing speech, how the rest will be compensated.

What else came from the Labour benches? James Kelly talked about the changes to taper relief. I was a little confused by his argument, but the gist of it seemed to be that the changes are good because they reduce a bit of bureaucracy. I suggest that Mr Kelly tell that to the many hundreds of thousands of businesses that will now be paying 18 per cent capital gains tax instead of 10 per cent. I doubt that there is any business in the UK that would be happy to pay 18 per cent instead of 10 per cent because it cuts down on a little bit of bureaucracy.

I was excited to hear that Jackie Baillie was going to be giving us some fabulous announcements on whisky. Boy, did we get them! She stated that all the evidence goes against the view of the Scotch Whisky Association, which is legitimately concerned that governments in overseas markets might decide to increase their tax revenues as a result of the recent change. I suggest to Jackie Baillie that, given that the announcement was made on 14 March, to say that in the course of six weeks great evidence has been gathered to suggest that the opposite is true is patent nonsense.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: Jackie Baillie does not take interventions from people who did not take them from her, but I am different from Jackie Baillie, and I am happy to take her intervention.

Jackie Baillie: I have to confess that I was saving myself for the cabinet secretary, whose intervention I took.

Gavin Brown might not read the newspapers from India, but in the past few weeks the Delhi Government has decided not to increase the duty on whisky.

Gavin Brown: Well—that is Jackie Baillie's case conclusively proved. What on earth is the Scotch Whisky Association worried about? In passing, I note that Jackie Baillie does not have time to debate reserved matters, but she has time to read Indian newspapers of a weekend.

The Liberal Democrats did not address their own amendment in any great detail, other than to say “housing market” and “child poverty” a couple of times. I suggest to Jeremy Purvis, who excitedly quoted David Cameron’s words in *Hansard*, that the tone and the body language of Mr Cameron, as he made those comments, are far more important than what he actually said. In simply reading *Hansard*, it is important to remember that Mr Cameron was being sarcastic, as the subsequent press release proves.

It was not a great budget for the people of Scotland. It was not great for the economy as a whole and it arrived on the back of a poor budget from last year and a poor pre-budget report. We want the best for Scotland in 2008, but that will happen in spite of the Labour Administration in Westminster.

16:43

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I hope that the *Official Report* staff get my tone and my body language correct as they report my words.

I will start by dealing with Mr Swinney, and the rank hypocrisy of many of the things that he said. He talked about the social democratic contract—a contract that we know has been broken for first-time home buyers, for those expecting new schools in their communities, for those expecting smaller class sizes in primaries 1, 2 and 3 and for those who have an interest in student debt and local income tax. Promises were broken in all those areas in the early months of this Administration.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has been quoted quite a lot today, so I will point out that it said that, across the UK, 16 million households benefit from the tax and benefit measures in the budget, with the biggest gains going to the poorest 30 per cent of people. We hear a lot about upwards redistribution, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies clearly states that the least well-off gain most from the budget.

Gavin Brown: If that is the case, why were the back-bench Labour MPs at Westminster so unhappy with the budget?

Andy Kerr: That was a beautifully posed question. I will come to that point in a moment.

We have had a lot of discussions about the 10p starting rate of tax. Iain Gray made the point to Mr Swinney that none of his back benchers has had the gall to stand up and say anything while the SNP are making cuts throughout Scotland. They did not have the guts to tell Mr Swinney to change his decision. However, when Labour MPs and others commented on the abolition of the 10p rate, the chancellor and the Prime Minister were willing

to listen and take the required action to ensure that the effects of the measure will be ameliorated in due course.

We also heard about the great social justice element of the SNP, but in relation to the graduate endowment, free prescriptions and free personal care, there is no targeting of the needy, and learned professors say that the council tax freeze will be a disbenefit to the poor while the rich will gain. Mr Swinney says that we must assert the Scottish interest, but we are part of the UK economy, which has the second-lowest inflation in the European Union. Unemployment is at its lowest since 1974 and employment is at a record high. The UK budget has delivered those benefits to the Scottish interest for many years during the lifetime of the Labour Government.

The resilience of the UK economy is envied throughout the world. We have seen our way through the Asian financial crisis, the Russian debt crisis and the dot com bubble. As James Kelly said, Labour’s stewardship of the economy in budget after budget has secured for the UK economy a position above every other economy in the world. Our economy leads the G7 group, having had consecutive growth for 62 quarters. There is no going back, unlike for other members of the G7. That is Labour in action. As an SNP member said during the debate, economic growth and social justice go hand in hand: Labour has delivered both.

Liam McArthur mentioned child poverty. Under the Tories—let us not forget them—child poverty doubled, and in 1997 it was the highest in Europe. If Labour had done nothing, 1.7 million more children might be living in poverty today. Of course, Labour did not do nothing. We stopped the increase and reduced the number of people living in relative child poverty in Scotland by 90,000. That is a faster rate of reduction in child poverty than any other country in Europe has achieved.

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The statistic for child poverty in Germany is 9 per cent. Under Mrs Thatcher, child poverty in Britain was upwards of 20 per cent, but it has only just come down to 20 per cent.

Andy Kerr: The facts are there for everyone to see. Under the Tories, child poverty went up by 1.7 million. Under Labour, it is reducing. That is the point of Government, and that is the action that UK Government budgets have delivered for those in Scotland.

I am sure that we all agree that the best route out of poverty is employment. As I said, unemployment is at its lowest since 1974 and employment is at its highest-ever level. Tax credits are working for many families throughout Scotland.

Labour's strategy at UK level—and what we advocate in the Scottish Parliament—is to increase employment, increase incomes, ensure that there is financial and material support for people, ensure that communities are safe for families, and improve children's life chances. That is exactly what Labour has been doing both here in the Scottish Parliament—in opposition and in government—and at UK level. Child poverty is a complex and challenging issue, but I advise Robert Brown that we have made substantial progress, contrary to what he said.

I turn to the Tories. Economic stability is at the heart of Labour's UK budget strategy. The Tories' spokesperson George Osborne said:

“every spending commitment that you will hear from the Conservative party is fully costed and paid for”.

Of course, we know that some of Mr Swinney's commitments are going wrong. The Tory party has made many commitments, including a 25 per cent cut in corporation tax, a transferable marriage tax allowance, an increase in working tax credit, an increase in inheritance tax threshold to £1 million, and a national school-leaver programme. However, none of those commitments has been costed. Our economy and its stability are at stake.

On the 10p tax rate, let us acknowledge that the chancellor and the Prime Minister have ensured that they will reverse and deal with the particular challenges that families face. The rate was introduced to help to tackle poverty when the child tax credit system was getting up and running. Of course, the child tax credit system now supports families in need. We will use such measures to ensure that we have the fairness that we seek to achieve.

I return to the point about the SNP's position.

“No one is going to reinstate the 10p band at a cost of £7 billion”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 April 2008; Vol 475, c 106.]

Those words were spoken not by a Labour MP or MSP but by Stewart Hosie. The SNP is left with few options in relation to the so-called rediscovery of conscience on the 10p tax rate, given that SNP MPs are not advocating it in Parliament.

The Government should take advice not just from me but from others. We talked about the council tax freeze and how great that is for Scotland. The editorial in today's *Edinburgh Evening News* states:

“The decision by Scottish councils to take a share of the government's ... ‘bribe’ in return for freezing council tax was accepted without ... thought for the consequences.”

What are the consequences? The editorial states that

“the chickens have come home to roost”

and that,

“the length and breadth of the country”,

councils are cutting services. Administrations are moving in not on high-profile services but on services that we care about, such as crèches, care for the elderly and facilities for our schoolchildren. Such services are social justice in action, and the SNP is removing social justice from Scotland.

16:50

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The by-products of the debate are significant. As the message gets out that Scotland is more and more in favour of controlling its own affairs, more members in their heart of hearts will have a strengthened realisation about the need for financial powers here in Parliament. It is interesting that there has not been a word from Labour members about levelling the playing field for Scotland versus the rest of the UK. Anything that I heard about the economy was myopic and focused on the UK economy—ignoring Scotland's relative lower growth. Over my entire business career, which spans up to 40 years, there has been lower growth, a declining population and lower life expectancy in Scotland. None of that was properly addressed or put in context.

Meanwhile, John Swinney spoke about our commitment to the Scottish people, which is being honoured across the board. We are seeing that reflected in the attitude of the people of Scotland. That approach is working at a time when people in Scotland are very much aware of rising food prices, rising energy prices and when housing costs are going up. The irony is that the UK budget that is doing nothing to level the playing field is being bankrolled by North Sea oil revenues, which are propping up Westminster's finances. Scotland is being let down by a lack of alignment with Scottish interests and a lack of benefit to give Scotland a competitive edge. I was very taken by what Derek Brownlee said.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

Jim Mather: Let me develop the point. The key matter that Mr Brownlee spoke about was, in essence, the rights of Parliament to take a rational approach to consideration of reserved matters as well as devolved matters, to take steps here—such as what we have done with the small business bonus—to mitigate moves down south, and to argue the case for Scotland on whisky, economic powers and so on. He welcomed the openness of the Government in doing that. I welcome it, too. What we are seeing is the 5.1 million people of Scotland coming on board—confirmation of that is in the approach's popularity. The necessity of standing up for Scotland is being

endorsed in the polls. Mr Brownlee also exposed the nature of the abolition of the 10p rate and the chancellor's comment that it was a transitional measure.

Iain Gray: Mr Mather stated that the agenda of the SNP and Mr Swinney is being supported in the polls. However, we have seen a poll this week that shows that their ultimate objective of independence—or is it separation; we are not sure—is supported by only 19 per cent of Scottish people. That seems to contradict his point.

Jim Mather: A poll last week showed a markedly different result. One can phrase questions to get certain results. There has been substantial debate about that.

What I know is what I see; we are seeing from Labour inability to deliver lasting fiscal benefit for low-paid people. The abolition of the 10p tax rate is a major issue. The true and fair view on that comes from Jim Cousins, a Labour member of the Treasury Committee, who said:

"There are millions of low-paid"

people

"who are not entitled to tax credits and millions more who are but don't claim it, and they have got to face food and fuel and rent increases this month. They cannot wait for a package in 2009; they need it in 2008."

Therefore, we must see the detail and it must be effective.

Andy Kerr: Does Jim Mather believe Stewart Hosie, whose name has come up a few times in the debate? According to the *Edinburgh Evening News*,

"Even core services like education have not escaped the axe. At a time when there is growing concern that children leaving school are not able to read and write properly individual schools were each asked to cut their budget by 1.5 per cent."

Jim Mather: Despite a tight settlement, we have boosted funding for schools, delivered a council tax freeze, reduced prescription charges, removed the student endowment, increased free personal care payments and delivered the small business bonus.

It was interesting to hear the anti-business rhetoric from members on the Labour benches, which is compounded by what Labour at Westminster has done on corporation tax and capital gains tax. Labour is unable to see that viable local shops can improve people's quality of life. They create competition, drive down local prices and create new job and business opportunities. For Ken Macintosh not to see that, and for him not to see the two sides of the coin that Angela Constance talked so eloquently about—in terms of compassionate enterprise—was disappointing to say the least.

Jeremy Purvis: I met representatives of the Headteachers Association of Scotland at lunch time, and they itemised cuts that are being made in schools across Scotland. Staff are not being told that they are being made redundant, but are being described as "surplus to requirements". Is that the fault of councils, or is it the fault of the Government?

Jim Mather: We are putting money in. The efficiency savings that you guys wanted, and that Labour wanted, were liable to have had a much more detrimental effect.

We are now addressing problems and identifying issues that Labour does not want us to identify. Moves that are being made at Westminster are having a negative effect on Scotland as we speak. The small companies' corporation tax rate, coupled with capital gains tax changes, is having unintended consequences—it is making more people sell their businesses and causing a loss of continuity in the Scottish economy. A disproportionate number of companies are now in that position.

Alex Neil's useful speech pointed out that oil-rich Scotland still has work to do on poverty and fuel poverty after 10 years of Labour. With its oil reserves and the trajectory that it is on, this country is well able to start addressing such issues. However, support for people by the Westminster Government is falling apart. That Government is losing its way and its sense of purpose.

In his speech, Jeremy Purvis was gloriously speechless for once. I believe that the ghost of Lloyd George did it. What disappointed me about Jeremy's contribution was that he ignored the new cohesion that is within our grasp in Scotland. Government, councils, the enterprise networks, VisitScotland and the business gateway can work together with the business community at local and regional level. I am sad that Jeremy has declined the opportunity to be part of that.

I listened with great interest to James Kelly's speech, which was a victory of assertion over argument. He should get out more often and talk to people in the business community about the effect that moves in Westminster are having on them. Negative material effects are manifest.

Whisky is a major totem in the Scottish portfolio of industries; it carries subliminal messages about Scotland, and the health of the industry is vital. It is a key economic engine in the Scottish economy. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Far too many conversations are taking place.

Jim Mather: It is clear that moves at Westminster have harmed a vital Scottish industry.

Westminster did not send a signal on solving binge drinking, neither did it send a message on tax fairness. The message that is being sent overseas is totally at odds with the motion that Jackie Baillie lodged in 2006. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jim Mather: The message that is being sent out on whisky is unacceptable: it damages Scotland's interests and it is very similar to the message that is being sent out on North Sea oil and the development of our oil reserves. Those crucial industries have to be looked after productively. However, despite what is happening, the industries are thriving and will continue to thrive. The contribution of the new independents in the North Sea is improving the trajectory of oil production at a time when the oil price is going through the roof.

In 2000, Donald Dewar said here that Scotland could not be independent because oil would never again reach the dizzy heights of \$18 a barrel. What would he say now, with oil at \$112 a barrel, with a new sense of purpose and a unifying goal in Scotland, and with evidence from the budget that Westminster will never do anything to level the playing field? That will be down to us, and it is exactly what we are doing.

We are galvanizing Scotland, making it a more cohesive place and bringing the different sectors of Scotland together. We are bringing our councils and our enterprise agencies together into a new cohesive whole that can take us to a brand new future. I look forward to that day.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:59

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is consideration of two parliamentary bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move S3M-1820, on committee membership, and S3M-1821, on substitution in committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Charlie Gordon be appointed to replace Claire Baker as a member of the Audit Committee;

Richard Baker be appointed to replace Michael McMahon as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Patricia Ferguson be appointed to replace John Park as a member of the European and External Relations Committee; and

Jackie Baillie be appointed to replace Richard Baker as a member of the Subordinate Legislation Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Claire Baker be appointed to replace Richard Baker as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee;

John Park be appointed to replace Claire Baker as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee; and

Richard Baker be appointed to replace John Park as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.—*[Bruce Crawford.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The questions on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): There are 13 questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to the debate on housing, I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Stewart Maxwell is agreed to, all other amendments to the motion will fall. However, if the amendment in the name of Stewart Maxwell is not agreed to, the amendment in the name of Johann Lamont will be called. If the amendment in the name of Johann Lamont is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Robert Brown will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-1812.2, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1812, in the name of David McLetchie, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR:

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST:

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS:

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 42, Against 72, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1812.3, in the name of Johann Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1812, in the name of David McLetchie, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR:

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST:

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS:

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 44, Against 56, Abstentions 15.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1812.1, in the name of Robert Brown, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1812, in the name of David McLetchie, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For:

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST:

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

I use my casting vote to oppose the amendment.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1812, in the name of David McLetchie, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR:

Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

AGAINST:

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 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)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (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)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (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)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, 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)
 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)

ABSTENTIONS:

Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 102, Abstentions 1.

Motion disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1803.1.1, in the name of Robin Harper, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-1803.1, in the name of Karen Gillon, on food security, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1803.1, in the name of Karen Gillon, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1803, in the name of John Scott, on food security, be agreed to.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1803.2, in the name of Mike Rumbles, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1803, in the name of John Scott, on food security, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1803, in the name of John Scott, on food security, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament expresses its concern at the potential for global food shortages; notes the recent cost increases in many basic food products here in Scotland, with food price inflation now exceeding 6%; further notes that many developing countries are experiencing growing social unrest as a result of food pressures; calls on the Scottish Government, Her Majesty's Government, the European Union and other relevant bodies to work closely, and with the appropriate urgency, to seek solutions that take account of the growing pressures on agriculture from both climate change and the rush to biofuels, as well as the peak in oil production; recognises the role of Scotland's primary producers in ensuring the long-term capacity and capability of our food supply, and further calls on the Scottish Government to encourage the development of local supply chains through public procurement, address the imbalance in power between the big supermarkets and our food producers, reduce the regulatory burden on farmers, and ensure that our primary producers operate on a level playing field with foreign competitors.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1814.1, in the name of Derek Brownlee, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1814, in the name of John Swinney, on the impact of the United Kingdom budget on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

AGAINST

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
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)
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)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
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)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 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)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 16, Abstentions 87.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1814.2, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1814, in the name of John Swinney, on the impact of the UK budget on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

AGAINST

Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 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)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 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)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 14, Abstentions 87.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1814, in the name of John Swinney, as amended, on the impact of the UK budget on Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, 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)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 16, Abstentions 44.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament is disappointed with some of the decisions taken in the 2008 UK Budget and their damaging impact on the Scottish economy and households; in particular regrets that action was not taken to reverse the 2007 decision to abolish the 10p tax rate; deplores the continued failure of the UK Government to provide an adequate package of measures to help families affected by the falling housing market and the absence of sufficient budget provision for the alleviation of child poverty; notes with concern the increase in the small companies' rate of corporation tax; believes that the blanket approach taken in setting alcohol duty is too simplistic and does not address

the wider social and health issues around alcohol; regrets that the measures aimed at tackling fuel poverty are insufficient, and further regrets the lack of appropriate measures to moderate the impact of rising fuel prices.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1820, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Charlie Gordon be appointed to replace Claire Baker as a member of the Audit Committee;

Richard Baker be appointed to replace Michael McMahon as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Patricia Ferguson be appointed to replace John Park as a member of the European and External Relations Committee; and

Jackie Baillie be appointed to replace Richard Baker as a member of the Subordinate Legislation Committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-1821, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Claire Baker be appointed to replace Richard Baker as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee;

John Park be appointed to replace Claire Baker as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee; and

Richard Baker be appointed to replace John Park as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

International Workers Memorial Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1710, in the name of Elaine Smith, on remember the dead, fight for the living. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of International Workers Memorial Day (IWMD) held on 28 April each year; considers that the official slogan "remember the dead, fight for the living" is particularly apposite and helps to ensure that all those who have died as a result of work are not forgotten whilst at the same time encourages renewed efforts to ensure that such tragedies are not repeated; welcomes events around Scotland to commemorate this important day and, in particular, the unveiling of the North Lanarkshire Workers Memorial at Summerlee Heritage Park in Coatbridge; encourages relevant authorities to fly official flags on public buildings at half mast; hopes that all workplaces will observe a one-minute silence at 12 noon on 28 April 2008; commends the STUC and the trade unions for their work in building trade union organisation and campaigning for stricter enforcement with higher penalties for breaches of health and safety laws to help in the struggle for safer workplaces, and supports the call for recognition of IWMD as a national day of remembrance for those who have been killed, injured, or made ill by their work.

17:10

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I have registered interests that are relevant to the debate.

I am pleased to have secured this important debate to commemorate international workers memorial day, which was held on Monday. The serious matters that will be discussed tonight might even receive press coverage after the return to Scotland of the *Morning Star* as a daily paper.

I thank all the members who signed my motion and who have stayed for the debate—they are mainly Labour members. The debate is appropriate to May day, which is an occasion to remember and learn from past workers' struggles against poverty, oppression and injustice. Of course, poverty and exploitation are particularly relevant to the debate.

My comrade Cathy Peattie held a debate about international workers memorial day in 2002 and I commend her for her constant work with trade unions and as the convener of Labour's trade union group. I also thank the Scottish Trades Union Congress, trade union members—including those in North Lanarkshire trade union council—and the families who have made the effort to come here to support the motion. That highlights the importance of the Parliament recognising

international workers memorial day. To that end, it would help if, in responding to the debate, the minister made a commitment to meet me, other interested members, the STUC and families of those who have been killed at work to discuss formal recognition of the day.

To recognise the day on Monday, measures were taken throughout Scotland—including a minute's silence at 12 noon in many workplaces and the flying of official flags at half-mast in several areas—and various events took place. One was an inaugural event in my constituency, where the North Lanarkshire workers memorial, which was funded jointly by North Lanarkshire Council and North Lanarkshire trade union council, was unveiled. I was privileged to speak at that event, which was attended by several MSPs and councillors, Tom Clarke MP and Grahame Smith, the STUC's general secretary, and at which we also heard a heartfelt plea for better legislation from Dorothy Wright of families against corporate killers.

The memorial is situated at the gates of Summerlee heritage park, which will reopen this year after major refurbishment. Visitors to Summerlee will see the excellent way in which the museum has preserved and interpreted the history of the local iron, steel, coal and engineering industries and of the people and communities that depended on them for a living. Working in those industries was dangerous. Our ancestors frequently faced the anguish, despair and heartache of losing their loved ones in industrial accidents and disasters. At Summerlee, we can reflect on the hard work and sacrifice of the working class of Scotland's central belt over hundreds of years and we can remember the difficult circumstances in which those people worked and lived. Scotland's prosperity was built on their blood, sweat and tears and that should never be forgotten.

My constituency has a great mining tradition but, tragically, that has meant first-hand experience of disaster for many of my constituents. Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the Auchengeich colliery disaster on 18 September 1959, when 47 men lost their lives.

Of course, it does not take a disaster for lives to be lost at work. Accidents happen, and some deaths at work are accidents. However, the Health and Safety Executive estimates that more than 70 per cent of major or fatal workplace injuries are the result of senior management failure, which is often systematic and over a period. The vast majority of deaths at work could and should have been avoided.

The theme of this year's international workers memorial day is occupational health. According to the Health and Safety Executive, work-related

stress accounts for more than a third of all new instances of ill health. Study after study shows a sharp increase in hours worked, which causes rising stress. Only today, we heard that the number of people—and particularly women—who must take second jobs to make ends meet is increasing.

Increased flexibility in the labour market has led to a feeling of powerlessness among workers. They suffer as a result of impaired mental health, long hours, work intensification and oppressive management. It is clear that there is a price to be paid for tailoring the workforce to meet the market's every whim. Employees are being squeezed to the point of illness to allow unrealistic targets to be met; it is a case of workers' health for employers' wealth.

Employers have a duty to their staff. When those duties are not met, serious penalties must be imposed. Only then will companies take health and safety seriously and make genuine efforts to reduce the number of cases of death, injury and disease at work. Too often, profit is put before people.

I again draw the Parliament's attention to the possible outsourcing of occupational health services at Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board to an American firm. Such privatisation—that is what it would amount to—would undoubtedly be a short-sighted and retrograde step, and would do nothing to ensure better health among the board's employees.

Over the past 30 years, market deregulation has taken place to an extent that would never have been tolerated in previous eras. When Margaret Thatcher swept away workers' protection, she systematically dismantled the network of legally enforceable rights that safeguarded employees against gross abuse and exploitation, rights that had been long fought for and hard won.

Unfortunately, although some commendable advances have been made, Labour has not yet fully reinstated those rights or overturned the majority of anti-trade union laws. The enactment of the trade union freedom bill that John McDonnell MP has proposed would be a good start in redressing the balance between the unions and big business, but a fundamental shift in power and a major change in the economic system are what are really needed. Capitalism cannot meet the basic needs of the world's people, half of whom live on less than \$2 a day, despite the record profits for big business.

The role of people who represent labour cannot be simply to respond to an increasingly pro-business agenda. We must go on the offensive by challenging injustice and inequality both inside and outside the workplace. The issue is undoubtedly

one of class, and it is important for members of the Labour Party to continually reflect on the party's traditional purpose—the advancement of the interests of ordinary working people. Our party was founded on the need to protect the rights of people who sell their labour and over the years has been responsible for the major legislative advancements that have been made in favour of the working class. I commend comrades who, at last week's STUC congress, highlighted the need to dismantle the anti-trade union laws, and I associate myself with the calls to repeal those laws.

Formal recognition of international workers memorial day ought to be implemented to act as a constant reminder of the annual toll of workplace deaths and an impetus to take action. I look forward to a response from the minister about a meeting to discuss that subject. We must all continue to fight in the hope that people who sell their labour can do so with the full protection of the industries and organisations that profit from their toil. I join in solidarity with all members who are present to remember the dead and to fight for the living.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the debate is oversubscribed, I ask members to stick to speeches of four minutes. It would be preferable if they took even less time.

17:18

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Like Elaine Smith, I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. I will heed the Presiding Officer's comments about how tight we are for time.

Back in October 2000, when I was a fairly new member, I convened a small conference in the Parliament on health and safety in the workplace. I have continued to maintain an interest in the subject.

We all know that Scotland has an unacceptably high rate of workplace deaths. HSE figures show that, since April 2001, 187 Scottish workers have been killed at work. It is interesting that the HSE's figures include serious injuries and fatalities in areas in which people might not expect such events to happen. Given my background and the constituency that I represent, I am well aware of the dangers in the mining industry, which includes surface or opencast mining, and in the construction and quarrying industries. Everyone knows about those dangers, but if we drill down into the HSE's figures, we find that fairly significant proportions of injuries and fatalities arise in the agriculture sector, the manufacturing sector and, indeed, the service sector.

Of course, trade unions have always played a crucial role in delivering a healthy and safe workplace. My trade union, the Transport and General Workers Union, which is now part of Unite, continues to highlight health and safety issues, not only in the traditional sectors but in the agriculture and forestry industries. The union has also been at the forefront of promoting and developing roving safety representatives, which we should have more of in future. Taking care of all aspects of health and safety in the workplace will lessen the likelihood of serious injuries as well as deal with day-to-day issues.

There are several concerns that we ought to think about in the current climate, in particular the safety of migrant workers, who not only might be vulnerable to exploitation but might find themselves at more risk because of issues such as language difficulties and unfamiliar working practices. In terms of exploitation, working conditions are one aspect of life for migrant workers, but the living conditions that are faced by many of those who come to this country to work in some of our seasonal industries are appalling. I welcome the fact that the trade unions have taken a particular interest in that situation.

I compliment my colleagues at Westminster on the Temporary and Agency Workers (Equal Treatment) Bill, which will give agency staff improved health and safety conditions.

I will finish with a point that I made during trade union week here in the Parliament. As the Minister for Justice at the time, I took a close interest in the corporate killing legislation and convened an expert group of academics, trade unionists, people in the legal profession and others who came together to consider the issue in more detail. With the passage of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 at Westminster, we need to continue to focus in Scotland, so I ask the minister to discuss with her colleagues the possibility of reconvening that group to examine whether we can do anything else in legislation that would be meaningful. The worst possible thing would be to have unworkable legislation that does not deliver for the families who have lost their loved ones. It would be worth looking at that.

17:22

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is with great pleasure, tinged with sadness, that I speak in tonight's debate as part of the Scotland-wide campaign to mark international workers memorial day. Along with Elaine Smith, I attended the event on Monday that was held by the North Lanarkshire trades council, and I put on record my appreciation of the work of the trades council and the trade unions involved in organising a very successful day.

It was interesting to hold such an event at Summerlee heritage park because it marks Scotland's industrial history and the steel and mining industries. As Elaine Smith said, those two industries suffered people dying and being maimed by losing limbs at work. The event brought back a memory of when I first moved to Coatbridge 25 years ago. An old comrade of mine had Coatbridge described to him as "hell with the lid off" because of the number of steelworks in the area. Lives were lost in the steel industry and in the mining industry that serviced it, many of which we will commemorate next year on the anniversary of the Auchengeich pit disaster.

As Elaine Smith highlighted, we have to remember that we have to build up resources for our workers today. We must ensure that procedures are put in place, such as occupational health services. One of the best examples of good practice in Scotland, if not in the United Kingdom and Europe, is provided by Salus Occupational Health & Safety, a company based in Coatbridge. It provides occupational health support to a number of organisations, including Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, and draws in income for Lanarkshire NHS Board through its consultancy work. That is a good example of how we can raise the issues of workers' health and wellbeing.

We must also ensure that the HSE is strengthened in its role of protecting workers. Too often, we hear of accidents happening and deaths occurring that could easily have been avoided if the HSE had been able to do its job of protecting workers in the workplace. In light of Cathy Jamieson's comments about migrant workers, the HSE's role is even more relevant today. Especially in rural industries, seasonal workers risk being maimed because unscrupulous employers disregard health and safety issues in the workplace.

As I said, I welcome the fact that Elaine Smith's motion finally gives us an opportunity to commemorate and pay tribute to the many workers who lost their lives building the Scotland that we have today. Many died needlessly and many workers were maimed. We must also remember those who suffered industrial illness due to the work that they were engaged in: the miners who suffered pneumoconiosis and the steel workers and those who worked in shipbuilding who suffered asbestosis. We need to mark such occasions so that we remember what work can do to individuals and ensure that such things do not happen in future.

17:26

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I apologise that I will need to leave the debate early. I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

I thank Elaine Smith for bringing such an important debate to the Parliament. Further, I thank the STUC for its fantastic work on international workers memorial day and on the vital work that it does on workers' safety.

Another day, another dollar—another 6,000 work-related deaths, or one death every 15 seconds. Work kills more people than wars. Globally, almost 270 million accidents are recorded each year, of which 350,000 are fatal. If we add to that the deaths from work-related illnesses, the total increases to more than 1 million deaths every year. Many of those could be prevented.

Among European states, the UK has the lowest rate of work-related fatalities and injuries. Even so, 2.2 million people in the UK suffer from work-related illnesses. Some 30 million days are lost due to work-related illnesses and 6 million days are lost due to workplace injury.

Despite improvements, Scotland is persistently above the UK average—the so-called Scottish safety anomaly. In 2006-07, 31 workers were fatally injured at work in Scotland, as were five members of the public. There were more than 12,000 injuries to employees and 1,250 injuries to members of the public. Scotland also has fewer successful prosecutions and smaller fines.

However, those figures do not reflect the full extent of workplace dangers. Many accidents go unreported. In the UK in 2006-07, some 140,000 injuries were reported but surveys show that nearly twice that number of injuries occurred.

New risks are constantly emerging. For example, call-centre workers are subject to long hours of sitting in front of a screen, suffer poor ergonomics and are put under high pressure. That results in a wide variety of ailments, from varicose veins to throat disorders, fatigue, stress and burn-out.

Biological risks are widespread and often poorly understood. As well as more obvious risks, there are other dangers such as asthma, allergies and skin problems from moulds and bioaerosols. About 7 per cent of European workers report hearing loss due to work.

As Elaine Smith said, stress is the second most common work-related health problem. The condition affects 22 per cent of European workers and is responsible for more than half of all lost working days. The annual economic cost of stress in the European Union has been estimated at €20 billion.

Many are subject to new terms of employment and job insecurity. We have an ageing workforce. With jobs becoming complicated and demanding, it is more difficult to balance work with family life. All of that contributes to stress.

Internationally, how many people are outside the statistics? How many child labourers are victims of employment and, in some cases, slavery? Employment laws should protect people from hazards, but they protect employers.

International workers memorial day is an international event that was first supported in Canada. The day was adopted by the Scottish Trades Union Congress in 1993, by the Trades Union Congress in 1999 and by the Health and Safety Executive in 2000. Canada, Spain, Thailand and Taiwan support international workers memorial day. It is time for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to adopt it as an appropriate way of actively ensuring that the debate about health and safety and welfare stays on the agenda, and of marking the words of Mother Jones—remember the dead and fight like hell for the living.

17:30

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I add my congratulations and thanks to those that have been offered to Elaine Smith for securing this important debate.

Members are aware of the tragedy that occurred in my constituency in 2004, when employees of two companies—ICL Tech and ICL Plastics—died as a result of an explosion. As the trial heard, that explosion could have been avoided if £405 had been spent on replacing a corroded section of pipe. Indeed, if the pipe had been laid in accordance with regulations, it is unlikely that it would have corroded in the way it did. In my view, if the factory had been unionised, it is unlikely that the problem would have gone unnoticed for so long.

Nine people died, 33 were injured—some very seriously—and 17, although not injured, were, in the words of the trial documents, placed at risk of death. One 82-year-old passer-by was injured by flying debris. When the case came to trial, more than three years after the event, the companies involved were fined £200,000 each.

However, for the families involved, the trial was never going to be the end of the story. They knew that, for all the facts to come out, they needed a full judicial public inquiry. After meetings with the Lord Advocate, the First Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, it was announced that there would be an inquiry that would allow all the facts of the case to be aired and, hopefully, all the lessons to be learned.

The inquiry begins in nine short weeks and will be held in the place where the families gathered while they waited to hear news of their loved ones. However, a new issue has arisen, of which I have made ministers aware. The Inquiries Act 2005 and

the Inquiries (Scotland) Rules 2007 contain the statutory basis on which awards of expenses can be made for public inquiries. Of course, ministers have discretion to override the rules. In the case of Stockline, there is already a ministerial determination that has superseded and restricted some of the more general provisions in the rules and the 2005 act. The most important matters arising from that determination are as follows. First no legal expenses will be paid retrospectively; accordingly, fees will be paid only for work that is approved in advance. Secondly, everything that the families' counsel has done until now is free.

The inquiry is only nine weeks away, and there is a huge amount of preparation to be undertaken, especially by counsel. The funding situation must be made clear well in advance of the hearing so that such preparation can take place. Further delays will seriously prejudice the families' case and the ability of their counsel to represent them properly at the inquiry. There is a suggestion that the families will be funded only if they qualify for legal aid. However, if funding is available only on that basis, families will be disfranchised in the inquiry. That position is untenable, because the families fought for the inquiry and are the most important people in the process. Will the minister ask her colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to meet me, my Westminster colleague Ann McKechin, and representatives of the families as a matter of urgency, so that we can make him aware of the issues that I have described and the strength of feeling that exists?

Today we are commemorating international workers memorial day. In 10 days' time, we will commemorate the fourth anniversary of the Stockline disaster. Surely it is not too much to ask that those who were injured and the families of the workers who died should not be required to undergo means testing to allow them to be represented at the inquiry for which they fought.

17:34

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I, too, want to support, commemorate and celebrate everyone who has worked hard to ensure that we remember international workers memorial day. I declare an interest and I thank Elaine Smith for securing the debate.

I note that only the SNP and the Labour Party are represented in the chamber for this evening's debate. Many of my colleagues on the Labour benches have been shop stewards, branch secretaries and even full-time union officials over the years—I was a union official in the south of England. I pay tribute to the STUC, which has played a more important part in my life than it could ever know, because I met my husband at an STUC summer school.

On a more serious note, in those early days I learned about the health and safety issues that confront many workers around the world. In the UK, the match girls used to suffer from phossy jaw, which was caused by the phosphorus that was used in the factories where they were employed. The match girls' strike was the start of women's activity in the trade union movement—in that context I am pleased that a woman secured this debate. Elaine Smith should be praised for reminding us of our important duties in that regard.

I represent a constituency in which there were more than 60 coal mines. As members said, we must remember issues such as pneumoconiosis and asbestosis, which has affected people who worked in the shipyards of Rosyth and Clydebank. We must applaud all the people who have dedicated their lives to fighting for workers' rights over the centuries. I am dismayed when I read in newspapers or hear on television about the many deaths in coal mines in China. I hope that we can do our job on such issues, in solidarity with workers around the world. We should celebrate the skills of the Cowdenbeath mine survival team, which is called on from time to time when there is a mining accident in another part of the world to help to ensure that there are survivors. The team does tremendous work.

Members talked about eastern Europe. I have great regard for the people who provide workers from that part of the world with advice and information.

It is sad that there is no Liberal member in the chamber to celebrate the life of Samuel Plimsoll, whose work ensured that a load line was painted on ships. At one time, there were terribly overloaded vessels on the open seas, which were known as coffin ships. Samuel Plimsoll realised that being a trade unionist was not enough and he would have to pursue his political convictions in Parliament. When he became a Liberal member of Parliament, he made his proposal for the Plimsoll line. At first, whether and where the line was painted depended on the whim of ship owners—indeed, one ship owner put the line on his ship's funnel. I am thankful that times have moved on and the Plimsoll line is now officially regulated.

17:38

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): I commend Elaine Smith for bringing the debate. I am sure that she agrees that Monday's event at Summerlee was very poignant.

International workers memorial day, on which we commemorate everyone who has been killed at or by their work, reminds us all of the dangers that many workers face at work.

The SNP supported Karen Gillon's proposal for a member's bill on corporate killing in the previous session of the Parliament. I was not a member of the Scottish Parliament then, but I supported her move from outwith the institution, in my position in Unison. Like MSPs, I accepted the position of the Scottish ministers at the time, which was that such legislation was not within the scope of the Scottish Parliament. However, if that is the case we must surely consider where responsibility for business regulation and legislation lies.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): For the sake of clarity, I say to the member that the bill was not withdrawn because of any decision of the Scottish ministers but because a bill was going through the Westminster Parliament. It was withdrawn to allow the Westminster bill to complete its progress and to see whether it would be sufficient. In my view, it is not. Therefore, I will look to bring a bill back to the Parliament.

Christina McKelvie: I thank Karen Gillon for that clarification. I am sorry, but that was not how what happened was articulated out there, including by the unions.

The corporate homicide legislation that was introduced in London is, quite simply, inadequate. It cannot be allowed to be the final word on the subject. We cannot allow the matter to rest there. We need to improve the legislation in this country and ensure that it is not struck down by the pen of a Scottish Secretary ruling that the Scottish Parliament has acted *ultra vires*. We should remember the dead, and fight for the living.

The number of people who are killed at or by their work is perhaps even exceeded by the number who are injured at work or made sick by their employment. We will be looking not only to improve the inadequate corporate homicide legislation that Westminster passed but to improve workplace health and safety legislation. Scottish workers deserve to be protected at their workplace not only from the danger of death but from injury.

Frankly, it is rather disappointing that some employers—I stress that they are in the minority—do not care enough for the safety of their workers. I want to see the legislation improved: both the legislation that covers death at work and that covering injury and danger of injury at work. Those who are responsible for the preventable deaths of workers or their injury should be prosecuted and punished.

As previous Scottish ministers made clear, the power to address that legislation lies in London. London has shown that it is not addressing—or perhaps will not or cannot address—those legislative inadequacies. As the debate demonstrates, there is a clear will in Scotland and in the Scottish Parliament properly to address

those inadequacies. Therefore, it is logical that the power to make that legislation should be repatriated to Scotland. If we have the desire to make the workplace a safer place, and we can address the issue in Scotland, it makes sense for us to reform the legislation in Scotland. I will continue to support reform of the law on workplace safety.

The issue is one on which we should continue to reflect, debate and bring forward legislative reform. I will continue to speak out for that reform and to campaign to bring the powers to make the necessary changes home to Scotland.

17:42

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Elaine Smith on bringing the motion before the Parliament and associate myself with many of her comments. It is a little bit disappointing that no Conservative or Liberal Democrat member is in the chamber. In some of the events of the past couple of weeks, members on this side of the chamber have shown whose side they are on when it comes to workforce relations.

I will speak about my experience and give a historical context to the debate. When we debated the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, I touched on my family experience. In 1920, my great-grandfather lost his life in a pithead accident when he was 33 years old, leaving two children under seven. He was an electrician and had decided to go to Argentina to work. Because of his death, a different chain of events unfolded and the family remained in Scotland, staying with relatives.

The accident shaped the lives of the family. I decided to research my great-grandfather's death in the local library in Dunfermline. The person who helped me brought out a book that was an inch thick and contained hundreds and thousands of names. Those deaths have shaped not only where we are now but, over the past few hundred years, the communities that we live in. Mining has left its mark, particularly in Fife, but also in other parts of Scotland. It is quite a frightening prospect that events such as those pithead accidents of long ago have shaped the communities in which we live.

Some of Christina McKelvie's comments on corporate manslaughter were interesting. There was overwhelming support in Scotland for a movement to introduce legislation on corporate manslaughter that would be different from what was proposed down south. There has been a step in the right direction down south, but there is now an expectation, particularly among trade unions and organisations such as families against corporate killers, for more powers. They believe

that the issue must be addressed and that a Scottish solution must be found, not least because of what we have gone through over the past couple of years. Issues such as the health and safety anomaly in Scotland and the number of deaths in this country must be addressed.

A number of SNP members supported such legislation at the time, along with a number of Labour members. Members such as myself and Christina McKelvie, who entered Parliament after last year's election, also support a move in that direction. It will be interesting to hear the Minister for Public Health's views when she sums up.

Questions remain over whether the changes that have been made down south will be enough. I am concerned that they may not be and that leaving it for a time to see whether those changes will have sufficient impact might lead to more people dying in the workplace, which we do not want to happen. If there is cross-party consensus on the issue, members should talk to one another and find a way forward.

I pay tribute to Louise Adamson, who has campaigned as part of families against corporate killers because she lost her brother in 2005. I got to know Louise because of her work on the campaign. She has been very brave and is an inspiration to people. She is prepared to go out and talk about her experiences and build a movement behind what she is trying to achieve on behalf of others who have lost loved ones. She has received support from families against corporate killers and the STUC. We all know that justice is silent, but sometimes the road to justice is not. We must ensure that we agitate along that road.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Given the number of members who wish to speak, I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 6.06 pm.—[*Elaine Smith.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:46

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I add my congratulations to Elaine Smith on securing the debate, which gives us an opportunity to remember those who have died or been injured at work. Members received a helpful briefing from the STUC, which gave us the stark figures for those who have died or been injured. As we were warned, even those figures should be treated with caution because they might not tell the whole story.

The debate gives us an opportunity to consider what still needs to be done to improve health and

safety at work. We must also consider the new threats to health and safety that arise through new working practices. I will come back to that issue.

In Bathgate on Monday, as in many other places, people gathered at the workers memorial stone to

"Remember the dead, fight for the living",

as the motion says. The practice, which has spread throughout Scotland, was first introduced to Scotland by the Lothian Federation of Trades Councils and was adopted by the STUC. My friend and colleague Councillor Jim Swan, of West Lothian Council, was at the forefront of promoting workers memorial day. In his role as a leading member of the STUC's hazards committee, he has been a diligent campaigner for safer and healthier workplaces. He has tried to prevent deaths and injuries by being proactive and persuading employers to take proper action and to learn when mistakes are made.

We should acknowledge that improvements have been made in health and safety. My father worked in the building industry and I remember him going off to work each day without any of the safety equipment that we now see regularly on our building sites. However, the figure that I heard being quoted at the Bathgate ceremony on Monday—that there have been 50 deaths in the past 12 months in the construction industry throughout the UK—shows that we cannot be complacent.

We must be aware of the new risks that new industries bring. What action is the Scottish Executive taking to encourage the necessary research into the effects of some of those jobs? This Parliament may not have sole responsibility for health and safety at work, but it is clear that we have responsibility for areas that impact upon it. Our legislative powers have, for example, allowed us to legislate to help sufferers of mesothelioma. However, as I hope I have made clear in my speech, I do not think that it is enough to react: we must be proactive.

This year's theme for international workers memorial day was occupational health. As well as the trade unions throughout Scotland, Scotland's health at work programme, led by Andrew Cubie, has been central to driving the healthy workplace agenda. As the programme comes within the remit of the Scottish centre for healthy working lives, there are concerns that the Scottish Government's commitment to the service is not being matched by funding. I hope that the minister will be able to respond on that point.

When people are ill or injured, their first port of call is usually their general practitioner. It is essential that GPs are aware of the possibility of a workplace influence on a patient's illness or injury.

Training, particularly continuing professional development, is essential to ensure that GPs are aware and have the relevant, up-to-date information.

The debate has been positive but there are still many issues to be addressed. I hope that the minister will take the time to reply tonight to some of the clear issues that have been raised.

17:50

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Like other members, I congratulate Elaine Smith. The number of members who have stayed and contributed to the debate is testimony to the importance of the issue. Also like other members, I draw attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, in particular my trade union membership.

It is worth reflecting on the importance of trade unions in promoting health and safety. Trade unions have existed over the years for three prime purposes: to improve employees' wages, to improve working conditions and to improve the health and safety of people at work. Those three elements are important strands in union work, and the trade unions in Britain and Scotland have a proud record of driving forward those agendas, particularly safety. The first problems with industrialisation came about in Britain, the first industrial nation, and the development of trade unionism has been geared to fighting for improved conditions and, in particular, improved safety.

Many of us who are trade union members are well aware of the importance of safety. Those of us who represent constituencies where there have been specific safety issues are particularly conscious of that. Patricia Ferguson talked about Stockline in Maryhill and I am sure that Karen Gillon will have things to say about the Transco disaster in Larkhall. The issue that is particularly to the forefront in my constituency is asbestos and asbestos-related disease.

It is no accident that the people who have campaigned on asbestos—there have been many campaigns over the past 15 or 20 years—are the self-same people who fought the industrial struggles on the Clyde. The people who fought on behalf of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders are at the forefront of the fight for better treatment and better compensation for asbestos workers. Clydebank Asbestos Group has played a particularly important role in raising those issues, not only nationally in Scotland and the UK, but internationally. It has pushed forward the argument that asbestos-related illness needs special consideration and treatment. It has fought the fight for early diagnosis and access to treatment and I am grateful to the minister for

taking forward access to Alimta. We fought in the Parliament for the Rights of Relatives to Damages (Mesothelioma) (Scotland) Act 2007 and are now fighting on pleural plaques. We will also fight for safe circumstances for the removal of asbestos from public buildings and houses, because there is a vast legacy of asbestos out there. The people who have to deal with it must be treated fairly and we must ensure that they do not fall victim to asbestos-related illness.

To return to my theme, trade unions have been at the forefront of the struggle not only on asbestos but the whole health and safety agenda. The Parliament needs to support the trade union movement in Scotland in carrying out that vital role. I hope that this debate will record the importance of not only remembering the workers who have died but remembering the trade unions that have fought on their behalf and promoting their role in that struggle.

17:54

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests and, like other members, congratulate Elaine Smith on securing this important debate.

Day and daily, people leave their homes to go to work, all of them assuming that they will return at the end of their shifts. They do, because we have some of the most stringent health and safety legislation in the world. People assume that their employers will do what that legislation says and ensure that they can work safely, with the correct equipment and safeguards. Of course, accidents happen that cannot be foreseen, as Elaine Smith said, but all too often, if we dig behind the Health and Safety Executive statistics, we find that those people who die at work die because of completely preventable incidents, when profit has been put ahead of workers' safety.

We must strengthen the role of the Health and Safety Executive, ensuring that it is more proactive in the enforcement of legislation. We must provide a framework in which workers are taken seriously when they seek to report breaches or when they urge action to be taken. When people die at their work, it is not just a matter of health and safety; it is a matter of justice, plain and simple. Why should someone be discriminated against by the Scottish justice system simply because they are killed at their work, rather than in some other public place, or because, like the Findlay family, they die in their own home through the negligence of private profiteers?

It is one of my greatest regrets that I was not able to secure the relevant changes to our justice system during the previous session. For the

avoidance of doubt, however, there are clear criteria by which a member's bill can be stopped from progressing, one of which is that the UK Government is introducing legislation that will give effect to the member's proposal. That was the view of the previous Scottish Executive. In consultation with the unions and the STUC, I withdrew my bill to allow that process to conclude and the UK bill to be amended and improved by MPs. It is hardly surprising that I would take that course of action—I am a socialist and a unionist, so my preferred position would have been a UK bill to give workers across the United Kingdom better access to justice.

The Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 is now in place, but I am not convinced—nor are the families concerned or the unions—that it is sufficiently robust to do what we wanted it to do. I had hoped that we would have been able to secure cross-party consensus here to enable us to re-examine the issue of corporate culpable homicide. However, the speech by Christina McKelvie of the SNP and the absence of Tory and Liberal Democrat members from the debate seem to make that unlikely. If a Scottish bill would be ultra vires, why was Cathy Jamieson, the then Minister for Justice, able to set up an expert working group on the matter?

It would be for this Parliament to determine whether the proposed amendments to Scots law were within its competence, through the certificate of competence from the Presiding Officer and by the decision of a parliamentary committee. I am disappointed to see the SNP cave in so quickly to the vested interests of the establishment.

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): It was your own Government.

Karen Gillon: The SNP could no doubt have argued that the smoking ban was outwith the competence of this Parliament, but the bill that provided for it was framed in such a way as to allow it to proceed. It is not outwith the wit of the Parliament to enable legislation on corporate culpable homicide to be introduced so as to amend our justice system—not our health and safety system—to ensure that people who die as a result of a workplace incident are not treated any differently than others.

For the avoidance of doubt, I have not caved in to the establishment; my resolve remains strong and clear, and I will do all that I can to introduce such legislation this session. I look forward to the SNP working with us on it.

17:58

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): I congratulate Elaine Smith on securing the debate. She has a long and consistent record on the issue.

The health and safety of workers everywhere, particularly in Scotland, is important to us. I join other members in paying tribute to the STUC, which continues to ensure that the subject is of the highest priority for us as politicians. I acknowledge its role, as well as that of Des McNulty, in securing legislation on pleural plaques for people who suffer from mesothelioma. The STUC was without doubt crucial in that, and we in the Government have been happy to respond and progress the necessary legislation.

No one should go to their workplace and come home again running the risk of becoming ill or suffering serious or even fatal injury. We are committed to improving Scotland's occupational health and safety record and to minimising as far as possible the risks to workers in the workplace.

As members have said, there are a number of statistics that show that the overall fatal injury rate in Scotland is generally higher than the UK's. However, it is true to say that figures do not tell the whole story, and do not reflect the extent of workplace risks. We accept that. Research indicates that the difference in the rates can largely be explained by occupational and other characteristics of the workplace. In construction, for example, Scotland's workforce is made up of a greater proportion of manual workers to managers and clerical staff than is England's.

I would like to outline some of the action that we are taking to improve Scotland's health and safety record. As members will be aware, in March this year the "Scottish Action Plan on Health & Safety" was published. It aims to co-ordinate action to reduce work-related injury and ill health between the UK and Scottish Governments, with business, workers representatives and professionals. The Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive are supporting its implementation through a stakeholder body called the partnership on health and safety in Scotland—PHASS.

The action plan committed £1.2 million in 2007-08 to improve the health and safety of Scottish workers and the public. It was published in March 2007 as a joint Scottish Government-PHASS document. The Scottish Government continues to support the activities that were initiated under the plan. The plan identifies a range of actions, with timescales, to be delivered by the Scottish Government and by key partners including local authorities, trade unions, employers and regulators.

The commitments for action in the plan include expanding advisory services on health and safety for employers and employees through the existing advisory service of the Scottish centre for healthy working lives, with particular emphasis on reaching small and medium-sized enterprises; developing and promoting worker involvement in

workplace health and safety, in co-operation with the STUC; extending the provision of specific information and guidance on the protection of public service workers; undertaking research to link existing data sources, for example on work-related ill health, community health profiles and deprivation indices, to inform evidence; and disseminating sector-specific guidance on fire safety.

The Scottish centre for healthy working lives is a centre of excellence on health and work that was established by the Scottish Government in 2005. It provides an occupational health and safety advisory service via a website and telephone line for all employers and employees, and health and safety advisers provide free site visits to small and medium-sized enterprises. I assure Mary Mulligan that this Government is as committed to the future of that centre as was the previous Administration.

On corporate homicide, the STUC has consistently pressed for separate Scottish legislation on corporate homicide, and worked closely with Karen Gillon on her member's bill in the previous session. I understand that their priorities are the creation of an offence for individual directors who contribute to a death, and the creation of a wider range of penalties.

The UK Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007, which came into force on 6 April, creates a new offence of corporate homicide in Scotland. An organisation will be guilty of the new offence if the way in which its activities are managed or organised causes a death and amounts to a gross breach of a relevant duty of care to the deceased. A substantial part of the breach must have involved the way activities were managed by senior management. Although the act does not create a new offence for individual directors who contribute to deaths, they can be charged with culpable homicide or with other offences under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

I appreciate what Cathy Jamieson and Christina McKelvie said in the debate, but the immediate priority should be to ensure that the new legislation is implemented effectively in Scotland. Karen Gillon referred to people caving in to the establishment. I am not sure whether by "establishment", she meant the UK Government. Her remarks struck a slightly sour note, because we have made it clear that, if legislation were found to be wanting, we would consider what further steps should be taken. I am happy to give that commitment again today.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): The minister will know that I lodged a question to ask whether the Scottish Government will consider introducing legislation along the lines that Karen Gillon proposed. The reply said exactly what the minister

just said—that it is too early. When will it be time? Each day the Government delays, more and more people will die needlessly. When will legislation be considered?

Shona Robison: Of course, such legislation would not be necessary if the UK Government had got it right in the first place. However, we will consider what has to happen beyond the existing legislation if it is found to be wanting.

Patricia Ferguson made some important comments on the Stockline inquiry. I assure her that I will speak to my colleague Kenny MacAskill about the issues that she raised. They are important.

A number of calls were made for international workers memorial day to be officially recognised. It is important to note that the previous Labour and Lib Dem Administration resisted such calls over the past eight years, and that the same calls have been resisted at UK Government level. Our Government takes a similar view. It is more important to focus on the action that we take to improve health and safety in the workplace. That should be our focus.

I am delighted that a range of events took place throughout Scotland during the past week to commemorate those who have died as a result of accidents at work. As I said earlier, the best way for the Scottish Government to commemorate those people is to continue to show its commitment to improving occupational health and safety. I am pleased to do that on behalf of the Government this evening.

Meeting closed at 18:06.

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