

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PARLIAMENT
MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 4 February 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 4 February 2009

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Professor John Haldane, director of the centre for ethics, philosophy and public affairs from the University of St Andrews.

Professor John Haldane (Director of the Centre for Ethics, Philosophy and Public Affairs, University of St Andrews): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am conscious of the great honour you do me, and am grateful for the privilege of being able to speak to you today.

Debate is the business of this chamber, and whether it is engaged in for personal display or party advantage, its first and final function is that of promoting action by the Parliament, on behalf of the nation. In sharing that common purpose, you are all to some degree philosophers, or should aim to be such, for all thought begins and ends in action; and resulting actions and policies are only as coherent, effective and worth while as the thought that conceives them.

The writer G K Chesterton remarked that we have no alternative except being influenced by thought that has been thought out or by thought that has not been thought out, and he observed that the second is what is called philosophy. Some degree of serious reflection is necessary for responsible politics, but like any other skill, thinking needs to be directed to good ends.

How, then, are those ends to be identified? Again Chesterton has wisdom to offer when he writes regarding human wellbeing that we must first find the cure before we can identify the disease. Any appearance of paradox there quickly disappears when we recognise that the example of a secure and loving family illuminates the problems of failed ones; and the sight of a well-functioning community reveals where communal life has dissolved into mere co-existence, or declined into suspicion and mistrust.

It is not the business of politics to save souls, but equally politics cannot achieve and maintain decency, let alone rise to greatness, unless it recognises that human beings are soulful creatures before and after they are economic or pleasure-seeking agents. That soulfulness shows itself in three ways: first, in a sense of contingency

and vulnerability, as we find ourselves in a world we did not make, and in conditions we did not choose; secondly, in a recognition of our conflictedness, and how we are drawn to good and bad alike; and thirdly, in a yearning for completion in secure and enduring personal relationships. Out of those intimations of our spiritual nature are born three great virtues: solidarity with the suffering; repentance for wrongs inflicted; and creativity in the hope of making and sharing things of enduring worth.

Such virtues might not resolve debates about budget allocations, but without them Parliament has little to offer—at best it is an irrelevance; at worst a burden. So again, you have reason to be philosophical, reflecting on our shared vulnerability, conflictedness and yearning, and working out how those constants of the human condition might be relevant to today's policy making.

Ministerial Correction

14:34

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I understand that Michael Russell, the Minister for Environment, wishes to say a few words. I am happy to accede to that request.

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I wrote to you about the matter on Friday last week, I spoke to you about it, and I copied my letter to the Opposition spokespeople, the convener of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, and the Scottish Parliament information centre.

During Thursday's debate on forestry, I used employment statistics. On Thursday evening, the Forestry Commission drew my attention to the fact that its figures arose out of, as it put it, an error in its methodology. In short, the statistics for 1995 to 1999 were drawn up in a different way from those for 2006-07, and it was therefore not possible to make a complete and accurate comparison.

I want to make my apologies to the Parliament and to the Opposition spokespeople for the error that occurred during the debate. The moment that it was drawn to my attention, I sought to correct it, as the Presiding Officer knows, and to ensure that others were aware of it. Again, I apologise both for making the error and for the fact that others repeated it during the debate.

The Presiding Officer: I am very grateful to the minister for correcting the record and for the speed with which he sought to do so. I can confirm that he contacted me on Friday.

Business Motion

14:35

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3378, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for this afternoon's proceedings.

Motion moved,

Wednesday 11 February 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (Scotland) Order 2009

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 12 February 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Health and Wellbeing

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 February 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 February 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Debate: Disabled Persons' Parking Places (Scotland) Bill

11.40 am General Question Time

12.00 noon First Minister's Question Time
2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Justice and Law Officers;
Rural Affairs and the Environment
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business—[*Bruce*
Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill (Emergency Bill)

14:36

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-3381, in the name of John Swinney, on treating the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill as an emergency bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill be treated as an Emergency Bill.—[*John Swinney.*]

Motion agreed to.

Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill: Stage 1

14:36

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-3362, in the name of John Swinney, on the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): It would be pleasant if it was as straightforward as this every time.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill.

Motion agreed to.

14:37

Meeting suspended.

Committee of the Whole Parliament

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:37*]

Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill: Stage 2

The Convener (Alex Fergusson): We move to stage 2 proceedings on the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill. The bill will be considered by the Committee of the Whole Parliament, for which the occupant of this chair is known as the convener.

Section 1 agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Section 2 agreed to.

Schedules 3 and 4 agreed to.

Sections 3 to 5 agreed to.

Schedule 5 agreed to.

Sections 6 to 10 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Meeting closed at 14:37.

Scottish Parliament

14:37

On resuming—

Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I reconvene today's meeting of Parliament—I am sorry, but it has to be done—for consideration of stage 3 of the bill. The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3380, in the name of John Swinney, that the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill be passed. The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

I remind members that Presiding Officers will not give any one-minute warnings. We are tight for time, so I urge all members to stick to the time limits that they are given.

14:38

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): At decision time last Wednesday, there could not have been one member of this Parliament who believed that the institution was in a good place; some people will never come to terms with that fact. In the intervening seven days, we have seen real and substantial co-operation across the political spectrum to ensure that Parliament fulfils one of its central requirements, which is to put in place a budget that adequately funds public services and supports the development of the Scottish economy. That requirement could not be more relevant or of greater significance at this stage in the development of our country.

As people face up to uncertainties about their employment or their ability to support their mortgage or the future of their business, they expect Parliament to fulfil its obligation to them and to take wise decisions about the future. The people of Scotland expect politicians of all parties to reach mature agreement on an effective budget that meets the nation's needs in these challenging economic times.

This afternoon, as a consequence of productive discussion over the past week, I am certain that Parliament will fulfil its obligation to the public. I express the Government's appreciation for the constructive attitude that all the parties that are represented in the Parliament have taken over the past few days. We have listened hard to what other parties have said and have been flexible when we have been able to be.

The budget bill as introduced had at its core the need to deliver real action on the economy, but

our discussions with others have without doubt strengthened the capability of the budget to deliver on that aim. Of course, our dialogue with other parties has been longstanding. Labour's 15-point plan included a number of practical and constructive suggestions to help the economy that the Government has taken forward, such as on the manufacturing advisory service and on supporting credit unions. The Conservatives have argued for more support to encourage new entrants into business. The Liberal Democrats have argued for a strategic approach to key economic and financial issues. The Greens have made a strong case for a home insulation programme. We want to take forward that input in a constructive way.

The total Scottish budget is in the order of £33 billion. In the budget, we seek to boost public spending, to bring forward capital projects so that we can get construction workers and apprentices into jobs and to help businesses and families wherever we can. Through our spending, we will continue to deliver on the commitments that we made during our first 20 months in office. We will reduce business rates for small companies, provide the resources to freeze the council tax, put more police on the streets, work to tackle climate change and invest in our health and public services. Building on the concordat, we will take forward our proposals in partnership with local government, in recognition of the leadership that local authorities are showing in every part of the country.

For our economic recovery programme, we will focus on the skills that Scotland's people need to remain in the workforce and to keep our businesses competitive. I have already announced to Parliament the enhancements that we will make to the partnership action for continuing employment initiative to help people to deal with redundancy. I am pleased that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council will support that initiative further by allocating £7 million of its own budget so that colleges can work more closely with PACE.

Over the past few days, we have revisited the arguments from the Labour Party on the need for additional measures to boost skills and employability, as we work to meet our target of 50,000 Scots in appropriate training by the end of the current parliamentary session. I am pleased to announce that we will provide £16 million in 2009-10 to increase apprenticeship recruitment. By our detailed calculations, we believe that that will allow for the recruitment of 18,500 new apprentices in our economy at this vital time. We will actively promote those opportunities to a broad range of groups in society and across a broad range of sectors in the economy, including tourism and shipbuilding.

We will give sympathetic consideration to increasing the number of modern apprenticeships in 2010-11, when the experience of the next year and the financial position becomes clearer. Those issues will also be considered by a summit on apprenticeships that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will convene, at the request of the Labour Party.

That investment will be in addition to the £50 million that we plan to draw in from the European social fund to assist with skills development and employability initiatives. We have worked hard to secure money through that scheme to support people in employment who may be facing redundancy.

At the same time, we know that we need to do more for our young people, who face tough times. I am pleased to announce that we will now provide additional funding for the charity Columba 1400, so that it can do even more of its vital work to help our country's disadvantaged young people to reach their full potential.

Through the budget, we are targeting resources to help those who need it most and to offset the effects of recession by providing a jobs boost for Scotland. Our spending plans include a major programme of capital investment of more than £3.5 billion both this year and next. In addition, I have already said that we will bring forward an additional £230 million of accelerated capital expenditure in 2009-10 to improve health facilities across the country and, with our local government partners, to deliver major infrastructure projects. Through that spending, colleges and universities will also benefit from improvements that will assist energy efficiency and other objectives. That money will generate work and support jobs—4,700 in total on the basis of our detailed plans—and provide a much-needed lifeline for our economy at a crucial time.

Improving infrastructure means investing in Scotland's town centres so that they are able to face major challenges in the current economic climate. The cause of town centres has been championed by the Conservatives and argued for by Labour, and we have listened. That is why, in the autumn budget revision—and I confirm the agreement that I made with the Conservatives in advance of the previous budget discussion—we will bring forward provision for a town centre regeneration fund of £60 million that will deliver real improvements in towns the length and breadth of Scotland.

As part of the budget, we will invest to improve our built environment in other ways. As I announced last week, the Government will take forward stage 1 of a programme of home insulation measures that we have discussed with the Green party. In Scotland, more than half a

million homes for which it would be suitable do not have cavity wall insulation; and a million homes have either no loft insulation or inadequate loft insulation. That is a real waste of resources and it contributes to fuel poverty. That is why, through this budget, we will provide £15 million from Government, and will leverage in £15 million from other sources, to provide up to 90,000 homes with advice and assistance on energy efficiency, and with insulation where it is suitable and appropriate. It will be the biggest such scheme to be implemented in Scotland. The scheme will be area based and will be targeted at those who need it most. We are clear that those who are able to pay should make a contribution, and that those who are not able to pay will receive the service free.

Through this budget, we will invest in our companies to help to safeguard jobs in all our constituencies. The budget will allow us to complete the proposals that we agreed last year for the full implementation of the small business bonus scheme in April 2009. On top of the £180 million that we have already committed to spend from the European programmes in 2007 to 2013, we will bring forward a significant share of the remaining £385 million of European structural funds. That in turn will support 300 high-quality projects nationwide, stimulating the Scottish economy. Again, that will bring jobs to all our constituencies.

We will go further. We have listened to the suggestion presented by the Liberal Democrats—that a finance sector jobs task force should be established within the context of the Financial Services Advisory Board. I am pleased to announce today that we will present that proposal—as a Government recommendation—at the next meeting of FiSAB on 10 February.

Over the past few days, we have listened to the case put forward by others to provide greater help to new businesses. Even in the face of recession, businesses can thrive, and we want to do all that we can to ensure that this generation of young Scottish business talent is supported in these challenging times. That is why, in response to representations from across the political spectrum, we have agreed to provide a grant to the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust to assist it in its valuable work in encouraging new entrepreneurs among the 18 to 25-year-old age group.

Challenging economic times require a country to draw on all the mechanisms at its disposal to assist recovery. I welcome the case that the Liberal Democrats have made to the Calman commission—that

“the Scottish Parliament should have the power to borrow”.

In response to that suggestion, I can confirm that the Government will submit evidence to the

Calman commission on extending the powers of the Scottish Parliament—particularly, the power to borrow.

Looking ahead, it is important that this Parliament faces up to the responsibility of recalibrating our strategic financial plans in light of the changing and reducing profile of public funding over the forthcoming years. We have accepted the proposals from the Liberal Democrats to have a joint strategic review of public spending in Scotland. This Government believes that that is required to help us to face the very difficult challenges arising from the changed public spending assumptions made in the chancellor's November pre-budget report. I will chair the review, and I will invite the political parties across this chamber to take part in that valuable and significant initiative.

In the past seven days, Parliament has focused on delivering a budget for economic recovery. However, I believe that we have achieved a great deal more than that. We have demonstrated that we have an overwhelming will to take the correct action to support public services and the Scottish economy. We have demonstrated that, in the face of major challenges over the future of public spending, we can agree on a way ahead. We have demonstrated that, when necessary, Government and Opposition can find common ground.

That is the Parliament that the people elected and, as a Parliament, we have the opportunity to deliver for our people. I commend the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill.

14:49

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I welcome much of what the cabinet secretary has said, and I hope that we will be in a better place—as he described it—at 5 o'clock this evening. I endorse his view that the actions of the past seven days have demonstrated a will on behalf of all the parties in the Parliament to ensure that we reach agreement on some of the big issues that face the Parliament and the budget.

At the outset of our original discussions on the budget some weeks ago, I said—with stronger powers of prediction than I thought I had—that the media would take a far greater interest in what we had to say about it, and it is clear that that has been the case in the past seven days. The media attention reached a crescendo last Wednesday when the vote was lost and the budget was rejected, but it allowed us to ensure that our discussions over the past week have been conducted in a mature fashion and in a way that is

appropriate in a Parliament that is governed by a minority Administration.

We should reflect on the events of last week and the way in which the situation developed, because some key principles were at stake during those discussions. Mr Swinney stated clearly from the outset—quite rightly and bravely—that it was his responsibility and that of the minority Administration to produce a budget that the Parliament could support. In turn, it is our responsibility and that of the Parliament to engage positively and constructively in that process. That is even more important, as I said, in a Parliament with a minority Government.

That minority Government has a greater duty to reflect the views of the Scottish people who voted for representatives of other parties, and other parties have a greater responsibility to ensure that the values, concerns and aspirations of those people who voted for them are addressed in the budget. The test of whether to vote for a budget is not that every Opposition party must agree with every word in it, but that they are convinced that the Government of the day has heard and acknowledged the concerns that the people who elected us want us to represent in the Parliament.

Voting against a budget is no easy matter, and I assure members that no one on the Labour benches who voted against last week's budget did so lightly. We did so in sorrow, not in anger. *[Laughter.]* I note the maturity of members of the Tory party—I will come to them in just a second. It is about the manner in which the budget was presented to us, and the fact that it fell short of our aspirations for Scotland. In those circumstances and at that point, I believe that it was right and proper for us to deny the Government our support.

It is simply not good enough for some members on the Tory benches to be so subservient to the Scottish National Party on so many occasions. I give Michael McMahon due credit for his comment about Derek Brownlee being the Mini Swinney of the Tory benches, but that role masks a total lack of responsibility and of any attempt to hold the Government to account.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Is there a Mini Andy Kerr anywhere?

Andy Kerr: That is very good—I did not quite get it, but there you go.

It is simply not good enough—it is bad for Scots, for Parliament and for opposition—for an Opposition party not to oppose. With regard to the debate about the alliance that is being formed in the Parliament, it is irresponsible for the Tories, in their frenzied preparations for a United Kingdom general election, to use every item in the Parliament as part of their campaign. That is what they do and what they will continue to do: we have

an Opposition Tory party in the Scottish Parliament that cannot oppose.

I will say one last word on the Tories. Having listened to the somewhat uncharacteristic rant from Annabel Goldie, who lectured us about irresponsibility in voting against the budget, it was hugely ironic for us then to hear their deputy leader, Murdo Fraser, say that if £1 were to change in the budget—for which they voted last week—they could not guarantee their support for the budget this week.

It is, apparently, irresponsible of us on the Labour benches to put forward our principles of reflating the economy, giving young people opportunities through modern apprenticeships and increasing support for those who face redundancy—but it would be irresponsible in the extreme not to vote for a budget in which £1 has changed from last week to this week. There is a clear contradiction at the heart of the Tory strategy.

It has been painful to watch the Liberals walk away in a strop from the budget process, only to re-enter it by ditching their only policy in favour of a mixture of vague promises and easily agreed concessions. However, the unintended consequence of the exchange in the chamber last week between Mr Swinney and Patrick Harvie is that we have had a more inclusive approach to the budget in the past seven days.

It is to the substantial points of the budget process that we need to address ourselves. The new measures that Mr Swinney outlined are important, substantial changes that have been made to this year's budget. These are tough economic times and we are going through a tough challenge in terms of the economy, so special measures are indeed required. That is why Labour felt it was so important that apprenticeships for Scotland's young people should be retained as a key part of the budget process. The new measures, in turn, gain my support and that of my colleagues in the Parliament.

As Iain Gray has made clear, the process was not about the price of Labour votes. Unlike others in the chamber, we understand that our role as an Opposition party is to successfully influence the actions of the minority SNP Administration. As a result of Labour discussions and Labour negotiations, an extra 7,800 Scots will have the opportunity to take up an apprenticeship. As Mr Swinney said, the total number of new starts will now be 18,500. That will in some way ensure that we do not return to the mass youth unemployment of the Thatcher years in the face of the recession. Instead, people will gain the skills to see them through the recession and onwards into a more successful Scottish labour market.

Adults will have the opportunity to shift into new roles as a result of apprenticeship training. An insulation programme, which is supported by Labour, will allow those apprentices to train and put their skills to good use. In our tourism industry, we will see many more of the skills that are required for Scotland to remain a competitive tourism destination. As a result of Labour action, if apprentices are laid off, they will have the completion of their apprenticeship guaranteed. I am pleased to acknowledge Mr Swinney's confirmation that we will have a summit of all the key players and providers of apprenticeships to explore how this Labour programme can be delivered and further progress made in future years.

As a result of our negotiations, significant new resources of £50 million will be put towards the PACE initiative and support for those who face redundancy in my constituency at Freescale and in constituencies that are represented by other members in the Parliament. As a result of those negotiations, significant resources will be put into our town centres to help them deal with the recession and the effect that it is having on the high street. In addition, on the first day of the financial year, the health boards will receive all their resources.

However, the budget does not answer all our ills or take on all the challenges that we face. As Mr Swinney acknowledged, we suggested in our recovery plan of last year a fundamental review of the budget in the light of the current economic climate. I think that I welcome the Liberals' support for that view, which came latterly, but I am keen to hear the detail of their proposals.

We have said before and will say again that the settlement for our health services is extremely tight and challenging this year and will continue to be so in the years ahead. Throughout our local authorities, we will see increasing charges, reduction of services and, tragically, some staff roles being lost. It will be a challenging year for them too.

Although we recognise and welcome the steps that the Government has taken today, including those that were taken in response to our economic recovery plan, we cannot kid ourselves into believing that, as a result of our actions today, our troubles are over. We will continue to chase the Government and monitor its actions in response to the challenges that we face.

I make it clear that the Labour Party will vote for the budget bill. Our engagement with the Government has been successful in securing additional apprenticeship places, the guaranteed completion scheme for our apprentices, the enhancement of PACE, the resources and support

for our town centres, and other measures. That is why we agree to support the bill.

14:58

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I pay tribute to the Government for the constructive approach that it has taken throughout the budget process. I have to give credit to the Labour Party, because it has been more constructive in the past week than it has been before, but it is a little bit rich for it to blame the Conservative party for last week's shambles, given that we voted for the budget. The Labour Party might wish to reflect on the fact that it was not as a result of Conservative votes that we had the shambles of the past week.

At Westminster, the defeat of a budget would bring down the Government. At Holyrood, it seems, it brings down the Opposition, or at least some of it. The Scottish Conservatives have behaved throughout the budget process in a constructive and responsible manner. We will vote for the budget today for the same reasons we voted for it last week—all 234 million of them. To mention just three wins, we have secured more police, tax cuts for small businesses and a £60 million town centre regeneration fund.

We do not have to fashion an elaborate story about why we are changing our position, because we are not changing our position. We said that we wanted to ensure the delivery of Conservative policies and measures to mitigate the recession—or what the Prime Minister now seems to think is a depression. We got those things and, as a result, we voted for the budget.

The public do not expect political parties to abandon their principles. However, given this Parliament of minorities, they expect us to compromise. If the public want a Conservative budget, they can elect a Conservative majority to the Parliament. Until then, we will do whatever we can to advance our ideas—the same is expected of all other parties.

For months now, at every discussion on the budget or the economy, the Liberal Democrats have lectured us on the need for an unfunded income tax cut and on how awful the budget is because of its less than 1 per cent difference from last year's budget. The budget deal that was struck yesterday between the Liberal Democrats and the SNP might not be the most expensive ever struck by the Government, but it has at least forced the Liberal Democrats to change the record. We should be grateful for small mercies.

When the Greens voted against the budget, they at least did so in the full knowledge that it would fall. Labour and the Liberal Democrats voted not thinking that the budget would pass regardless. It must have come as a shock to them when it was

defeated. We had the frankly bizarre spectacle of Iain Gray standing up and asking for clarity about what happens next. He might at least have bothered to find out before he plunged the country into chaos.

As we pointed out last week, voting down the budget has serious consequences for public services, council tax levels and small businesses. It should not have taken the actual voting down of the budget to make that apparent to the other Opposition parties.

Those who voted against the budget last week have been damaged. However, although I do not particularly care if the Labour Party, the Lib Dems or even the Greens have been humiliated, I care when the institution of Parliament is damaged. It took this place years to claw back any semblance of public respect after the Holyrood fiasco, and after last week's shambles we are in danger of going back to square one.

Andy Kerr: How does the member equate his comments with those of his deputy leader, Murdo Fraser, who said that there was no guarantee that he would support the budget and, in fact, he would not do so if it did not suit him?

Derek Brownlee: We voted for the budget last week and we are voting for it again today. I do not understand the member's problem; in fact, I do not think that the member himself understands his problem.

I welcome the belated outbreak of common sense on the other Opposition benches. Long may it continue, because Scotland and the United Kingdom do not have their troubles to seek. I also welcome the Government's announcement of next year's spending review, which, as my speeches both in December's Finance Committee debate on the budget process and last week confirm, the Conservatives have raised throughout the budget process. The mess that the public finances are in thanks to Labour will impact on the Scottish budget for the next decade, and the Parliament will have to confront difficult choices on spending priorities.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the member give way?

Derek Brownlee: I am sorry, I want to make some progress.

If all this signals a culture change at Holyrood to deliver greater value for money in the long run, taxpayers will benefit.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies green budget, which was published on the day that this Parliament voted down its own budget, shows that real-terms cuts of 2 per cent per annum for the Scottish Government are a realistic prospect in the next spending review. This year, we heard

complaints that the real-terms increase in spending is 1.7 per cent but, over three years, the difference between a 1.7 per cent real-terms increase and a 2 per cent real-terms cut will be £3.7 billion, which is more than the combined budgets of the justice and transport portfolios. That is the scale of what might confront us and why we should all pause for thought. It is also why a 2p tax cut was—and remains—unrealistic.

Throughout and outwith the budget process, we have raised the issue of how hospital-acquired infections might be tackled. I welcome the Deputy First Minister's constructive engagement on that matter and her willingness to consider creative ideas such as bed-by-bed infection monitoring. We will continue to work positively with the Government on that and other issues.

The Scottish Conservatives are proud of what we have achieved in this year's budget and what we achieved in last year's budget with our constructive and responsible approach. As I have said, we have secured more police; business rates reductions for 25,000 Scottish businesses and the scrapping of such rates for 125,000 more; and a new town centre regeneration fund that has been set at £60 million this year. With a total of £234 million of budget changes, our record speaks for itself. That is why, this afternoon, the Conservatives will vote again for the budget.

15:04

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth said that the Government had not planned to make a submission to the Calman commission. We are pleased that things have changed. I need not quote to some members what they have said about the Calman commission, but the recognition that participation in its work is potentially the best way of delivering enhanced powers for the Parliament is welcome. I hope that there is cross-party support for the move throughout the Parliament.

The Liberal Democrats believe that in relation to the Parliament's financial powers and how we handle our budgets, the status quo is unsustainable. Every party is now working with the Calman commission, and we have a real chance of getting real change for a purpose—so that there can be political choices on finance and borrowing powers for the Scottish Parliament and a different relationship within the UK. I am sure that that will not be the content of a joint submission from us and the SNP, but we will consider the offer of a joint submission. Nevertheless, at the weekend, Professor Curtice said that perhaps

“the most interesting long-term consequence”

of the budget situation is the consideration of the powers of the Parliament and the submission to the Calman commission.

The cabinet secretary's response to last Wednesday's vote, the result of which most people in Scotland were baffled and intrigued by, does him credit. He immediately signalled the need for open and genuine discussion with others to secure the budget's passage as soon as possible. Last week, the Conservatives screamed in a press release that Labour, for example, was “descending into hysteria”. Of course, the Tories could never be accused of being hysterical. The next day, Bill Aitken shouted in a press release:

“jobs and lives are at stake here.”

Annabel Goldie said:

“there will be fewer police on our streets and there will be less care money for our elderly.”

Indeed, she spoke the language of treason against anyone who voted against the budget, and she suspected a coup d'état.

Derek Brownlee: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: I will if I have time to do so.

Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way to a lady?

Jeremy Purvis: I give way to Miss Goldie.

Annabel Goldie: As Oscar Wilde said:

“There is only one thing worse ... than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.”

I am therefore delighted by the length of time that Mr Purvis is devoting to me. However, he must accept that my party voted for the budget last week to try to ensure that all essential providers and services in Scotland continued to be funded. Why were the Liberal Democrats unable to do the same? They have secured not one penny more in the intervening seven days.

Jeremy Purvis: We know that the Conservatives voted for the budget and that they sent apocalyptic messages on the same evening. However, my local authority, which is run by a Conservative coalition, managed to set its budget on Monday this week, seemingly unimpressed by Ms Goldie's tales and predictions of lives being at risk.

Last night, Roseanna Cunningham got things just right in a radio discussion with me and representatives of other parties. She said that a budget process is never without pain and that difficult decisions have to be made. She also said that what had happened demonstrates the need for everyone to have a plan B.

Our view remains that the proposal for a reduction in taxation is an immediate and radical response to Scotland's economic crisis. Last week's gross domestic product figures show the desperate state of the economy. We know from those figures that Scotland is likely to be in a deeper and longer recession than the rest of the UK will be. On top of that, in 2011 every worker in Scotland will pay more national insurance tax as a result of the VAT cut from the pre-budget review in London. That is the situation that we are in and which we should consider in the in-year strategic spending review discussions with the Government.

The First Minister has written to Tavish Scott to say that the Government is keen to take forward the suggestion that we need to have a more strategic review of public spending in Scotland. He recognises our belief that that is required to reduce taxation. We respect the Government's view on there being a potential funding gap because of decisions that the Westminster Government has taken. That draws into sharp focus our need to change the Scottish Parliament budget processes, but it also means that each party will be able to take into the processes their own beliefs about how resources should be identified.

Indeed, we still believe that lowering the burden of taxation on lower and middle-income earners is necessary, as is identifying areas for funding to boost the Scottish economy, such as marine renewables technology or minimum income guarantees. I think that the Scottish Conservatives agree with us that there should be a review of Scottish Water. We will be able to bring such proposals to the table under the process for considering this and next year's budget.

Last week Derek Brownlee said:

"We welcome the accelerated capital spend, but the hangover will come in 2010-11."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14413.]

The Conservatives' warning was clear, but what they did not say is what the Scottish Parliament information centre confirmed to us today: the £60 million for the Conservatives' town centre fund is accelerated capital that has to be repaid next year—that is £60 million of cuts in town centre or capital funding for the year after. We will monitor and scrutinise that issue closely, even if the Conservatives do not.

15:11

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): It is with a certain feeling of regret that I find myself speaking in the second stage 3 debate on the 2009-10 budget. The fact that, for the first time, a budget was voted down by this Parliament when we are facing the first recession in a devolved

Scotland and the deepest recession since world war two might have damaged the trust that has been built up in this chamber over the past 10 years.

Today, we have the opportunity to start rebuilding that trust. No one can be in any doubt that failing to pass the budget, even for a week, has caused real concerns for people and businesses in all our constituencies. Local authorities want to know with certainty how much funding they will receive, small businesses want to know whether they will get the lifeline of a rates cut, and people want the shadow of council tax increases to be removed.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): For clarification, I tell the member that everybody understands the seriousness of the situation. Does he suggest that there ought not to be an opportunity to vote down a budget? Does he have a proposal to change the rules, because that is the logic of the position that he proposes?

Joe FitzPatrick: I am suggesting that, particularly during a recession, there is a duty on the Opposition to act responsibly in the interests of the people of Scotland.

There are things that will make a difference. The chief executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Liz Cameron, summed it up on Sunday when she said that every day the budget is delayed is damaging to Scotland's economy. We all have a responsibility to our parties, but we also have a responsibility to those whom we are here to represent. It is impossible to argue that Scotland and our constituents would be better off if £1.8 billion of funding was delayed. As was the case last week, I am happy to add my support for the Scottish Government's budget. It meets the needs of Scotland's households and businesses at this time of economic uncertainty.

I welcome the support of the Liberal Democrats, not least because it gives me something new to say—after several debates on this year's budget, I was running out of derogatory adjectives. In all seriousness, I congratulate the Liberals on their pragmatic approach this week. They have recognised that taking a constructive approach—as the Conservatives and Margo MacDonald have done throughout—can be beneficial for all parties and those whom we represent.

I also welcome the Labour Party's support for the budget. It is unfortunate that it did not feel able to support the budget earlier, because it would have saved a lot of angst throughout Scotland. Labour and the SNP might not agree entirely on some issues, but with the consensus that we have reached on the budget today, it is clear that we agree that this is the right budget at the right time for Scotland. I hope that that wave of consensus is

the start of a new approach to politics by both the Labour and Liberal parties. If that is the case, it is the people of Scotland who will be the winners.

At the heart of the budget is an approach by the Scottish Government to make things fairer and to ease the burden on those who are most at risk from the economic downturn. The budget allocates a further £70 million to allow local authorities to freeze their council tax for the second year running. In previous years, the regular round of council tax rises led to a doubling of council tax in a decade. That time is past, and I am confident that councils throughout Scotland are working hard to deliver a second historic council tax freeze this year.

Today's budget is also about support for small businesses, which are the bedrock of our economy and vital for employment in Scotland. In the economically challenging year ahead, we must ensure that we take the necessary measures to ensure their continued economic success.

Phase 2 of the small business bonus scheme will benefit 150,000 small businesses throughout Scotland. With the passing of the budget, 7,500 businesses in Dundee alone will have their rates scrapped or cut.

The budget addresses the need to protect jobs in the current economic climate, particularly in the construction industry. I therefore welcome the £230 million of capital expenditure that is being brought forward from future budgets, which will help to support 4,700 Scottish jobs.

As was the case last week, today's budget is a clear choice between supporting families and businesses in Scotland and turning our backs on the problems of our constituents. I believe that the whole Parliament acknowledges that, which is why we have seen much greater consensus this week. I hope that that consensus will result in unanimity by the end of the debate.

Throughout the budget process, and in the past few days, parties throughout the chamber have come together to ensure that we do the right thing for the people of Scotland. Be in no doubt: this Parliament let down the people of Scotland by failing to pass the budget last week. Today, we have an opportunity to make amends. A unanimous vote will send the people of Scotland a strong signal that this Parliament takes its responsibilities seriously.

15:16

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this afternoon's budget debate. In many ways, this is like groundhog day: it is another Wednesday and we are having another budget debate; again, I am

following Joe FitzPatrick in the debate; and, again, Derek Brownlee has launched an attack on the Labour Party in his speech. I am sure that we all welcome the fact that we will not see a repeat of last Wednesday's scenes when, from my current vantage point, I watched various SNP representatives offer Patrick Harvie bits of paper, like chips at a casino. It was like sitting in the front row during "The Price is Right".

The key thing to understand is why we are back here again this Wednesday. We are here because the cabinet secretary made a political miscalculation, in that he thought that he had the support of the Greens, and because Parliament sent the SNP Administration a strong signal that the budget that was before us last Wednesday was not fit for purpose.

It is perfectly reasonable to vote against a budget, particularly when we do not feel that it is good enough for the hard economic times in which we live. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats described the budget as "woefully inadequate". There was a lack of investment in jobs and not enough hope for our youngsters. There were concerns that there had been a failure to protect front-line services in the national health service. As a result, the budget was voted down. Today, we have before us an improved, enhanced budget, on which I think we can all agree. Scotland will be better for the amended budget that is before us today and for the fact that the previous budget was voted down a week ago.

We have absolutely no truck with the Conservatives' scaremongering in the aftermath of last week's vote. As I said, the Parliament sent the SNP Administration a clear signal that the budget was not good enough. To give the cabinet secretary his due, he has worked hard over the past seven days in discussions with other political parties to bring to the chamber an amended budget that can be agreed on tonight. A week on, we have ended up with a budget that, I hope, can be agreed upon, and the world has not fallen apart, despite what the Conservatives predicted last Thursday. Perhaps they should turn up at Waverley station tomorrow to retract the leaflets that they were handing out last Thursday morning.

Margo MacDonald: Is the member attempting to say that, as a Parliament, we should explain to our fellow Scots that the process that we have just undergone is good for everyone? From his background, he will recognise that it is called negotiation.

James Kelly: The member is leading me on to the points that I want to make.

I welcome some of the amendments that have been made to the budget. It is good news for people in my community of Cambuslang and

Rutherglen and for people throughout Scotland that, as a result of the process that we have gone through over the past week, there will be 7,800 additional apprentices. Those apprentices will be able to take up places in the insulation programme, the capital programme—which has been enhanced to the tune of £230 million—and the housing investment programme. I welcome the investment of £50 million in partnership action for continuing employment, the additional £7 million that the cabinet secretary announced today and the guarantees for apprentices who are threatened with redundancy, which will be particularly useful in my constituency, where 150 job losses are threatened at Vion.

I welcome the town regeneration fund of £60 million. Labour campaigned for such a fund, which was included in our 2007 manifesto and our negotiations on the budget. It will be welcomed throughout the country at a time when “for sale” and “to let” signs are going up in our main streets.

Some concerns remain to be addressed. Michael Levack from the Scottish Building Federation has expressed concerns about the slowness of the pipeline for capital investment. Local government and our health boards face serious challenges, and there are issues relating to health inequalities.

I welcome the amended budget that is before us, but there are still serious areas of concern, which Labour will monitor closely. I hope that the Parliament will agree to the amended budget at decision time.

15:22

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): It is indeed another week, another budget, following the collapse of the stout parties that are now settling for some very thin rations.

I begin by giving the Labour Party in general, and Jim Kelly in particular, given his speech, a wee lesson on the subject of chronological order—a concept that Labour members appear to have great difficulty grasping in the context of town centre regeneration. I start with the period 1999 to 2007, now better known as the wilderness years. During that period, the sum total of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive's contribution to town centre regeneration was nothing—zero, zilch, nada, nowt.

Next we come to the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections. On 28 January 2007, the Scottish Conservatives announced proposals for a town centre regeneration scheme, as part of a package of measures to support small businesses and traditional shopping areas that are under pressure from out-of-town retail parks and supermarkets. The policy was highlighted when we published our

election manifesto on 2 April 2007. The first cheep that we heard from the Labour Party came when it published its manifesto. I point out to Mr Kelly that that was on 10 April 2007—eight days after the Tory manifesto launch, and after eight years in which the Labour Party had done precisely nothing on the subject, despite having every opportunity to address it.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member take an intervention?

David McLetchie: No thank you. It is Labour members who I am attacking. Mr Purvis's turn is coming.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston)
(Lab): Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No thank you. The member will just have to bide his time.

I appreciate that the Labour Party wants a fig leaf to cover its embarrassment in light of its budget climbdown, but its claim on town centre regeneration is not a fig leaf but a straw at which it is clutching.

As we all know, our consideration of the budget is set against the backcloth of Labour's economic recession, the collapse of our currency and a rising tide of unemployment. We need serious measures for serious times. Unfortunately, serious measures have not been much in evidence in this session of the Parliament. Two weeks ago, in the debate on the report of the Council of Economic Advisers, Scottish Labour's response amounted to a proposal that John Swinney should speak first in parliamentary debates on the economy and that we should establish a formal link between the Council of Economic Advisers and the national economic forum. We were suitably underwhelmed by that recession-busting measure.

When I heard the proposal, I thought that we had reached a new low point of surreal irrelevance, but I was wrong. Never ones to be outdone when the chocolate teapot prize is at stake, the Liberal Democrats have surpassed themselves with their efforts of the past week. First, there was the letter: the Liberal Democrats forced Alex Salmond to write a letter to Sir Kenneth Calman seeking borrowing powers for the Scottish Government. Frankly, if Sir Kenneth does not know that Alex Salmond is in favour of borrowing powers for the Scottish Government, he must be the only person in the country to fall into that category.

We can but picture the scene in Bute house: Mr Salmond is propped up in bed, a Wee Willie Winkie hat on his head and a guttering candle on the bedside table. It is freezing cauld in Bute house, because Patrick Harvie did not get enough money to insulate the roof. The First Minister

starts on his tortuous letter with the words “Dear Santa”—I am sorry; I should have said “Dear Sir Kenneth”. He goes on to say, “I don’t have enough pocket money to spend. My friend Lavish Tavish, who knows a thing or two about spending money, says that you should let me borrow. Please give me that and I promise that I will be a good boy. Love from Alex.” So much for the letter.

Then there was the next Lib Dem masterstroke: a committee on financial sector jobs. They called it a committee, then a sub-committee and then said, “Oh, let’s call it a task force.” How imaginative! I had never heard that suggestion before. The Scottish Conservatives have no objection to a task force or any other body coming up with imaginative ideas to help to repair our broken economy—broken by a Labour Government—but, in the debate tomorrow, let us ensure that we set in place a mechanism to monitor the success of the task force.

There is also the other suggestion for—yet again—another committee. This committee is supposed to review Government spending in order to find ways to finance the Liberal Democrat tax cut policy that the Lib Dems could not find themselves in six months of trying. As everyone knows, the reality is that public spending is likely to fall in real terms over the next few years. Scotland is not immune to that. This country will have a hard job sustaining its public services at current levels of taxation never mind at reduced rates.

I will end on a generous note, Presiding Officer: it is in my character to do so. I express my deep gratitude to the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in the Parliament, whose sheer incompetence and ineptitude over the course of the budget negotiations enabled the Scottish Conservatives to win concessions totalling £234 million from the SNP Government, which all Labour and Liberal Democrat members will end up voting for. That is what I call a real achievement. Let us face it: the next best thing to a Tory Government is a Government that does what the Tories tell it to do and whose policies Opposition parties vote for in any case.

15:28

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): As a supporter of the Scottish Government, I am delighted that it appears possible not only for the budget to be passed but for it to be passed with near-unanimous support. If that were to happen, we should all relish the achievement, which would be an achievement for not only minority government but the inclusive politics for which we all stated our support at the outset, even if the latter has not been much in evidence thus far in the debate.

Even though saying this puts me at risk of being accused of crawling, I will say it: the achievement has a great deal to do with the businesslike and straightforward approach of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, not least in the way in which he dealt with the less-than-easy job of negotiating with several other parties—parties whose views diverge legitimately from those of his Government and, indeed, of other Opposition parties.

I am sure that, compared with the past few weeks, last year’s budget process now seems like a cakewalk and that the cabinet secretary will take even greater satisfaction in the passing of this year’s budget bill than he did in the passage of last year’s. If it is passed today, the budget will represent an achievement above all for the Parliament. We know that there are many and vocal interests who seem happy only when the Parliament is seen to stumble, and it will be interesting to see how they use this situation to deride the Parliament again—as I am sure they will.

I will focus on an area in which, I believe, the budget has been substantially improved since we discussed it last week. It might not cost any money, and it has already been the subject of some derision by David McLetchie, but I believe that the commitment by some parties to co-ordinate their activities to promote borrowing powers for the Parliament is significant.

I mention that commitment not simply because it has been the subject of one party’s discussions with the Scottish Government over the past week. I mentioned borrowing powers during the debate on the report from the Council of Economic Advisers, and I lodged a consensual motion on the issue two weeks ago. I have sought support from other parties for an agreed approach on borrowing powers, and I hope that those parties will encourage their members to support that motion, especially as we are discussing the matter tomorrow.

How powerful an argument it would be if the whole Parliament could agree on the need for more borrowing powers. It is easy to attach party-political considerations and party advantage to the initiative, but any party in the Parliament that harbours ambitions to govern in the future has to pause for only a second to realise how willing it would be to have those powers even in good economic times, far less during the current economic recession.

Wendy Alexander has previously mentioned the urgent action that is required to tackle the downturn. That is true both in absolute terms, with respect to how quickly action can be taken to help save and promote jobs, and in relative terms, with

respect to how quickly that can be done compared with other economies.

We are substantially behind the curve when it comes to borrowing powers, which are one of the fundamental tools that Governments are currently using to address the economic downturn. As we have heard from civic Scotland—this has been said, for example, by Reform Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Liberal Democrats and, in a previous debate, Malcolm Chisholm—there is general support for the idea of borrowing powers. However, at least not until now, there has been no real urgency on the issue.

In last week's debate, I said that the Calman commission could meet quickly to address the matter. There is no reason why it has to wait for its next meeting: it could meet quickly, agree a position—if there is consensus—and work with the Scottish Government, as now appears possible, on a joint approach to Westminster in order to deal with the issue as quickly as possible.

Public-private partnership is still a matter of division between the parties, and I do not intend to rehearse the arguments, but they are substantially superseded both by the new accountancy procedures that we will be obliged to follow in the late spring and by the fact that PPP projects down south are being delayed and deferred because of the lack of private finance for funding them.

We are perhaps behind civic Scotland on borrowing powers. All sorts of bodies have supported them in the past, and there is no reason why we cannot act quickly now. The fact that we appear to be moving quickly today to agree a budget that was not agreed last week shows that, when the Parliament wants to do something and when there is consensus, we can move very quickly. Members are giving their own reasons for their positions last week, which are not their positions this week, but, whatever those reasons, the severity of the economic downturn is one of the major things that have been playing on people's minds.

I do not mean this on a party basis, but there has perhaps been a time lag for some people in appreciating how severe the economic downturn is and how quickly it is happening. If we vote unanimously, or nearly unanimously, in favour of the budget, having moved very quickly through the three stages of the budget bill in one day, there is no reason why we cannot show the same urgency of action on borrowing powers.

Despite my sometimes harsh words towards the Liberal Democrats in the past, I appreciate the significance of their commitment to campaign against the £500 million of cuts that are coming down to us. That will be a key subject of political

debate in future years, and to have support against the cuts is important.

Considering the various initiatives that members have mentioned—help for apprentices and building works, for example—we could do so much more in the short term if we had borrowing powers. Much more labour-intensive activity would be possible, which would help to soak up unemployment and provide opportunities for apprentices to go into real jobs. That is a crucial aspect in the Parliament's consideration of the current economic crisis.

Some parties might have fun having a go at each other today—that is part of the debate—but I hope that we can concentrate on the fact that, at least for a brief moment, we have some unanimity, consensus and a willingness to work in an urgent fashion. I certainly hope that that carries through into the issue of borrowing powers for the Parliament.

15:34

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The budget process is always difficult, and it is self-evidently more difficult for Opposition members because the budget bill can never be a neutral document. The budget reflects the priorities of the Scottish National Party; it is not a Labour budget, so it is our responsibility to try to influence and shape it. That is an understandable part of the process—our role throughout the process has been to seek to influence and shape the budget in the direction of the commitments that Labour would have made and the strategy that we would have had. Nevertheless, the budget bill that we are debating is not the one that we would have introduced.

There is frustration that the budget process has been characterised in commentaries as being about playing games. The sense that horse trading and game playing were going on was reinforced by decisions that the cabinet secretary made, such as his singling out of Edinburgh instead of addressing the needs of all our cities.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: No. There is recognition that problems have been caused by the presentation of decisions and by the pretence that there was no serious negotiation by Labour before last week's vote, which is simply not true. The process was too much about the arithmetic in the Parliament and not enough about genuinely reaching out to members to find ways of improving the budget.

There has also been frustration about the pretence that, in seeking to support proposals that

would improve the budget, we somehow supported the whole budget. It is dishonest to suggest that members who sought to persuade the cabinet secretary of the strength of a particular approach had a reckless disregard for the impact on local communities. That is simply not true—what is happening in our communities has driven and motivated serious negotiation on the part of the Labour Party.

We focused on key issues and we sought to support families and communities who are facing the current economic challenge, so we welcome the announcement of what we sought: a secure guarantee to people who are currently in apprenticeship placements. As a consequence, many young people and their families can have certainty when before there was a great deal of uncertainty. For that alone, today will have been a good day at the office.

We urged the Government to understand the critical role of Government intervention and action that goes beyond simple assertion. We recognised the importance of supporting people who face unemployment and transition to other jobs. We sought significant increases in the number of apprenticeships because we know our history and we remember what happened when Government took a laissez-faire approach and abandoned young people and families to the scourge of unemployment. We recognised the opportunity that apprenticeships would provide for training and planning for the future. The change that we secured in the Scottish budget is a Labour dividend for families; at last there is a firm commitment on apprenticeships.

Critical issues will come into play in the delivery of that commitment. In the past, I have raised significant issues about the importance of equality proofing and anti-poverty proofing the budget and the role of equality impact assessments. I remain concerned that, although the budget allocates moneys, it does not do the hard job of ensuring that we meet the diversity of need in our communities. We can have no confidence that there is any understanding of how people experience disadvantage and discrimination if the budget process does not explicitly set out how such an understanding is arrived at.

Single outcome agreements play a critical part in addressing need locally, and the social inclusion budget has been entirely devolved to local government. Stewart Maxwell has said that equality impact assessments should be done but that if they are not done it is for the Equality and Human Rights Commission to investigate. Such a process would take a long time, and there is a simpler solution, which I urge ministers to accept: if they think that equality impact assessment of single outcome agreements should be undertaken

because of how such agreements affect communities, they should say that an agreement will not be accepted without evidence that an equality impact assessment has been done. It is as simple as that.

I want to ensure that the shift in the budget addresses need. The cabinet secretary has considered Labour's case for modern apprenticeships, and I urge him to apply an equalities approach, too. It is not enough to assert that Government policy inevitably helps disadvantaged people. It has been claimed that free school meals, free prescriptions and the council tax freeze benefit the poor, but in a written answer to a parliamentary question the Government confirmed that there is no evidence of such benefit. We need evidence, so that we can ensure that what we do makes a difference.

As part of the summit on apprenticeships, the cabinet secretary must commit to addressing structural employment issues such as segregation, which reinforces the position of women. If apprenticeships are segregated, it is inevitable that women's experience of low pay will continue. We must consider the sectors in which apprenticeships are offered. Are we improving the care sector, in which there are many women workers? We must address that issue.

We have to consider what we say to employers. I was told today that an apprentice hairdresser earns £60 a week for a 45-hour week. That is unacceptable and would not happen in England. I urge the cabinet secretary to ensure that the summit on apprenticeships addresses that.

An understanding of those issues is critical to driving social inclusion. How much of the town centre regeneration money will go to our most-deprived communities? How will PACE meet the needs of people with disabilities, who are more disadvantaged in the employment market? We need to understand that equality is not a bonus but at the core of spending decisions and policy documents. Otherwise, the budget decisions that we make today will reinforce inequality rather than challenge it.

I welcome the shift that the cabinet secretary has made, but I urge him to ensure that, when he allocates funds for his commitments, he considers how his allocation meets the needs of particular groups in our communities. That is central to our approach, and I look forward to him acknowledging that in his closing speech.

15:41

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): After my remarks last week, I am a little disappointed that nobody got round to making "Groundhog Day 2". I

suspect that the producer felt that a sequel would have undermined and missed the point.

The debate does not quite feel like *déjà vu* all over again—I welcome the tone and much of the content of the cabinet secretary's opening speech—but there have been some exceptions. Astonishingly, having sat through three budget debates in as many weeks, I have yet to hear a Tory MSP mount any critique of the Scottish Government. We have been treated to plenty of well-crafted rage about Labour's recession, which I presume has more to do with pre-UK election posturing than scrutinising the budget or holding the Scottish ministers to account. We have also witnessed the creative genius that gave birth to the Tories' dodgy dossier on the Scottish Liberal Democrats, but it is more the deluded musings of the SNP Government's unpaid research unit than the actions of a serious Opposition party. All that was delivered with trademark wit by Mr Brownlee and with flamboyant bravura by Mr McLetchie, but it was hardly likely to have Mr Swinney overly concerned about how he might secure the Tories' votes.

The overall tone of this afternoon's exchanges has been different from last week, which is appropriate and reflects well on the Parliament. All parties and every commentator sought to interpret the public mood on the crisis that engulfed the Government and its budget last week. Indeed, the Presiding Officer had scarcely made his dramatic intervention before Alex Neil treated us to the inside scoop of what people were telling him. With all due respect to Alex Neil, I suspect that the margin of error in such a poll is unacceptably high.

Since last week's vote, every MSP will have spoken to constituents, gauged their views and reflected on their expectations. As I did that, I certainly detected anger but, as much as anything, it was anger at having been told that, if the budget was not agreed to last Wednesday, public services would grind to a halt, investment in major projects all over Scotland would not take place and an election was inevitable—all of which was clearly untrue. I note that, in a piece of masterly understatement, Bill Aitken insisted that lives were at stake—Mr Neil has some competition.

Speaking to my constituents, I found no echo of the scaremongering that characterised some of the speeches in last week's debate and no desire to see the Government's budget simply rubber-stamped for ministers' convenience. People want agreement to be reached and a budget to be passed that—as far as possible—reflects the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. They want serious measures for serious times.

The Liberal Democrats have responded to that mood, as has the Government. Notwithstanding

the reservations that I continue to have about aspects of the budget, we have used the process to persuade the Government to make important changes that will lock in long-term benefits for Scotland during the recession and beyond. We remain committed to the need to reduce the tax burden for those on low and medium incomes. That could not be achieved in this budget process, but a platform has been laid for permanent tax cuts in the future through the new strategic review of Government spending.

Bringing to bear the Council of Economic Advisers' depth of knowledge and array of expertise in considering the budget will provide real benefits, as will the Government's change of mind on a finance sector jobs task force. Despite Mr McLetchie's reservations, under the auspices of FiSAB such a task force can provide a real focus for action to assist that key sector through exceptionally difficult times.

Liberal Democrats still believe that the approach of the Scottish Futures Trust is misguided. It has proved costly and resulted in uncertainty and confusion precisely when the construction industry in particular has looked for a clear steer. However, by agreeing to Liberal Democrat demands for councils to receive revenue support under the SFT, Mr Swinney has taken an important step towards ensuring that building programmes for schools and hospitals have a chance of being restarted.

Andy Kerr: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I am afraid that I must crack on.

That news has been particularly welcomed by local authorities around the country, not least by the City of Edinburgh Council. Councillor Jenny Dawe said:

"A proper programme of support for school building will be a very helpful move. So far, this has been missing from the Government's plans."

I dare say that even Lord Foulkes will be pleased by the news, though doubtless Mr Swinney would see that as a perfectly good silver lining being spoilt by a large, dark cloud.

Let me come to the concession that Professor John Curtice has suggested is

"the most interesting long-term consequence of all".

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I of course welcome the news of SFT support for council building programmes, but I will be satisfied only when I see the first brick laid for each new school. Only then will I believe that the SNP's promise to match brick for brick has been met. I will watch the situation over the next few years very carefully indeed.

Liam McArthur: As, indeed, will we.

In agreeing to make a submission to the Calman commission on the case for additional borrowing powers for Scotland and to free up Scottish Government officials to support the work of the commission, the SNP has not simply reiterated its long-held position. Lord Wallace of Tankerness, a member of the commission, observed:

“As a result of the new position of the Scottish Government, there is now assembled a powerful coalition for change.”

The Government's new position is significant because it brings closer the prospect of meaningful change to, and enhancement of, the powers of the Parliament. It also brings closer to fruition and makes more credible the Scottish ministers' assertions about the Government's major infrastructure plans—for example, that the new Forth bridge can be constructed without jeopardising every other transport project in the country.

The Calman commission is precisely the forum through which to make the case for additional borrowing powers for Scotland. For all the bluster about the national conversation, that approach lacks credibility. I note that, on the Scottish Government's website, the national conversation is represented by an icon of a small man, all alone, shouting through a megaphone. That just about sums it up for me.

Last week, I referred to Mr Swinney as a sooth-saying rodent, but his reaction to the vote was well judged and his engagement with Opposition parties on a range of substantive issues was well managed. I withdraw my previous comparison and look forward to the budget bill being passed at decision time.

15:47

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): Heaven loves nothing more than a repentant sinner, which is perhaps why so many MSPs were present for time for reflection today.

Parents are always encouraged to praise their children for the good things that they do, to focus less on the naughty things that they do and, of course, never to cast up past mistakes. For that reason, I will not speak at length about how last week's events ran the serious risk of disrupting local authorities, including my local authority of West Lothian Council, which could have had a £19 million shortfall and a 40 per cent increase in council tax. However, I would heed the words of Jim Spewart, who said at the weekend that now is not the time for point scoring. It is often the leading lights in civic Scotland and in the business community who speak good old-fashioned common sense. I believe that the political parties,

Parliament and Scotland have moved forward and for the better this week.

As Keith Brown did, I welcome the growing consensus that Scotland should have a budget that makes decisions about raising income as well as about spending it, instead of what happens just now, which is a bun-fight about how we will cut the cake. Many of us will recall the unedifying comments by Tony Blair when he drew comparisons between the Scottish Parliament and English parish councils. Ironically, parish councils can borrow £5 for each person in their area. Furthermore, local authorities can utilise prudential borrowing and the Northern Ireland Assembly can borrow up to £2.5 billion. Instead of having such powers, we have a fixed budget that is given to us by the mother of all Parliaments—apparently, mother knows best. However, I hope that one day our adolescent Parliament will come of age.

I suppose my hope is that, when next we approach budget negotiations, we will have learned the lessons of past budget negotiations and given ourselves a reality check, in order to remember two things. First, the budget is a balancing act for all parties, but all must remember that whatever they propose must find support across the political spectrum. Secondly, a significant proportion of the £30 billion-plus budget is already committed, with fixed and non-negotiable costs as well as statutory obligations.

Before negotiations in smoke-filled rooms, or even before the first handbag is drawn, we must remember that a third of the budget—in excess of £10 billion—has already been eaten up by local government, and pensions liabilities for teachers and NHS staff take up the best part of £3 billion. I bet that by the time we include European Union regulations for agriculture support, for roads, and for police, fire and prison services, at least half the cake has already gone. Maybe Mr Swinney will clarify how much of the budget is available for discretionary spending.

The devolution settlement ensures that no one can be bought and sold for Swinney's gold, I am—of course—sad to say. However, even a limited amount of money can go a long way if it is spent wisely. I have never believed that one political party has a monopoly on good ideas. Spending £230 million on accelerated capital spending, £70 million on affordable housing, and £60 million on town centre regeneration supports 5,000 jobs as well as apprenticeships. Those are the right things to do. Without full economic powers, however, we will never truly tackle poverty or inequality.

We are living through the worst recession in 60 years. As Joe FitzPatrick does, I welcome the comments of Liz Cameron, who was absolutely right to say that

"every day the budget is delayed, that's delaying contracts that could be going out to the private sector."

She urged

"all political parties to get around the table"

and to concentrate on "the bigger prize" that could

"be won ... for the Scottish economy."

The loss of jobs in my constituency has focused the mind. At this time, our resolve and aspirations should be focused on the bigger picture and on, as Liz Cameron put it, the "bigger prize". In a Parliament of minorities, we all have an opportunity to grasp that prize. Ensuring the safe passage of our budget is the responsibility of all 129 members of the Scottish Parliament.

Despite the political commentary describing last week's events as a crisis, I prefer to think of it as a rite of passage, the growing pains of a young Parliament or perhaps the birth pangs of a better nation. The past week has been a defining moment for the Scottish Government and Parliament. Across the political divide, there has been a shift in thinking and in how we do business. Minority government does work, and Scotland has changed forever and for the better. The challenge to all 129 MSPs is to move with the times and not be left behind.

15:52

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am bound to disdain the mother-knows-best attitude. I hope that the idea that a Parliament that asserts itself against the Government should be compared to an errant child does not come to reflect the SNP Government's attitude.

At the start of the debate, Andy Kerr rightly said that no one would lightly vote down a budget and that it had, in the Labour Party's case, been done more in sorrow than in anger. I have to admit that, for myself, there was no small measure of both in last week's debate.

I argued last week that, without the incorporation of substantial measures along the lines that we proposed, the budget would reflect an inadequate response to the economic situation in which we find ourselves, and to the ecological crisis of our own making. I am sorry to say that the budget still represents an inadequate response to those crises.

Governments in Europe and America are recognising the need to get to grips with the concept of a green new deal. They recognise that recovery from the current economic situation will depend on substantial investment in low-carbon infrastructure. They recognise that we must not only generate energy more cleanly, but cut our consumption radically. We in Scotland should

recognise the opportunities that such an approach could offer. Instead, the Government has continued to pile resources into projects that will increase carbon emissions. I have to go past one of them every morning on the bus coming out of the south side of Glasgow, where concrete piles are being driven into the ground to carry tens of thousands of additional car journeys into and out of the city centre.

We argued from a Green perspective that the budget was not supportable unless it incorporated, as a counterbalance, substantial measures along the lines that we have proposed. I am sad to say that, after months of trying to persuade the Government to adopt just one such positive measure, it still does not get it. The basis of our proposal has been not just scale but universality. A free, area-based approach is the only way to drive up participation rates to the high levels that are needed if we are to cut people's bills, preserve jobs in the construction sector and cut emissions. Sadly, the response that I have had from the Government following last week's debate demonstrates that it still does not get it.

Just today, the National Audit Office has published an assessment of previous fuel poverty campaigns that demonstrates that the target-and-miss approach will have to end. We cannot continue with that approach; if we want to eradicate fuel poverty and to cut our emissions, we need to adopt an approach to insulation that is based on free and universal provision.

We argued that that would cost in the region of £100 million a year for a 10-year project. All the Government data that I have seen so far support that assessment. The Scottish Government's initial suggestion on the scale of what could be delivered, however, involved the provision of £4 million a year. It would have taken more than three centuries for that scheme to complete the job throughout Scotland. Last week, a slightly larger scheme was offered, which involved the provision of £22 million a year. It would have taken 44 years for that scheme to complete the job throughout Scotland. Even though the cabinet secretary stated that what was on the table last week remains on the table, he can guarantee only £15 million a year from his own resources, which means it would take 65 years to complete the job throughout Scotland.

This morning, I lodged an amendment to the stage 3 motion, which offered Parliament a final opportunity to endorse the adoption of the free and universal approach for which we have argued. Sadly, it was not selected for debate—not that I would necessarily have expected the other parties to support it.

Angela Constance: How many houses in Scotland need insulation? Very few council houses in West Lothian have no insulation at all.

Patrick Harvie: The initial proposal was for a scheme that would cover 1.8 million properties. That was supported by the Scottish Government. The answer depends on how much we want to do. Do we want to cut emissions only from households that have already had half their loft insulated, or do we want to support everyone to cut their emissions through insulation?

The debate that we should be having is not about the detail or the scale of our proposal; it is about how we have got to where we are. The Liberal Democrats have done a complete U-turn. In the past few weeks, they have described the budget as “wholly insufficient”, and the Government’s response to the economic situation as

“the weakest and most reduced response of any national or devolved Government in western Europe”—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14416.]

and “woefully inadequate”. The same budget has now been re-presented and this time they are voting in favour of it. It is greatly disappointing that the wave of criticism from the Labour and Liberal Democrat Opposition has receded and that members have been pacified by the assurance that the SNP still supports its own policy.

Mr Swinney argues that he expects Parliament

“to reach mature agreement on an effective budget”.

Unfortunately, we are being asked to give quiet acquiescence and docile agreement to a business-as-usual budget. At decision time, there may be only two votes against the budget, but given that the science is clear on climate change and peak oil, I do not care about the numbers or about how seriously they are taken by the rest of Parliament. Those votes will represent a wider movement that has been born in an age of increasing recognition of the crises that we face. While the middle ground of politics continues to represent an inadequate response to the central challenges of the 21st century, the Greens will continue to stand for that movement.

15:59

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Many speakers have articulated a sense of déjà vu. As Angela Constance made clear, we have learned one overwhelming lesson—that the process that has been gone through this week, which has involved the critical ability to give ground on key areas that matter to other parties and the ability to tie down details and to clinch a deal, should have been gone through last week. If

that had happened, the budget might not have been defeated last week.

In no circumstances—especially grave economic circumstances—should we witness a scramble at the back of the chamber as the First Minister passes notes throughout the afternoon to a member. As Angela Constance acknowledged in her speech, that should not happen again. The SNP Government has learned the lesson that that is not how a Government should negotiate. It will not negotiate like that again in the future.

It is in that spirit that Labour’s central proposals have been reconsidered. This is not the budget that my party or I would have proposed, but the priority that is now being given to work, skills and opportunities is welcome. We welcome the step change that has taken place in the past week, which is about the attention and support that have been given to the substance and the coherence of Labour’s package of proposals. It is not surprising that Labour’s flagship proposal should focus on apprenticeships and skills and the broader impact on the Scottish economy, but in the context of the current economic downturn, it is in all our interests to give ground on such strategic issues.

There is a commitment to almost 8,000 new apprenticeships in next year’s budget. That is not just good news for those individuals; it will directly benefit their families and communities. I echo what Johann Lamont said about the equality impact assessment. I am sure that those of us who were members during the first session of Parliament do not need to remind the members of the SNP Government who were MSPs back then what they said then about the budget and equality. I hope that they are truer to their words now than they have been so far.

However, we now have a guarantee for apprenticeships for people who are threatened with redundancy. That is a confidence boost not just to them but to the Scottish economy. We now have £50 million specifically committed to help to retrain people who are facing redundancy. That will not only help those individuals but will provide direct assistance to key sectors of the Scottish economy. Because of that progress, it is right to negotiate and compromise. I recognise the passion behind Patrick Harvie’s words, but I part company with him on the issue. He is right to flag up the significance of the climate change crisis and of the actions of Government, but there are times when it is right to negotiate and to do a deal. The Government has made enough progress—just enough—to allow us to support the budget.

I still have deep reservations about the budget, though. I hope that the Government is not arrogant after today’s vote, and that it does not assume that all criticisms of its actions will be suspended. That would not be a fair price for us to pay for our

support. The SNP Government has been grossly unfair to Glasgow—I will continue to remind the Government of that. It has presided over a host of missed opportunities—I will remind it of that, too. I make it absolutely clear that I could never be comfortable with a Government that has developed such a close working relationship with the Tories. The SNP and the Tories think that all it takes is a tax cut and they have ticked the business box.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will Margaret Curran tell us her views on the coalition that runs Dundee City Council? The administration there requires the support of the Conservatives to get its budget through and to run the council on a day-to-day basis.

Margaret Curran: Mr FitzPatrick might not be aware, but I was a member of the previous Government, which was a coalition. There is an enormous difference between working with another party to find common ground and delivering that party's political agenda.

David McLetchie made what was perhaps the best remark in the debate, when he described this Government as

“the next best thing to a Tory Government”.

That is exactly what we are witnessing.

Progressive voices know that what we need right now is active Government intervention to maximise spend and link it directly to jobs and economic activity.

We all know that political life requires pragmatism, so I acknowledge the moves that have been made by the cabinet secretary. This is a sobering time, and we cannot afford to be complacent. I also acknowledge the moves that have been made on partnership working and hope that they will continue. Our focus has to be on the economic and social interests of Scotland and on the experience of the people whom we represent. I would not shirk working with anyone in order to make progress with that agenda. Perhaps Mr FitzPatrick will understand that. However, that does not mean that anyone should shirk criticism when that criticism is right. We need to get the balance right—I think Angela Constance made more moves in that direction than Mr FitzPatrick. We have to acknowledge where there is common ground and where criticisms still have to be made.

We live in a time of challenging economic change. Today, we will make some progress in addressing the key issues, especially in relation to work. However, this is just the start. I hope that the cabinet secretary will, when he sums up, indicate his willingness to work with Parliament, and not to ignore Parliament when it suits him.

16:05

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I thank the cabinet secretary for being accessible, for listening and for being fair. He practised with me the message that was preached by Johann Lamont: he acknowledged that I have a mandate, too. It is a more limited mandate than that of the parties in this chamber, and for that reason my objectives were perhaps more limited in my negotiations with the cabinet secretary. It was a pleasure to do business with him, and I look forward to repeating the process all over again next year. I have some ideas in mind.

Next year, Parliament will continue to be a Parliament of minorities—Angela Constance was correct in much of what she said. However, we would all do better to explain to Scots that, in this Parliament of minorities, it will be continuous negotiation and not name-calling that determines the outcome of proceedings. Shame on those who say that one cannot have a good Tory. I used to believe that, too—until I came to this place of consensus. I now think that it is much better to listen to what the Tories have to say, because they have some good ideas—and I do not care whom they pinched them from, so long as we put them into effect.

It is better still, I think, to do what Labour members have suggested and to start the horse trading earlier. Had that happened, we would not have to decide now whether to keep on the hair shirts that were so speedily donned last week, or to cast them off and say, “Everything is all right now.”

I have campaigned for the capital city supplement for years, and I always started early, as every finance minister would admit. However, one outstanding question has arisen from some of the exchanges. I do not want to pursue the idea that there is any division between the twin cities of the plain. It would be an artificial division. I want the cities to work together and I have made moves in that direction. What I want to know is this: should I infer from what Labour members say that they will, the next time they are in government, withdraw the capital city supplement? I ask the question because Edinburgh will still be the capital and will still perform services that are peculiar to the capital on behalf of the rest of Scotland.

Margaret Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Margo MacDonald: I hope that Margaret Curran will not mind if I do not take an intervention just now. I will see whether I have time at the end—but there is something else that I would like to start negotiating on now.

Parliament is to have a review of public spending, and we are to have a group including

representatives of all the parties in the Parliament. It should also contain representatives of no party in the Parliament. A considerable body of opinion stands behind the idea of independent negotiation. For example, Patrick Harvie can point to opinion outside this chamber, and that opinion should be represented in the group's deliberations. I therefore give notice that I will be knocking on the cabinet secretary's door to suggest my name for a post.

Finally, I thank the cabinet secretary for the courtesy that he accorded me, and for his sheer patience. The city of Edinburgh's capital city supplement is safe, and it will be a year-on-year budget heading because we will continue to be the capital. I also thank the cabinet secretary for sensibly saying that he will give early and sympathetic consideration to Edinburgh's request on council housing. The need is urgent. I did not try to put a figure on it, because I knew that the cabinet secretary was trying to accommodate many other interests.

Having thanked the cabinet secretary, I am now quite prepared to give way to Margaret Curran.

Margaret Curran: I am shocked that Margo MacDonald seems to have abandoned all her criticisms of the Tories, and appears to be cosying up to them. In response to her direct challenge to me, I tell her that Labour recognises the challenges that Edinburgh faces and that the city has a special status as our capital. However, we also recognise the challenges that other cities face—especially Glasgow, which hosts half of Scotland's poor. It is particularly divisive to say that one city's needs override those of another.

Margo MacDonald: That is the last time I will give way to Margaret Curran. I say, following that full exposition of where Ms Curran stands on the position of the cities, that Edinburgh is the capital city. It undertakes unique services and provides unique facilities on behalf of the whole country, so it is not fair that Edinburgh council tax payers should pay for those with the expenditure not being shared throughout the country.

In that respect, Edinburgh is unique. In respect of health, Glasgow is uniquely bad. I kept my tongue between my teeth when it came to reviewing the Arbuthnott report on expenditure and how money was allocated according to need, because Glasgow's need is much greater than ours in Edinburgh. However, I would hate an artificial division between the cities to be one of the fall-outs from the current budget process. Aberdeen has a good case in all sorts of ways to argue for specialised cash, as have all the cities. I acknowledge that. I simply argued for on-going recognition of Edinburgh as the capital, and acknowledgement that right now, because of the city's peculiar situation in relation to the fall-out

from the collapse of its financial centre, there is an urgent need for public housing.

The cabinet secretary has satisfied my requests, in that he is willing to take them on fairly.

16:12

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Harold Wilson once said:

"A week is a long time in politics."

I can hardly believe that it is only a week since I was attacking my good friends in the Liberal Democrats and in the Labour Party for their proposals. However, they have made great strides in the intervening week in reaching agreement with the Government.

At the end of the day, this is not about what any party or individual achieves in the negotiations, but about what is best for Scotland as a whole, and for the particular requirements of different sections of our community and the different geographies of Scotland.

Last week, David McLetchie made one of the best speeches in the chamber; he has done the same this week. The first point that he made last week was about the amount of discretionary spend that the cabinet secretary has at his disposal. As Angela Constance very articulately pointed out earlier, when the commitments on local government, salaries, meeting our European Union obligations and all the rest are pared away, the amount that remains to be divvied out in a different way from the previous year is very limited. I congratulate the cabinet secretary on becoming almost a magician in trying to meet the demands of all the parties—with the possible exception of the Greens—in order to achieve a near-unanimous vote.

I share Margo MacDonald's concern: it would be a terrible tragedy if the budget debate ended up setting one part of Scotland against another. The basic principle is that resources need to be allocated on the basis of need. There are particular needs in Edinburgh that result from its status as a capital city, and the cabinet secretary—

Andy Kerr rose—

Alex Neil: I will come to Andy Kerr in a minute.

The cabinet secretary has tried to meet those needs. As I represent Lanarkshire, I know that there are similar needs in Glasgow and Lanarkshire, and I hope that those will be reflected in the additional spend on health, housing and other services. I also hope that the review of local government funding and allocation of resources will help to improve the formula and ensure that

allocations are based on economic and social need.

Andy Kerr: The member's assertion that Labour sought to divide our cities is far from the truth. Through the cities growth fund, Labour sought to ensure that extra resources were made available to all our cities in recognition of their individual needs and circumstances.

Alex Neil: I did not accuse Labour or anyone else of trying to divide us; I just expressed the hope that none of us will fall into the trap of trying to set, or accidentally setting, one part of Scotland against another.

Another important element is the Liberal Democrats' point about borrowing powers. The Northern Ireland Assembly represents a smaller population and has a smaller budget than the Scottish Parliament, but it has the power to borrow up to £2.2 billion. It makes sense, particularly in a time of recession, to give us the flexibility and the additional resource that can come from having the power to borrow. I draw a comparison between what happened last week south of the border and our current limitations north of the border. Quite rightly, Lord Mandelson announced a package of support for the car industry, which is concentrated south of the border; that support, which amounts to £2.2 billion, comprises a combination of different types of borrowing and guarantees.

Just as that support is justified for the car industry in the midlands and elsewhere, it would be entirely appropriate for such funding, if necessary, to be made available from borrowing to help the Scottish economy. For example, it could help us to meet the cost of the new Forth crossing. Scotland requires such support. I hope that, when we discuss borrowing powers, not just in the context of tomorrow's debate but in relation to the direction that the Parliament should take, we will achieve a consensus on the principle that we should have such powers.

However, the debate on borrowing powers is not a naked debate, because it relates to powers over taxation. A Parliament's ability to borrow is enhanced if it also has the power to raise its own money for its own spending. Therefore, I argue, as the Steel commission did, that as well as considering borrowing powers we need to consider revenue-raising powers, even in a devolved situation, because the two go hand in hand.

We all recognise that we are living in difficult times. Last week's International Monetary Fund forecasts were not encouraging for Britain as a whole, and we take our share of those. It is therefore incumbent on every one of us, irrespective of our particular priorities and views, to support the budget at 5 o'clock, not for the sake

of any party or individual but for the sake of Scotland.

16:18

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I echo the sentiments that Alex Neil expressed at the end of his speech. Every member in the chamber wants a budget that is right for our country, particularly given the straitened circumstances that we know the country faces in the next couple of years.

Alex Neil quoted Harold Wilson, who said:

"A week is a long time in politics."

After seeing Tavish Scott's performance on "Newsnight", I am tempted to think that six hours is a long time in politics, given the Liberal Democrats' about-turn in relation to their key demands of the Government—but more of that later.

I am sure that the Conservatives will respond to this point, but I was concerned about the leaflet that they rushed out. When I read the horror stories in the leaflet, I thought that it was advertising a film adapted for Scottish circumstances—the Tory version of "Apocalypse Noo". The leaflet said that there was going to be a major meltdown in the Scottish economy. A week later, we know that that was always balderdash. We knew that just 24 hours after last week's vote.

We are in a better position this week because members have come together and recognised that there are areas of mutual concern and consensus. I agree with Margo MacDonald. I do not want there to be a disproportionate distribution of resources between Glasgow and Edinburgh, or between other cities. However, urban policy must reflect the fact that a number of Scottish cities have very different and distinctive needs. Margo MacDonald—and, indeed, my Labour colleagues in Edinburgh and the Lothians—is perfectly right to highlight why Edinburgh should receive a fairer allocation of resources. The same, of course, can be argued of Glasgow by Glasgow members, including me.

Diogenes said that we were born with two ears and one mouth, by which he meant we should listen more and speak less. Of course, I am going to ignore that advice totally for the next three or four minutes. However, the fact that the cabinet secretary has spoken less and listened more has had benefits, although I have to say that I found all the scurrying about the chamber to secure a solution during last week's debate rather unedifying. Mr Swinney might well have been trying to seek solutions but, given the character traits of our First Minister, I am not totally convinced that his approach necessarily led to

last-minute solutions. I see Patrick Harvie nodding, so some secret diary entry about what went on might still emerge.

The fundamental question is: what can we do in the face of a global economic recession? I understand the Tories' natural partisan behaviour in trying to blame a UK Labour Government solely for the situation. There are times for engaging in that debate; however, I will take no lectures from the Conservatives, whose Governments, after all, authored two UK recessions and who never really wanted the Scottish Parliament in the first place. Given the historical facts, I find it very difficult to come to terms with the Tories' language on this matter.

Labour has consistently articulated its position on how we need to respond to the situation. At the weekend, I was disappointed to hear that business leaders were concerned about some of our demands. Given the difficulties faced by individuals in certain sectors, I understand why some might have those concerns, but I think that in the midst of a recession it is wrong to argue that apprenticeships should not be considered for continued support. Indeed, that was the very brutal lesson that we needed to learn in the 1980s and 1990s, given the skills shortage facing the new economy that emerged at the beginning of the century.

I realise that the Liberal Democrats might have moved on in the debate. However, their position today stands in sharp contrast to some of the previous positions that Jeremy and Tavish have articulated. It all puts me in mind of "Pride and Prejudice", with Tavish in the role of Darcy—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Please refer to members by their full names.

Mr McAveety: With Tavish Scott in the role of Mr Darcy—[*Laughter.*] I must apologise; I am not a massive enthusiast of Victorian literature.

As I say, in my paraphrase of "Pride and Prejudice", Tavish Scott plays the role of Mr Darcy; unfortunately, Miss Elizabeth will have to be played by John Swinney. In his letter, Mr Darcy writes, "Miss Elizabeth, I have struggled in vain and I can bear it no longer. These past months leading up to the budget have been a torment. I have fought against my better judgement, my family's expectations and circumstance. All these things I am willing to put aside. I ask you to end my agony. I don't understand it, but I love you." Tavish Scott, John Swinney and the First Minister might well have authored such a letter jointly.

Despite all that, the fundamental question in today's debate—and, indeed, in everything that has happened in the past seven days—is whether the budget is better today than it was seven days

ago. I think that it is. Have we reached more of a consensus in the debate on the future of Scotland's budgets? I think so, although I must argue with Alex Neil about the cabinet secretary's room for manoeuvre. Mr Swinney has, for example, £950 million of end-year flexibility that was not available to previous finance ministers in the Scottish Parliament, and access to certain other flexible arrangements might also lead to solutions.

The fundamental message from my constituency is that we need to keep people in work where possible and to sustain the hope that I think young people have begun to have in the 10 years since this Parliament's creation—and, indeed, in the 12 years since the election of a UK Labour Government that had genuinely different priorities. As a result of the debates that we have had, we have managed to get a much better budget. Last week, one of the newspapers said that people get excited and hung up on process, not the end result, but what really matters is that we have a budget that makes a difference for the citizens we care about.

16:24

Jeremy Purvis: I regret that when it seems that all parties that are represented in the Parliament agree for the first time on active participation in the Calman commission, Andy Kerr chose to ridicule that in his opening speech. I hope that he will reflect on his comments and that the Labour Party and the Conservatives—and, indeed, all parties—will see the process as a real and active way of bringing long-standing changes. As members of all parties have said, that could be the most significant long-term effect of the discussions that have taken place over the past week.

The budget is still not the best or the most appropriate budget for the economic situation that we face in Scotland. As Frank McAveety said, it is better than it was last week, but it is still woefully inadequate to deal with the situation that Scotland faces. However, the long-term approach to powers for the Parliament and the way in which our budget discussions will be conducted has improved. A process is starting now for members of the parties that are represented in the Parliament and, potentially, people outside it to consider not only strategically but aggressively lines of budget spend. Critically, for the first time civil service support will be part of the process. That is a significant move.

Patrick Harvie: I have no beef with Jeremy Purvis's assertions about the longer term and borrowing powers. However, does he accept that if the Liberal Democrats still regard the budget on which we will vote tonight as "woefully inadequate", they should have been less keen to

trot along and offer their support immediately after the budget fell last week? That would have given the SNP an incentive to make the budget a little less inadequate today.

Jeremy Purvis: I take note of the negotiating tips that Mr Harvie has given over the past week and will come back to some of his remarks in a moment.

Councils throughout the country have welcomed the agreement that has been reached for the first time that revenue support for schools projects will be forthcoming. The Government knows our views on the Scottish Futures Trust—they are perfectly clear—but the fact that level playing field support, or revenue support as it is now called, is being restored is significant and has been warmly welcomed.

Joe FitzPatrick, Keith Brown and other members have argued consistently for the need to engage in the Calman debate on the powers of the Scottish Parliament. That is also welcome.

David McLetchie was so impressed by his own speech that he thought it unnecessary to listen to many other speeches. However, there was a chronological gap in his lecture. There was a Nixonian missing 18 minutes—I refer to the time when the Conservatives voted to support the abolition of town regeneration funding through the Scottish Enterprise network. That funding was simply not transferred over to councils. He argued that town centre funding was getting close to perfection, as far as his policy was concerned; indeed, before the vote on Wednesday that was already on postcards that were handed out at Waverley station. Within a breath, he attacked us for having uncoded policies to boot.

I have asked SPICe how the Government would fund the regeneration policy—I am sure that the answer was known to Mr McLetchie. SPICe told me today that, as a result of additional Barnett consequential for accelerated capital spending, the £60 million for the town centre policy is accelerated capital spending that must be cut from next year's capital budget. The Conservatives must tell us which councils' budgets or which capital budget lines will have to be cut next year. They have asked where alleged cuts will fall in our policy, which they do not support. It is fair enough that they should ask about that, but it is equally fair for us to ask where the real reductions in next year's capital budget lines will fall. I will not be alone in being concerned about SPICe's confirmation to me this morning that

"It is not yet known how those £60 million of cuts to the capital budgets will be managed next year."

Surely when Mr McLetchie was doing his impersonation of Wee Willie Winkie, he asked how

the £60 million of cuts would be managed next year.

I enjoyed Mr McLetchie's speech—indeed, I always enjoy his speeches. His attacks on us are always well rehearsed. However, in recent weeks, they have been on alleged cuts, and perhaps in them he should have paid cognisance to the fact that there will be real cuts in capital budgets next year. Those cuts will be considered as part of the scrutiny process. No doubt, he will fully engage in the new structures that the cabinet secretary has set up.

Patrick Harvie cited my comments about the budget not only in his speech, but in his intervention. He quoted accurately my concerns about the economy and asked how on earth I could support the bill today. I remember that, at the start of the budget process last year, he said that he would not support that budget because it included funding for the M74 extension. However, he changed his view. Last week, his unshakeable, principled stance on addressing global challenges would have been placated by a last-minute 50 per cent increase in a £22 million scheme.

I was impressed by Mr McAveety's knowledge of both pride and prejudice. Perhaps he unwittingly summed up the debate, which has involved a lot of pride—not only dented, but espoused—and a tinge of prejudice. If we are all wearing hair shirts, as Margo MacDonald said, the budget is ultimately better and I hope that the country's finances will be better, too.

16:31

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): We have heard from an unhappy Mr Purvis today. Perhaps he is suffering from indigestion after gorging on humble pie for the past seven days or so.

What matters to Scotland's people, institutions and businesses is stability and certainty. At times like these, people do not just want that—they demand it. It has been apparent in the past seven days that the mood in Scotland is clear: people want not risky games and brinkmanship but action and delivery. As one business leader said at a recent event,

"I don't care how you do it—just make sure it now happens."

The Scottish Conservatives have attempted to be responsible from the beginning—from early discussions to stages 1 and 2, final negotiations, stage 3, act 1, and stage 3, act 2. We have thought carefully about our position and our tone at all times and we have gained solid achievements.

The consequence of that is £234 million of Conservative policies that would not otherwise

have been implemented. We pick out the town centre regeneration fund, which we welcomed last week, to the tune of £60 million. We have campaigned for that for a number of years—we started back in January 2007. As David McLetchie said, we have campaigned for that fund for longer than any other party has. The cabinet secretary acknowledged last week that

“In their input to the budget process, the Conservatives have set out the arguments for a new fund to support town centres.”—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14406.]

As he said today, the Conservative party has championed such a fund.

Town and village centres are the life-blood of communities. Many have been at a competitive disadvantage for several years and some have been on a downward spiral. The fund will be a shot in the arm. It has been described—rightly—as new money that can build momentum for regenerating our towns and put them back on an upward spiral in the next couple of years.

That success builds on several successes that the Scottish Conservatives obtained last year—1,000 extra police to go on our streets, an acceleration of the small business rates cut and an emphasis in the drugs strategy on recovery instead of damage limitation or maintenance.

If the bill is passed, the small business bonus will increase again from 1 April. More than 150,000 businesses, in every constituency, stand to gain. Of those, 120,000 will pay no business rates at all from 1 April. The other 30,000 or so will receive a meaningful discount.

Best of all, the small business bonus comes with no strings attached. Businesses decide how best to use the saving, perhaps by creating a new display, installing a new shopfront or employing a new member of staff. In the current climate, the saving might make the difference between keeping and losing a member of staff. It is clear to all Scottish Conservatives that business owners know best how to spend that money, which is why it should not be tied. They know far better than me, the Government, any Opposition politician or any trade union how to spend their money. In these difficult times, such a measure could be the difference between profit and loss or the difference between trading and not trading.

I turn to the other Opposition parties. We have seen the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party attempting to run the four-minute mile along the road to Damascus. Both parties have expressed a belated desire to appear positive, but what did they get that made it all worth it? David McLetchie offered a good analysis of what the Liberal Democrats got. As one reporter said:

“It would be most unfair to say the Lib Dems have been bought off—their demands would not cost a penny.”

Last week, my colleague Derek Brownlee cruelly described the Liberal Democrats as capitulating for the cost of a stamp. Even that is not true, because they can now e-mail the Calman commission, which would make a 27p saving. Perhaps next year the Lib Dems will go for a full pound in their negotiations. Some of the suggestions that the Lib Dems have made are perfectly sensible—some are things for which we have argued for months—but it is hard to see how they square them with the passing of the budget for 2009-10.

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

Gavin Brown: I am always happy to take interventions from Mr Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles: Gavin Brown seems genuinely upset that the Liberal Democrats are voting for this consensus-based budget. Why are the Conservatives so upset about that?

Gavin Brown: Mr Rumbles did not even have time to roll over and have his tummy tickled before he agreed to vote for the budget. Although the Lib Dems' support for the budget is belated, we are delighted that they are going to vote for it, with all that that entails.

It is difficult to see what is now on the table that was not on the table before for the Labour Party. As one newspaper reporter said this week:

“Mealy-mouthed Labour leaders skulked around in the background saying plenty but doing nothing”.

We have heard once again today that Labour is still in denial about the fact that the recession in the United Kingdom has an awful lot to do with Gordon Brown, which is why, as the IMF said, the recession is projected to be deeper and longer than in any other western country.

The Conservatives have taken a responsible approach from day 1. We have sought to help with measures for the economy and other Conservative policies. We want to see town centre regeneration, business rates cuts, more police on the beat, and accelerated capital spend. In short, we want a budget for the high street. That is why we will support the budget today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call David Whitton. Mr Whitton, you have up to 10 minutes.

16:37

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I hope that I can rise to the challenge that you have just set me.

A week ago, when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth was doing one of

his many interviews about the budget, he said that it was his duty to put forward a budget that convinced Parliament. As we all know, last week he and the SNP failed that test. However, it is to his great credit that he did not shirk his responsibility or try to deflect any blame that was heading his way for what happened then. Instead, he reintroduced his budget and set about further negotiations in order to be more convincing this time. Has he succeeded? We do not have to wait long to find out.

It is interesting today to reflect on what was said during our debate last week. Derek Brownlee, the so-called financial guru of the Conservative group—at least, that is how Mary Scanlon describes him; I have heard other names for him, but parliamentary privilege prevents me from mentioning them here—spent most of his time attacking the Labour Party. There was nothing new about that. Since the debate last week, and today, he and his sidekick Mr Gavin Brown have been running around boasting about size—the size of their so-called achievement. In typical Tory boy fashion, they go back to the days of Loadsamoney, when biggest meant best. It is a wonder that the Del Boy and Rodney of Scottish politics did not turn up for the talks with Mr Swinney in a yellow Robin Reliant with their nicked policies, such as the town centre regeneration fund, loaded in the back.

David McLetchie: Chronological order!

David Whitton: I say to Mr McLetchie that I am just coming to chronological order. He should just wait. My friend Mr Brownlee and I happen to agree on the need for a town centre fund. It is just a pity that he did not vote for one on 15 January 2008—another date for the chronology on which Mr McLetchie is so keen—when he had the chance to do so in the Finance Committee. However, as Angela Constance pointed out, a sinner who repents should always be welcome—let us welcome a sinner who has repented.

Derek Brownlee: If I remember correctly the detail of the amendment to which the member refers, it proposed to fund town centre regeneration from a non-existent budget line. It was then revealed that the budget line was the local government settlement—Labour wanted to take money from councils and then give it back. How would that have helped regeneration?

David Whitton: The member is talking nonsense, as per normal, but never mind—he repented.

David McLetchie: It was the truth.

Andy Kerr: The money was taken from capital projects.

David Whitton: I will take an intervention from Mr Kerr.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

David Whitton: Thank you, Presiding Officer. They are a rowdy bunch—typical Tories.

I am sure that Mr Brownlee and his colleagues welcome the fact that his request for £20 million was turned into a £60 million boost for Scotland's small towns, thanks to Labour's intervention.

By a lucky coincidence, a letter from my favourite minister, Mr Jim Mather, arrived at my Kirkintilloch office today. Mr Mather has agreed to meet local traders in my constituency to discuss their concerns. He can rest assured that he may bring his mind maps with him; a reply, with dates, will be sent to him shortly.

Mr Brownlee is a man with an amazing capacity to predict the future. Last week he declared:

"Tavish Scott ... has, since 2007, elevated irrelevance to a point of political principle".—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14414.]

Given the events of the past few days, who could disagree with that statement? 2p or not 2p, that was the question. We now know the answer. However, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune have certainly not gone the way of the Liberal Democrats. In one tortuous interview on "Newsnight Scotland", referred to by my colleague Frank McAveety, Mr Scott was asked for the details of his masterstroke—the get-out-of-jail-free card that he had presented to the First Minister in order to get the budget through. He said, "It's a secret. I can't tell you." That from the party of openness and transparency.

Well, now the secret is out—it is an economic storm rescue plan that involves Mr Salmond writing a letter to the Calman commission about borrowing powers, a subject about which we will hear a lot more tomorrow. My colleague Andy Kerr did not rubbish the commission, as Mr Purvis suggested—all he said was that Mr Scott is seeking vague promises from Mr Salmond. We all know that Mr Salmond likes writing letters, but they are usually addressed to Sir Sean, rather than Santa. I suppose that getting him to correspond with someone else is an achievement, but it will not change the budget by 1p, never mind two. What effect has that policy earthquake had on the Liberal finance spokesman? Alas, poor Jeremy Purvis, I knew him well.

I congratulate Patrick Harvie and the Greens on sticking to their principles. One or two armchair generals sent letters to the papers suggesting that, having had the temerity to vote no last week, they should now get nothing, but that is not the case. The insulation programme, such as it is, will help to provide vacancies for some of the apprentices

whom we want, along with jobs for those who will oversee the work. My only advice to Mr Harvie is that there is an old saying about a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush, and that £33 million is probably worth more than £15 million. I am sorry that he is shaking his head.

Margo MacDonald: Could Mr Whitton advise me of whether, the next time that Labour is in government, it will discontinue the capital city supplement?

David Whitton: I look forward to the next time that we are in government, when we will continue our capital city's growth fund.

Mr Swinney was right last week when he said that the focus of the Government and the Parliament should be

"to produce a budget that does everything"

possible

"to support recovery from the difficult economic conditions that we now face."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14403.]

That is why Labour members were determined that everything possible should be done to create and maintain opportunities for young people and to support those who have already lost their jobs or are facing the prospect of redundancy; several members have spoken about that this afternoon. As my colleague Andy Kerr said on opening for the Labour Party, we in the Labour Party remember clearly the Tory recessions of the 1980s and early 1990s. We remember more than 3 million people being out of work and—worse than that—youngsters leaving school with no job, no training opportunities and no hope.

That is why today's modern apprenticeships are so important. They provide jobs with training and not training for jobs. At present, 10,714 modern apprentices are in training. The SNP has accepted our request to create an additional 7,800 modern apprenticeship places in this budget year—an increase of 70 per cent. That is a step change that will make a difference. The SNP has committed to making further increases next year. We look to Mr Swinney to honour that commitment. He knows the numbers that we are looking for. The young people of Scotland will expect him to deliver on that.

Labour went into the budget negotiations with a package of measures to help to tackle the situation that our country faces. As we said at the time, and many of my colleagues have mentioned in the debate, our top priority was to create those modern apprenticeship places. Last week, we had no firm numbers and no guarantee that young people could finish a course—we had only an assurance. There was no clarity on partnership

action for continuing employment funding or NHS budgets. We voted no and we were right to do so.

What has changed? After further talks with Mr Swinney, a meeting between our leader, Iain Gray, and the First Minister, and yet another exchange of letters between them, what have we achieved? This year, 7,800 more young people will get an apprenticeship with funding to support them through a three-year programme and we have a written commitment that more apprenticeships will be created next year. We have also achieved apprenticeship places that are tied into the accelerated capital expenditure programme, and an apprentice guarantee scheme—not simply an assurance. Also, Iain Gray has persuaded Mr Salmond to hold an apprenticeship summit with key employers from all around Scotland to explore how modern apprenticeship places can be created and maintained. Furthermore, we have achieved £50 million for the PACE programme, £60 million for the town centre fund, and a promise from the Government that it will tell NHS boards at the beginning of the year how much they will get from centrally held funds. Those achievements add up to a package of measures that we on this side of the chamber can now support.

Unlike the Tories, the public are not interested in who got most from the budget process. What counts for the public is what is delivered. Does securing what we have achieved mean that we will support all that the SNP is doing in government? No, it does not. Questions remain about the Scottish Futures Trust, the Government's local income tax proposals and the local government settlement. We will continue to put questions on those matters. For the Labour Party, unlike other parties, the process was never about the price of our votes but about doing the right thing in terms of creating jobs, providing training places and giving hope to those who face redundancy. Our package does that. The SNP has accepted it. We will therefore vote for the budget at decision time.

16:47

John Swinney: Many harsh things have been said during the debate, by members on all sides of the chamber—

Mike Rumbles: Not by you.

John Swinney: Mr Rumbles is absolutely right. I will resist the temptation—the almost all-consuming temptation—to do so.

In the previous stage 3 debate, Mr McArthur accused me of being a sooth-saying rodent. I understand that he used the same terminology in today's debate, but that he has now withdrawn the accusation. I am grateful for the increase in the quality of parliamentary terminology.

David McLetchie spoke of the wilderness years. I became quite worried for him, given the dangerous ground on which he stood when saying that. Some of us have long memories. We remember the real wilderness years that brought some of us into politics to lead our country in the direction of paradise, with a Scottish Parliament and a journey to independence. That said, I listened with interest to David McLetchie's amusing journey through the wilderness years.

There were a couple of contradictions in Margaret Curran's remarks. She seems to think that there is something absolutely and atrociously despicable in the Government coming to an agreement with the Conservatives. Mr Whitton knows full well that his colleagues sit in a coalition with the Conservatives on East Dunbartonshire Council. As Mr FitzPatrick pointed out, the Labour Party works with the Conservatives on a co-operative basis on Dundee City Council.

Margaret Curran: I was trying to make the point that you should be explicit about the coalition that you have with the Government. [*Laughter.*] I beg your pardon: I meant the coalition that you have with the Tories. You should make it clear—Mr McLetchie rightly gave you praise for this—that you are implementing a Conservative approach to Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to make their remarks through the chair.

Margaret Curran: My apologies.

John Swinney: Margaret Curran is on common ground with the Conservatives about the town centre regeneration fund—although I concede the fact that there is a debate about the chronology. It is being suggested that it is somehow despicable for the Government to work with the Conservatives on certain issues—we are not working with them on all issues; they frequently vote against us—yet it is also being suggested that it is all right for the Labour Party to do the same thing. That is inconsistent.

David Whitton: On a point of information, it is actually a Labour-led coalition in East Dunbartonshire.

John Swinney: That, of course, makes all the difference.

The other contradiction in Margaret Curran's speech centred on a vigorous attack—she always does this, and with tremendous passion—on our having presided over some cuts in taxation. I know that it is hard to believe, but the United Kingdom Labour Government has also, on occasion, cut taxation at different stages. It is obviously okay for it to do so. Of course, the Labour Government has bumped up taxation, too, and it will be bumping it

up again in the future. We must be consistent about the lines of argument that we advance.

Angela Constance made a fantastic contribution to the debate, on the emergence of some of the challenges that the budget process has posed for the Parliament this year. We are going through a learning process as a Parliament that is operating, for the first time, without an in-built majority. Last week, in a pretty painful fashion, we found out the consequences of a budget not succeeding. I readily concede that the public services of Scotland did not emerge with absolutely no money last Thursday morning. However, without the speed of engagement between different political parties that has taken place over the past seven days, we could have stumbled towards a situation where our public services were not properly supported at a time when support is required. Angela Constance made the point that it is important that the debate is driven by the desire to secure an outcome that is right for our people. That shows the correct approach, which is driven by common sense.

Johann Lamont: The Labour side was frustrated because there was not a sufficient speed of engagement before last Wednesday. In fact, Labour negotiated seriously. Does the minister agree that it ill behoves the Parliament to impugn the motives of those who sought to improve the budget, in the way that Labour did?

John Swinney: I will come on to that point. It is not particularly constructive for us to go over old ground. Labour front-bench members may contradict my remarks in public if they wish, but the Government engaged genuinely with the Labour Party in discussion on the budget process—better than we did last year—in advance of the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill being debated in the Parliament last week. There was more and better engagement this year compared with the 2007-08 process. Personally, I felt that we were very close to getting some form of agreement. The areas of division were not that great. In the end, we were not able to bring about an agreement, but we have been able to do so in time for today, which I warmly welcome. In his opening speech, Mr Kerr made it clear that the engagement with the Government had been successful, and he welcomed that.

When we spoke initially about the budget process, the Liberal Democrats advanced their principled position that we should reduce taxation. The Government could not accept that point; we did not think that it was the right thing to do; we thought that it would not have commanded support in the parliamentary chamber. Following the different circumstances in which we found ourselves last Wednesday, we have had a constructive and meaningful discussion. I make

particular reference to the point in the Liberal Democrats' propositions that relates to what is possibly the greatest challenge for the Parliament: public expenditure. We have set out a working-group approach, to advance the arguments around the challenge of the public spending profile in future. I missed the theatrical parts of Frank McAveety's speech—those parts are always entertaining—but I listened to the substantive final 20 seconds of his speech, in which I think that he was reminiscing about the previous eight years, when there was a substantial above-inflation increase in public expenditure. That will not be the case during the next six to 10 years in the Scottish Parliament, so the Liberal Democrats' suggestion that we examine and review our approach to public expenditure is timely and necessary. I look forward to all parties taking part in that process. Whether there will be time on the agenda for Margo MacDonald to participate is an open question, but I am sure that we will manage to squeeze her into the discussions—how could we exclude her?

The Government has tried to work to secure agreement with the Scottish Green Party. Patrick Harvie was right to say that he came to us in October with proposals for a home insulation scheme. We have had a significant amount of engagement on the matter and the Green party has been given access to Government officials, to try to advance the matter in detail. It is unfortunate that we were unable to secure a final agreement, as we found last week.

I appreciate that Mr Harvie might well be disappointed with the quantum of resources that have been allocated to the home insulation scheme. I simply make two points to him and to Mr Harper. First, the Government has tried to introduce the largest home insulation scheme that has been announced and implemented in Scotland. Secondly, to ensure that we brought other political parties to a point of agreement, we have had to identify resources that could be deployed to support commitments on apprenticeships that the Labour Party wanted. As finance secretary, I cannot spend the money twice; I can spend it only once.

Patrick Harvie: I entirely understand that the cabinet secretary cannot spend money in the Scottish budget twice. We have been asking him to spend money differently. We have stressed time and again that a home insulation programme will be successful at driving up uptake if we remove the barrier of cost. Why does he continue to propose a means-tested approach, which has failed, failed and failed again?

John Swinney: For the simple reason that I cannot justify paying for people like me to get home insulation for nothing when people who are

more deserving than I am require it. In the Government programme we are trying to ensure that all aspects of government recognise the contribution that they can make to tackling climate change, through programmes such as the climate challenge fund or through the work of Scottish Enterprise and universities to encourage more innovation and technology developments.

The Government listened carefully to the Parliament during the past couple of weeks. I think that we have understood the importance of bringing people to a point of consensus that can support a budget proposition. I give Parliament the commitment that as we engage in future budget processes, that will be the tone and style of the Government's engagement. We will seek to bring people to a point of agreement so that we can put in place a budget that reflects the needs of the people of Scotland and the aspirations of our country at a difficult time. That will be the thinking process that the Government puts into the formulation of choices on the budget and on the difficult issues that we confront. As a Parliament, we must demonstrate to the people of our country that we have listened to their concern that the financial arrangements to support our public services and deliver for the economy must be in place. That is precisely what the Government's budget is designed to ensure.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): That concludes the debate.

Before we move to the next item of business, I am sure that members will want to join me in welcoming to the gallery the German ambassador to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Herr Georg Boomgaarden. [*Applause.*]

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3372, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 11 February 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (Scotland) Order 2009

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 12 February 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Health and Wellbeing

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 February 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 February 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Debate: Disabled Persons' Parking Places (Scotland) Bill

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon

2.15 pm

followed by

followed by

5.00 pm

followed by
Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

First Minister's Question Time

Themed Question Time

Justice and Law Officers;

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Scottish Government Business

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Decision Time

Members'

Business—[Bruce

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-3379, on the suspension of standing orders.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purpose of allowing up to 2 hours and 25 minutes to debate motion S3M-3386 (The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (Scotland) Order 2009) on Wednesday 11 February 2009, the final sentence of Rule 10.7.1 of Standing Orders be suspended.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motions S3M-3374 to S3M-3377, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Town and Country Planning (Grounds for Declining to Follow Recommendations) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Town and Country Planning (Amount of Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2009 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S3M-3380, in the name of John Swinney, that the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill be passed, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 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)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)

AGAINST

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 123, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3379, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the suspension of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purpose of allowing up to 2 hours and 25 minutes to debate motion S3M-3386 (The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (Scotland) Order 2009) on Wednesday 11 February 2009, the final sentence of Rule 10.7.1 of Standing Orders be suspended.

The Presiding Officer: If no member objects, I propose to ask a single question on motions S3M-3374 to S3M-3377, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

The final question is, that motions S3M-3374 to S3M-3377, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of SSIs, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Town and Country Planning (Grounds for Declining to Follow Recommendations) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Town and Country Planning (Amount of Fixed Penalty) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2009 be approved.

Human Trafficking

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3293, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on combating human trafficking. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the need to develop appropriate strategies to combat the evil practice of trafficking people into Scotland; commends the important and continuing work of the International Justice Mission (IJM) to combat sex trafficking; notes that, in the 12 years since the organisation's founding, the IJM's investigations have resulted in freedom for hundreds of girls and women held by force in the commercial sex trade; also recognises that the IJM's founding principle is the defence and protection of individual human rights for all people by bringing the law to bear on their behalf and by prosecuting perpetrators who violate local and international laws; also notes the important contribution of local groups such as Cupar Justice and Peace Group on this issue, and further recognises the international and interdependent characteristics of human trafficking and the need for an internationally coordinated approach to bring about the end of such crimes here in Scotland and across the world.

17:04

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the members who have stayed behind for this debate and the members from all parties who signed my motion. I also acknowledge the interest that other members have in the subject. They include Gil Paterson, who led a members' business debate on the issue in March last year, and Christina McKelvie, who has a current motion on it. Indeed, Christina McKelvie and my colleague Margaret Mitchell attended a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference on the topic earlier this week.

Earlier today, I hosted an event that the International Justice Mission UK organised, which had contributions from Terry Tennens, the director of IJM UK, and Alasdair Henderson, a young Scottish lawyer who went out to Rwanda with the IJM to help stop human rights abuses in the field. I am pleased to say that Alasdair Henderson has joined us in the public gallery. Those people can describe far better than I the evils and sad consequences of human trafficking, as well as the action that needs to be taken to stop it.

We are debating one of the evil, cruel and immoral practices of which mankind is capable: trafficking other human beings as if they were a commodity and subjecting them to forced labour, the sex trade and domestic servitude. It is 21st century slavery and we must do everything possible to stop human trafficking into Scotland and to help combat it on the international stage. It is hard to express in words or even imagine the

fear and torment that girls, boys, women and, indeed, men must feel who are subject to human trafficking and forced into another country as labour or into the sex trade.

I will try to outline the scale of the issue with some stark statistics. The International Labour Organization estimates that at least 2.4 million people across the world are in forced labour because of trafficking. The United States Department of State estimates that at least 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders every year for the sex trade alone. The total market value of illicit human trafficking is in excess of \$32 billion annually, making human trafficking the world's third largest criminal enterprise, after drugs and weapons.

Unfortunately, there are few statistics on trafficking into Scotland. A United Nations Children's Fund report in 2006 suggested that there were, at any one time, 5,000 child sex workers in the United Kingdom, most of whom were trafficked here. In 2003, the UK Government estimated that there were 4,000 victims of trafficking for prostitution in the UK at any one time. The latest upper estimate of the number of woman and children trafficked into forced prostitution in the UK has now risen from 4,000 to 18,000.

The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland estimates that 13.5 per cent of human trafficking activity in the UK is carried on in Scotland, which means that we have a disproportionate share of the illegal activity. At this very moment—here in Edinburgh and in Glasgow, Dundee and elsewhere in Scotland—there are terrified and isolated individuals who have been illegally trafficked into the country and who are being forced into the sex trade and into servitude. Worryingly, as of 2008 there had not been a single prosecution in Scotland for human trafficking offences.

As my motion sets out, we need to take more action to combat human trafficking. I understand that it is an international and extremely complex issue and that there are no easy answers. I also understand that, due to the nature of human trafficking, it is incumbent on us to work closely with the UK Government, as well as with other Governments in the European Union and internationally. That is why I welcome partnerships such as that between the Scottish Government and the Home Office on the "UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking". Only yesterday, a debate was led in the House of Commons by my Conservative colleague Anthony Steen MP, who has done an enormous amount of work on the issue and is chairman of the Westminster all-party parliamentary group on trafficking of women and children. A lot of work is being done to raise

awareness of the issue in Westminster and I hope that this members' business debate will go some way to help that process here in Scotland.

Just before Christmas last year, the UK Government finally ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. That is an extremely important step. The UK's ratification of the convention will mean that, for the first time, victims of trafficking have rights and will be entitled to a recovery period, specialist care, accommodation and other services. We must use the ratification of this important convention as a catalyst to work harder, because we need greater protection for victims of human trafficking. The Scottish Government must consider and discuss with the Home Office issues such as guaranteed residency permits for victims and protection against prosecution for victims who were forced into unlawful activities such as prostitution.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): In advance of the retrospective action, would it not be better for the Scottish Government to co-operate with the Home Office and the Foreign Office to try to stop trafficked people coming into the country? To the best of my knowledge, we have no intelligence as to how they come in, what the most common routes are, or how many come in.

Murdo Fraser: I entirely agree with Margo MacDonald's point; perhaps the minister could address it in his response. It makes perfect sense to prevent people from coming into the country, and, for that matter, to reduce demand in this country for the services of these unfortunate people.

We need specialist police in Scotland who are trained and able to understand human trafficking so that they can work with victims respectfully. We must ensure that Scottish charities and non-governmental organisations are fully involved in identifying and supporting the victims of trafficking. We also need to pursue fully the criminal traffickers. That is why the work of charities such as the IJM is so important.

The IJM sends law enforcement professionals to developing countries to conduct criminal investigations, collect evidence, help to rescue victims and bring perpetrators to justice. It has secured freedom from oppression for thousands of people using the courts and the laws of other countries through better law enforcement. That is exactly the sort of charity that we should encourage and support.

A great deal of work is already being done in Scotland by Scottish groups and charities, such as the Cupar justice and peace group from my area of Mid-Scotland and Fife, some of whose

members join us in the gallery this evening. What we now need is greater political involvement and to assist where we can.

We can all agree that this is a global issue and one of the most immoral and evil practices of the modern world. Human trafficking is an international and complex crime, but progress against it is being made. The work that is being carried out by charities such as Amnesty International and the IJM is making a difference, and that must inspire us to do more. We must send a clear message: Scotland does not want human trafficking; we will hunt down the criminals behind it and we will help its unfortunate victims.

17:11

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on lodging the motion. The gravity of the subject makes it all the more appropriate that Parliament has this debate. I, too, place on record my congratulations to the International Justice Mission. I have not worked with it as closely as Murdo Fraser has, but I have met its representatives in the past. I apologise for being unable to attend the briefing that the IJM gave earlier today. It is right to praise and commend its work.

In Scotland, the UK, Europe and beyond, we rightly show contrition for our role in the slave trade of centuries past. It is rightly described as a stain on our collective history. Just as we show contrition, we commend the abolition of the slave trade and those who worked for its abolition, whether it be Robert Wedderburn in Scotland, William Wilberforce in the UK or Abraham Lincoln and his emancipation proclamation of 1863. For all that, we should not become lax in our attitude to slavery. Modern-day slavery exists in Scotland and beyond, but we just refer to it euphemistically as human trafficking.

I note that an Amnesty International briefing—I put my membership of Amnesty on the record—says that trafficking is the third most lucrative black-market trade in the world, not far behind drugs and arms. It is a serious problem. Just as the IJM undertakes good work in this area, so does Amnesty International. Last year, Amnesty International Scotland published "Scotland's Slaves", which reports that Scotland has 13.5 per cent of the UK's trade in trafficking. Trafficking cases were found in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Falkirk, Grangemouth, Stirling and Tayside, and they involved victims from across the world.

I have some reports with me. One from 2006 is about a 17-year-old African girl being rescued by the police in Dumfries during a major vice investigation. Another, from *The Scotsman* of July

2008, reports that 15 sex slaves from south-east Asia were found working in Scotland's sex industry. Another case was reported by the BBC in May last year: the Gangmasters Licensing Authority revoked the licence of a company that used forced labour. I welcome the fact that the licence was revoked but wonder whether a more severe punishment might have been appropriate on that occasion, and whenever this issue rears its head.

As Amnesty International's report noted, most attention is focused on trafficking for the sex trade. I place on the record my disgust for that so-called industry. We should prosecute to the fullest extent of the law those who procure the services of a woman who has been forced into prostitution. However, we should also focus on the problem of the trafficking of people into Scotland for the purposes of forced domestic or agricultural labour. We need to publicise that issue and to prosecute people who use forced labour.

As always happens during members' business debates, time is running out. I will end by quoting article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which had its 60th anniversary in December last year. It says:

"No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

We have a long way to go to achieve that goal. I hope that we in Scotland can play our part in that process. I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say.

17:15

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing a debate on an important and distressing issue. It is appalling to think that, in Scotland today, there are hundreds of trafficked women and children—the figure could be more than a thousand—working in the sex trade. The figure is disproportionately high compared with that for the rest of the UK.

The International Justice Mission is to be congratulated on its work in the area. It rescues victims of such abuses and raises awareness of the human impact of a horrifying global industry. Amnesty International showed the extent of the problem in our country through the publication of its report "Scotland's Slaves", which was launched at the Scottish Parliament last year. That report showed that, during operation pentameter 2, Scottish police forces raided more than 50 premises, 59 people were dealt with as victims of trafficking and 35 suspects were arrested. As Jamie Hepburn said, cases of trafficking were uncovered right across Scotland, and the victims included people from eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. As well as finding evidence of trafficking for

the sex trade, the police operation found evidence of the trafficking of people into Scotland for domestic and agricultural labour.

Both Amnesty International and the International Justice Mission have highlighted a need for more support for the victims of trafficking in Scotland. Progress has been made—the UK ratified the European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in December last year and has established the UK human trafficking centre in Sheffield. In addition, victims of trafficking are allowed a 45-day reflection period and might be entitled to a year's residence.

However, further progress needs to be made, which will require work at Westminster and by the Scottish Government. We should of course support the national and local groups in Scotland that work on the issue, which make the case that there is an urgent need for accommodation for victims of trafficking.

There is also the issue of successful prosecutions against those who are responsible for human trafficking. The International Justice Mission reports that, despite the success of operation pentameter, as of 2008, there had—as Murdo Fraser said—been no prosecutions in Scotland for human trafficking. Jamie Hepburn is right to say that we must ensure that such cases can be prosecuted correctly. There have been 48 such prosecutions in England and six in Wales. Through the Policing and Crime Bill, the UK Government is looking to create a new offence of paying for sex with someone who is controlled for another person's gain. The International Justice Mission argues that similar legislation should be considered here in Scotland. The case for that is persuasive, as I fear that the actions that Margo MacDonald mentioned will not be sufficient on their own.

During stage 1 consultation on the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Victim Support Scotland and others raised the issue of sexual offences that relate to human trafficking. In its stage 1 report on the bill, the Justice Committee said that although trafficking is not a matter for that bill, the Scottish Government should consider it further. I would welcome the minister's thoughts on that suggestion.

We all agree that the victims of human trafficking need to be properly supported and helped through their horrific experiences, and that those who abuse people in that way must be brought to account. I hope that the Scottish Government will support further action on such matters. This has been a good debate.

17:19

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing a debate on this extremely important subject and, in so doing, on helping to raise awareness about trafficking.

Trafficking is a hugely complex issue that involves the movement of people by force, fraud or deception in order to exploit them for sexual purposes or forced labour. While it is frequently linked with criminal activity, especially smuggling, the drugs trade and sexual exploitation, it is also prevalent in the form of economic exploitation. It would therefore be a mistake to think of it as just a criminal justice issue. If it is to be tackled effectively, an holistic approach must be adopted, with interministerial involvement and third sector voluntary input to give prosecution services valuable information about what is happening on the ground.

When trafficking was discussed at the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in India in 2007, it was described as a growth industry. That is no less true in these difficult economic times—the victims who are targeted by the traffickers are vulnerable and easily exploited; they often live in extreme poverty and desperately seek a better life.

Speakers at the CPA conference and at the one on migration and trafficking that is currently being held in London—to which Murdo Fraser referred—have emphasised that no country can deal adequately with this global problem in isolation and that it will require international co-operation. Crucially, that must include a concerted effort to identify the victims by ensuring that the correct data about the extent of trafficking activity are collected in the country of origin, the transit country and the receiving state. Traffickers move their victims to ensure that they are kept isolated, vulnerable and without any of the support that could come from forming relationships.

Although the motion calls for appropriate strategies to be developed to combat the evil practice of trafficking people into Scotland, it would be folly to assume that trafficking is purely an immigration issue that can be fixed by passing legislation. Proof of that comes from the startling statistic that Lithuania, which is now part of the European Union, is the second largest country of origin for trafficked women into the United Kingdom—and they are not illegal immigrants; the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service will not prosecute those who are genuinely trafficked.

I said at the outset that this is a complicated issue, but at the heart of any strategy to combat it must be the protection of victims. I therefore welcome Amnesty International's excellent briefing

paper on the subject, which highlights the UK Government's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. I hope that, through the convention and the access to services and rights that it bestows on trafficked people, coupled with better identification of the victims and the adoption of a holistic approach to the issue, an effective strategy can be found to end this evil practice.

17:23

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Murdo Fraser has done well to secure the debate and to keep this important issue on the public radar and on the agenda. All the public bodies and voluntary sector organisations that are involved in combating the problem are to be congratulated.

During the festival of politics last summer, I was privileged to host an event at which Amnesty International's briefing paper "Scotland's Slaves" was presented for the first time. It was gratifying to hear the extent to which the body politic and civic Scotland are interested in keeping the matter alive. The number of known cases here may be relatively small, but they are no less important for that: one is too many.

We need to consider a number of things. Margaret Mitchell spoke about issues that arise because of countries' membership of the European Union. It can be a challenge to get people to admit that they have actually been trafficked. All too often, the problem for authorities as they try to identify, track down and then prosecute traffickers is victims' fear. Traffickers, or those who encourage people to come to this country, are often holding hostage—literally or figuratively—the families and extended families of the people who are being trafficked, which makes it difficult for anyone to confidently point a finger at a trafficker. We have to understand the consequences for the extended family. As Margaret Mitchell rightly said, we have to find a mechanism that will give people reassurance. That will entail dealing with the problem not only within the UK but within the countries in which the traffickers operate.

Gil Paterson and others have kept the subject on the agenda in the past. I want to conclude my contribution to this afternoon's debate as I concluded my contribution to the previous debate on the matter. In this Parliament, we talk about the subject in the abstract, but when one comes across it first hand it really comes home.

Back in 2001, I was privileged to be in Kosovo. At one stage, when we were going through a checkpoint, a truck in front of us was held up and inspected. The truck was only the size of an extended Ford Transit, but when its canvas sides

were lifted, 45 females were found inside. All of them were dehydrated; we had to provide them with water. It transpired that they had come from all round the Balkans. They had been gathered up and were being smuggled through Kosovo to western Europe. We all know the numbers of people who were imported into Germany for the world cup, but it is quite a shock to see other human beings being treated in that way.

Richard Baker spoke about the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill. I will be interested in seeing how the bill progresses—I could make a good case for allowing traffickers to be prosecuted under that legislation. The Equal Opportunities Committee has considered that possibility in some detail.

I again congratulate Murdo Fraser. I hope that we will continue to have such debates and that the subject will remain on the agenda for as long as is necessary. We have to keep its profile high.

17:28

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): I join the chorus of congratulations for Murdo Fraser on securing the debate. It serves Parliament well that we are united across the chamber on this issue. I echo his commendation of the International Justice Mission in combating sex trafficking, and I pledge my support to that aim.

I commend the work of the justice and peace movement. A group from Cupar used very persuasive lobbying skills to encourage me to put together a motion that I have lodged on the issue. I also give particular mention to the group in Lanarkshire—the area that I represent—and I commend other groups Scotland-wide that have called on parliamentarians to raise awareness of the issue.

Murdo Fraser and Margaret Mitchell both mentioned the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference that Margaret and I attended at Westminster this week. International migration and human trafficking were on the agenda. One of the lovely things about the conference was that it brought together parliamentarians, speakers and academics from around the world to consider the causes and effects of human trafficking and to consider good practice in supporting trafficked individuals and in supporting Governments, organisations and law-enforcement agencies in combating the despicable trade in human beings.

One of the questions that were asked at the conference was very simple: what is human trafficking? It was right that the question was asked, because there seems to be some doubt about the answer—especially among those who would like to justify some of the human trafficking

that goes on. Margaret Mitchell has already stated—it is worth repeating—that human trafficking is

“the movement of people by force, fraud or deception in order to exploit them for sexual purposes or forced labour.”

An associated issue is the movement of children within and between countries, which also amounts to trafficking. We heard a powerful true story about a baby who was, because of an issue within that family, trafficked away from its family and never seen again.

There is legislation that makes it a statutory offence to traffic a person for the purposes of sexual exploitation but I am not sure, after attending the conference on migration and trafficking, whether it goes far enough. There is a lot of good practice in all the countries that were represented there, but we need to consider many questions.

One of the guest speakers at the conference was Dr Bridget Anderson, who is a senior researcher at COMPAS—the centre on migration, policy and society—at the University of Oxford. She said that as of December 2008, there had been 96 convictions of individuals for trafficking and exploiting vulnerable human beings. Of course, 96 is better than none, but I think we can do much better than that.

It was also asked at the conference why it matters. It matters in Scotland because this is a modern country in which trafficking, using and exploiting human beings should not be countenanced. The trafficking of human beings is a lucrative business, so we need to strengthen legislation to deal with it. I gather from the speeches that were made at the conference that it is a major plank of organised crime throughout the world, which we must target.

We heard at the conference that greed and profit are the driving forces. Scotland is a caring and egalitarian nation, so we need to ensure that the traffickers are put out of business. We need to get rid of the greed and the profit that drives that business. We need a two-pronged approach, which outlaws and convicts traffickers, and which also changes the attitudes of the people who create the demand. We heard a powerful contribution from the Swedish delegates about how they had managed to change a whole country's attitude to sexual trafficking and the business of sexual exploitation.

I commend to members the “Handbook for parliamentarians: The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings”. I have had a quick look through it, and it is a really good piece of work. I congratulate the Scottish and UK Governments, which have both signed up to it. I also welcome the Scottish

Government's tailored guidance, which fits in with UK guidance on Scottish legislation, practices and policies for best practice and with a partnership agreement between both Governments.

The Scottish human trafficking group is sharing good practice among law enforcement agencies, which is to be commended. An organisation in Glasgow called TARA—the trafficking awareness-raising alliance—is doing a great amount of work. It is a pilot project, and I ask the minister—I hope that he will not think that I am being too cheeky—to consider continuing it.

I have some fears about the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill, which is currently going through the UK Parliament. The bill will criminalise people who do not have travel documents, which would immediately affect people who have been trafficked. We need to consider that, although we have been assured that prosecutors would perhaps not prosecute such people. We have a moral, political and personal responsibility to bring an end to the horrific practice of trafficking, and I lend my support to the motion.

17:34

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I acknowledge the contribution of the Deputy Presiding Officer, Trish Godman, to ensuring that the subject has remained a political issue. I appreciate that she is not in a position just now to express her views, but her record is there to be recognised.

I congratulate Murdo Fraser on bringing the debate to the chamber. The importance of the motion lies in the fact that it not only describes something terrible but considers ways in which we can address the issues. When I read the motion and became aware of the issues, the capacity of some people for cruelty and the willingness to perpetrate that cruelty against other human beings took my breath away. The danger is that, in being appalled, we are also paralysed and fear that we can do nothing to address that level of cruelty. If we do not act, however, we give up on so many people who are facing problems. We have a responsibility to act. One reason why I welcome the debate is that it enables us to consider how we can support action to address the problem.

It is clear that the issue is not particularly about women, but it is disproportionately experienced by women. It is therefore important to make the connection with the abuse of women, male violence against women and the unequal status of women in this country and elsewhere. I believe that those factors play a part in ensuring that it is disproportionately women who suffer from being trafficked and abused by men.

It is critical that we support the organisations and groups that reach out to vulnerable people, who might be fearful of speaking out and do not know where to go. It is essential that we use the networks within communities to give people the confidence to speak out. That is true domestically just as it is true for those who are trafficked into the country.

We need to challenge the perpetrators—not just those who traffic, but those who use and abuse trafficked women. The Women's Support Project in Glasgow has done some significant research on the attitudes of men who use prostitutes. One of its stunning findings was that, although a significant number of the men suspected that women were there through no choice of their own, that they had been forced to be there and that they may have been trafficked, that bore no relationship to whether the men would use those women. The notion that prostitution is a fair transaction between men and women is exposed by that. The men knew that the women could have been victims of trafficking, but that made no difference to whether they chose to continue.

We heard about Germany. Why was there a demand for prostitutes there? Who would use them? I know that Trish Godman has made representations to Glasgow City Council about the Commonwealth games and the need to challenge attitudes there. It is critical that we put the matter in context and address the question of the perpetrators. As has been suggested, legislation might need to be developed on the Swedish model, but the Scottish Parliament passed relevant legislation before the 2007 election, and that legislation needs to be enforced, because it focuses on the perpetrators and puts the matter in that context.

I remind the minister that, although local authorities operate under financial constraints, there are soft budget lines, and those are the lines that should support groups that go out and support women. However, there is nobody to speak up for that in the hard battle of financial choices. I hope that the minister will address that problem.

We need education in our communities. We need to talk about what is happening and the connection with violence against women. We need to protect those who have been trafficked, and we need to ensure that the focus on perpetrators is not lost. People are appalled by the notion of trafficking. That is straightforward, but it is more difficult to consider what creates the demand. The minister will have the support of all members if he is willing to address that.

We should examine the legislative measures that are in place, consider how well they are working and encourage further enforcement of them, because they shift the balance from those

who allegedly make the choice to go into prostitution to those who create the demand in the first place and continue to use prostitutes despite the evidence, which is visible to them, that some of the most vulnerable people have been placed there for abuse through no choice of their own.

17:39

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I have long believed that one should use sparingly the imputation that any particular form of human conduct is evil, but I would say that human trafficking is truly evil. I am grateful to Murdo Fraser for giving us the opportunity to debate the matter, and I commend him for his informative and measured speech. The Scottish Government is wholly committed to working with others—principally the UK Government but also many other stakeholders—to ensure that this vile trade is eradicated in Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn was right to say that human trafficking is really a form of slavery and servitude and to mention those who campaigned to abolish slavery. Indeed, this is an appropriate time to debate the issue given that we are approaching the third anniversary of the ratification of the Palermo protocol. That protocol paved the way for the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which the UK Government ratified on 17 December last year.

The Scottish Government worked closely with the UK Government to ensure that Scottish arrangements were in place to enable ratification. Given that the convention comes into effect three months after ratification, the whole of the UK will be bound by its terms from 1 April. That also illustrates the appropriateness of the timing of this debate—between now and 1 April, we will continue to work closely with our partners in Scotland and elsewhere to ensure that arrangements are in place and work well in a Scottish context.

We welcome the success of operation pentameter, which was mentioned by Richard Baker. The resulting improvements in intelligence and close partnership working have enabled more trafficked people, who might otherwise have remained unidentified, to be rescued from this despicable trade. During the second nationwide, police-led anti-trafficking operation in Scotland, 56 premises were visited, 15 adult victims were recovered and cash was seized.

As Hugh O'Donnell pointed out, the victims of this vile trade are in a state of fear that is probably unimaginable to those of us who, happily, have never been in such a position. They are terrified of saying anything to anyone, and I suspect that only 15 victims were recovered because a larger

number decided to make themselves scarce. That fear factor must be borne in mind when we try to tackle the issue.

Christina McKelvie rightly highlighted the TARA project, which I understand is receiving support from Glasgow City Council and top-up funding from the Scottish Government.

Members also mentioned the way in which the criminal law deals with the matter. The Scottish Government is open to suggestions from all sides as, after all, there is really no place for a partisan approach to the issue. In response to Richard Baker, who highlighted one approach that the UK Government is taking, I therefore make it clear that our minds are open and that we are willing to consider any representation that he might care to make and, if he so wishes, to meet him.

I point out to Hugh O'Donnell that the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill will create a statutory offence of sexual coercion, which will enable police and prosecutors to target traffickers or pimps who knowingly force someone to engage in sexual activity. Moreover, the bill makes it clear that sex is unlawful when the victim agrees or submits to sex because of violence, threats of violence or intimidation. Those two proposed crimes will cover many if not all situations but, as I say, we are open to suggestions from other members.

As many members have pointed out, there are links between trafficking and other forms of organised crime. Trafficking is no respecter of national frontiers, and Christina McKelvie was right to emphasise that action can be effective only if it is undertaken internationally with countries working together. That is why the Scottish Government is represented on the UK interdepartmental ministerial group on human trafficking and why the "UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking", which provides a framework and strategies for moving forward, is published by both the Scottish Government and the Home Office.

That framework is flexible. Indeed, the updated version, which was co-signed last June by Jacqui Smith and Kenny MacAskill, takes the UK approach beyond what is required by the convention. For example, victims of trafficking have a 45-day period of reflection and recovery rather than the 30 days recommended in the convention and they are granted residence permits of one year rather than six months.

Margo MacDonald asked whether more should be done to prevent trafficked people from entering the UK. She hit on a key issue, which is dealt with at point 12 on page 40 of the action plan. Our efforts are increasing—additional staff are being trained at immigration entry points, for example—

but, sadly, we recognise that, no matter how robust our efforts are, some people will get through. We must acknowledge and deal with that problem.

The UK is primarily a destination country for human trafficking, but the work that is done by organisations that conduct their own investigations and raise awareness, such as the International Justice Mission, is invaluable. Organisations such as the Cupar justice and peace group also make a substantial contribution.

The Scottish Government has contributed to Tearfund, which was designed to protect children and young people in Malawi from abuse. It helps them to access their rights, particularly those who live or beg on the streets. Funding of £208,000 has been provided to Tearfund; a supplement was provided recently.

It is clear from the joint Scottish Government and UK Government action plan that the international dimension to human trafficking has always been and remains firmly on the agenda. The nature of the crime is such that no one country acting on its own can be expected to succeed entirely in tackling it. The same applies at a domestic level—we want to work with, and are working with, all relevant agencies at a domestic level to eradicate the evil trade of trafficking.

The debate has been extremely useful and timely. I hope and expect that we will continue to work together to tackle human trafficking, which is the most evil of trades that we know.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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