

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 26 March 2009

Session 3

£5.00

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Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by RR
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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 26 March 2009

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

Health Care

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3796, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the national health service and the independent health care sector.

09:15

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome the undoubted success of the Scottish regional treatment centre at Stracathro and put on record our congratulations to the previous Liberal and Labour Scottish Executive on setting up that pilot and leading the way with a highly effective partnership between the NHS and the independent health care sector. It is not often that we congratulate, but there we are.

As the motion states, the Stracathro pilot has been rated as excellent by its patients; has reduced waiting times; has had no reported cases of hospital-acquired infection; and has saved more than £2 million for the NHS. For people living in the area, the pilot helped to keep Stracathro hospital open, following a petition to the Parliament with 48,000 signatures. In the past, politicians and others have talked about the NHS and the private sector as two separate entities, which of course they are. However, the difference at Stracathro is that an independent company leases NHS facilities to treat NHS patients at times when the theatres are not being utilised, including outwith normal working hours, during the evenings and weekends, which suits many patients.

The partnership brings money into the NHS through leasing. It has also helped several NHS boards to achieve waiting time targets, allowed better planning for service delivery and cut down on expensive last-minute ad hoc spot purchasing from the private sector. Of course, any failure to deliver surgery and treatments within the timescale results in the independent company, Netcare Healthcare UK, having to undertake the activity free of charge. In the two years from February 2007 to February 2009, almost 5,000 patients from the Forth Valley NHS Board, Grampian NHS Board, Fife NHS Board and Tayside NHS Board areas were treated by Netcare at Stracathro. The system is more efficient and is estimated to provide 11 per cent

more value for money than undertaking similar activity in the NHS. A contract variation was agreed with Netcare to reduce treat-by dates from 12 weeks to eight weeks for all activity groups by 28 February this year.

We hear constantly that the NHS should not be in conflict or competition with the independent sector. However, the project illustrates conclusively how the independent sector can complement and work alongside the NHS to benefit NHS patients. No one pays for treatment at Stracathro—the facility is for NHS patients. Another criticism that is often made of the independent sector is that it takes resources from the NHS. However, it was a contractual requirement on Netcare not to recruit staff who had worked locally for the NHS in the previous three months. My colleague Murdo Fraser will expand on that issue of additionality. The contract addresses many of the criticisms that have been made of the independent sector.

Our motion calls on the Scottish Government

“to continue to work with the independent sector ... to deliver the best possible healthcare”

in Scotland. The Scottish Conservatives want to put patients first. We want patients to receive the best-quality treatment in the shortest time that provides the quality of life that they seek. The approach of working with the independent sector includes the service that is provided by Medacs Healthcare, a private company that is based in Leeds and which is the largest supplier of locum doctors to the NHS. The company also provides a full service to the Scottish Prison Service as well as providing forensic medical examiners for detainees, police personnel and victims in Scotland. I made it my business to telephone one or two constabularies and the Scottish Prison Service, which confirmed that they receive an excellent service from Medacs. The good thing is that those organisations can examine their contracts every few years so that anything that is unsatisfactory can be negotiated and put right. The system has worked well to the benefit of people in Scotland.

Another independent company is Atos Healthcare, which operates 31 medical centres in Scotland and employs more than 170 clinical staff here, including doctors and nurses. The company makes recommendations on entitlement to benefits after carrying out medical examinations and reviewing cases. I appreciate that entitlement to benefits is a reserved issue, but I hope that the Scottish National Party will not use forthcoming legislation to ban commercial companies, such as those that provide an excellent service to benefit claimants, the constabulary, the prison service and other organisations throughout the public sector in Scotland.

It is sad—I could use other words, but I will be diplomatic—that the SNP Government undoubtedly puts ideology above patient care. The Government amendment congratulates NHS staff on the excellent work that they do. All members would congratulate all NHS staff on their excellent work, but the Government could find it in itself only to note the role of the private sector staff who treat NHS patients—how shameful. The Labour Party amendment would even delete our tribute to it. My goodness—we are in a consensual Parliament with a minority Government, but when we congratulate our partners in the Labour Party, they attempt to delete our congratulations. However, the Stracathro project is undoubtedly excellent.

The examples of the Scottish regional treatment centre; the medical work for the Scottish Prison Service and the police service; and Atos's work on determining medical fitness in relation to benefits or fitness to work give a taste of the range of excellent work that can be done through the NHS and other organisations working in partnership with the independent sector to deliver the best possible health care for the people of Scotland. That is what the Scottish Conservatives want.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the success of the Scottish Regional Treatment Centre at Stracathro and pays tribute to the previous Scottish administration for piloting the scheme; notes that the Stracathro pilot was rated as excellent by its patients and has reduced waiting times, that the centre has no reported healthcare associated infections and that it has saved several million pounds of taxpayers' money in the process of successfully treating NHS patients; further notes that since 1999 successive Scottish administrations have recognised the contribution that can be made by the independent sector to treating NHS patients, with a record 4,409 treatments performed in 2008, more than double the level in 1999 and a 38% increase since 2007, and accordingly urges the Scottish Government to continue to work with the independent sector in order to deliver the best possible healthcare for the people of Scotland.

09:23

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I welcome the debate, which gives us the opportunity to restate our policy on the use of the independent sector and to correct the claims that NHS boards' use of the private sector has increased during our period in office. I will come to that in a minute.

Our primary objective is to have a world-class Scottish NHS. We certainly have no policy of investing in independent services at the expense of the NHS. The funds that were voted for by the Parliament for the NHS will be spent by the NHS for the benefit of NHS patients. However, neither do we have a policy of prohibiting NHS boards from using the capacity of the independent sector at the margins when that is demonstrably of

benefit to NHS patients and represents value for money.

For example, NHS boards are perfectly free to continue to use the independent sector to help meet short-term pressures and to provide capacity from time to time when that is necessary to treat patients quickly. That will always be at the margins. We use the independent sector on a tactical basis, with long-term investment in the NHS. That is unlike the previous Administration, which made available £45 million over three years specifically to fund and encourage the use of the independent sector. That funding has now been repatriated to NHS boards, which has allowed investment in direct patient care. The investment that we make available will build sustainable services within the NHS. The independent sector will be used tactically, not strategically, on NHS terms and without central pump-priming where funds are used for acute activity in the independent sector.

Let me turn to the statistics. The assertion has been made that official data are showing more use of the independent sector by NHS boards. Members should be aware that only now are procedures that have been taking place in the independent sector being recorded properly. The Information Services Division acknowledges that the published data are incomplete. That is why, last summer, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing specifically required boards to ensure that returns are submitted to ISD Scotland for patients who have been treated in the independent sector.

The figures that have been referred to by the Tories as somehow showing an increased use of independent hospitals include private nursing homes, hospices and other independent providers, including homes run by local authorities and charities. In fact, half of the total figure that was cited in the motion—2,435 out of the 4,409 treatments for 2008—is for non-acute activities. The Tories have got their facts badly wrong, and they have interpreted figures incorrectly, despite the explanatory notes and the written answers that have been given to them, which make that point very clearly.

Mary Scanlon: They are your figures.

Shona Robison: They are our figures—with a very clear explanatory note that members should have read. It would be a mistake to use the welcome increase in local care provision as a means to further the argument that the NHS is increasingly relying on the independent sector for acute activity. Rather, it is clearly consistent with our policy of shifting the balance of care.

A proper analysis of the data that were provided by ISD Scotland shows that NHS boards have

recorded a significant downturn in the use of the independent sector for acute hospital activity. The figures show that independent sector acute activity fell by 37 per cent between 2006 and 2008—1,008 episodes in 2008 compared with 1,604 episodes in 2006—notwithstanding the lack of proper recording prior to 2008. It should also be noted that the joint NHS-independent sector facility at Stracathro showed activity of 966 episodes in 2008, compared with none in 2006, which skews the available figures for 2007 and 2008. Figures for core acute activity, leaving aside Stracathro, confirm that NHS boards are not making increased use of the independent hospital sector for acute services.

I acknowledge the contribution that diagnostic and treatment centres can make to reducing patient waiting times. However, that can equally well be done in the NHS. The Stracathro pilot is currently being reviewed by NHS Tayside and its partner boards, which are examining their future capacity needs and are considering the full range of options for Stracathro's use to deliver the best outcome for patient care and the public purse.

Despite the tightest financial settlement from the London Treasury since devolution—

Members: Nonsense.

Shona Robison: It is true. Despite that, the Scottish Government has invested more money in the NHS than ever before. We have increased spending on health per head of population to record levels, and we have delivered record investment, which will exceed £11 billion by 2010-11. Capital investment totalling £1.676 billion was made available to NHS Scotland over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11. In 2009-10 and 2010-11, capital resources of £603 million and £548 million respectively have been made available to NHS Scotland. That is a record level of capital funding, which will ensure that the NHS is better equipped and resourced than ever before to improve the quality of the patient and staff environment.

With those words, I am happy to move amendment S3M-3796.3, to leave out from "success" to end and insert:

"Scottish Government's commitment to a mutual NHS in Scotland and its decision only to use the private sector for health provision at the margins where necessary; further welcomes the fact that there has been a 37% drop in private sector acute activity, excluding Stracathro, between 2006 and 2008 and congratulates NHS staff for achieving this reduction; notes the role of the private treatment centre pilot at Stracathro, established by the last administration, and awaits the final evaluation of this pilot, and commends the Scottish Government policy to direct investment into the NHS rather than divert scarce resources into private sector health provision."

The Presiding Officer: The remaining speakers were advised that they would have about four

minutes each. I can now advise them that we have a bit of flexibility available, so members should feel free to take interventions if they wish to do so.

09:30

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I pay tribute to Mary Scanlon and the Conservative party for lodging this morning's motion, which does, indeed, pay tribute to the previous Administration for commissioning the pilot scheme at Stracathro. That is a rare accolade, and it led me to look a great deal more closely at the evaluation of the Stracathro project. My colleague Helen Eadie will address some of the critical points arising from that evaluation, which were rather skipped over by Mary Scanlon.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Given that the member's amendment deletes our compliment and tribute to the previous Scottish Executive, can we take it that the new Labour Party is now officially ashamed of its record in Government?

Dr Simpson: It will become clear as my speech progresses that we are in no way ashamed of what we did in Government. We are very pragmatic in our approach.

The Scottish regional treatment centre has made a positive contribution for patients. It has reduced waiting times for many patients with painful and debilitating conditions. That success has been achieved by increasing the number of spaces that are available for elective surgery, ensuring that the treatment is efficient and convenient, while maintaining high levels of care. The SRTC allows us to keep open a valued resource at Stracathro hospital—that was a very important factor in the decision that we reached, in response to the campaign in the area to keep the local facility open.

It was Labour's aim over its term in office to utilise the skills and capacity of the private sector to overcome NHS capacity issues on a temporary basis, and I am pleased that the proposals have worked so well at Stracathro. Independent health care organisations can provide great flexibility, particularly by introducing new and innovative care—not that the NHS is bad at introducing that. However, on occasions, it is necessary for us to use the private sector to instigate changes and to ensure adaptation.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Would the member care to spell out a little more where he sees the independent sector's role as being innovative? Can he give us some other examples?

Dr Simpson: In a speech of four minutes, I do not have time to do that. There is no doubt, however, that there are areas where it can play a

role. For example, the private sector has done work on breast cancer and on infertility. Innovative work has been done in the private sector. That is in no way to detract from the NHS, which has produced the preponderance of innovation, but using the private sector can be very helpful to the NHS when it comes to mass change.

We developed the SRTC to ensure a greater balance of facilities in the east. It was appropriate for people in the west to go to the Golden Jubilee national hospital, and the nationalisation of that establishment was an important factor in creating the necessary capacity.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Dr Simpson: I have taken enough interventions, and I have to get on—I am sorry.

The Golden Jubilee hospital provides a great resource and provides capacity that boards themselves are unable to provide.

Many patients are still waiting on long lists, with 18 weeks from treatment to the out-patient stage, and 18 weeks from out-patient to treatment. That will change, and there will be capacity needs in future. The Minister for Public Health and Sport has said that the Government will use the independent sector not strategically but tactically, and I understand that, but it will become necessary to ensure that there is adequate capacity to meet the new, very challenging, targets. The use of the private sector will need to continue.

The standards of those independent sector services that we use must be the same as those for the public sector and that is certainly the case at Stracathro. Patients get a choice about the date and time of their initial appointment, which is now usually within six weeks of referral. It is important that it has been possible to achieve that.

Satisfaction ratings exceed 90 per cent for the treatment centre, and the incidence of health care acquired infection is low. I was very impressed with the centre when I toured it, and Tayside NHS Board was pretty satisfied with the treatment available there. Nevertheless, patients still have to travel quite long distances. In the longer term, it will be important to build capacity within the NHS to ensure that that is where the overwhelming majority of procedures are carried out.

Mary Scanlon mentioned Medacs Healthcare, and I am pleased that the prison medical service is to be brought back into the NHS. That is important. A pragmatic decision was made because it was not possible for the NHS to undertake the service as we wanted it to be undertaken. However, it has now been agreed in principle that both nursing and medical services in

the prison service will be brought back into the NHS. I hope that that will happen quickly.

Labour will continue to maintain a totally pragmatic approach in which the interests of patients are put first. When we undertake work with the private sector, it will be done entirely on that basis.

The Labour Party will certainly support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

I move amendment S3M-3796.1, to leave out from “and pays” to end and insert:

“with its high level of patient approval and welcomes the Scottish Regional Treatment Centre’s contribution to maintaining Stracathro Hospital as both a local and regional resource; notes the success of the nationalisation of the HCI hospital in Clydebank, now the Golden Jubilee National Hospital, and recognises the contribution of both these units and their staff in achieving the continuing reduction in waiting times.”

09:35

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I listened with great care to the opening speeches from colleagues, and last night I read the motion and the amendments carefully, and I am bound to say that we are conducting a rather artificial debate. If we interpret the English language in the ordinary way, the motion in the name of Mary Scanlon makes no plea at all for an extension or expansion of private medicine in Scotland. It simply acknowledges that a pragmatic approach—to paraphrase the words of Dr Simpson—should be taken to utilising the private sector when it might augment and complement the NHS.

In her opening speech, Mary Scanlon drew attention to three examples of where it has been helpful to take just such a pragmatic approach; and although I understand that we are to hear from Helen Eadie a litany of failures, the wording of Dr Simpson’s amendment acknowledges the contribution that such an approach has made. I am sorry for Helen Eadie, because the amendment has put her in an awkward position. But there it is: we all know how difficult it can be when there are internal party difficulties.

The Minister for Public Health and Sport has explained that she does not want any expansion in private provision. The Government has made its position absolutely plain, and I have no qualms about that. The minister has said that services should, in every case in which it is possible, be provided by the national health service. However, she acknowledges that places such as Stracathro might, on the balance of the argument, be able to offer a pragmatic solution. As a result, trying to find differences between the views placed before us is extraordinarily difficult. I have no doubt that, during the rest of this debate, we will turn not so

much to simple medicine as to forensic medicine, in order to discern the differences between our positions.

Unlike the Labour Party in its somewhat contorted amendment, the Liberal Democrats have chosen to leave untouched the Conservative motion's gracious tribute to the previous Administration. Such a tribute has happened only once before, so I would be reluctant to delete it from the record. That would be churlish in the extreme.

The position of the Liberal Democrats is clear. We sign up to a health service that is, in essence, run by the national health service. However, we also acknowledge that we are where we are: private providers exist and if the NHS cannot provide a service—as happened in the prison service some years ago, as Richard Simpson pointed out—we have no ideological objection to the use of the private sector for the benefit of patients. However, we say clearly that any use of the private sector must not involve the displacement of people who are involved in or work for the NHS.

In a country the size of Scotland, it can be somewhat false to talk of competition. The competition would have to take place within what is a limited resource—limited both in personnel and in buildings. Having full competition, with all the duplication involved, would not be a sensible way to make progress.

As long as it is understood that the NHS must remain the core of health provision, Liberal Democrats are content that the private sector can have a role. We would do nothing to encourage the expansion of the private sector, and we would certainly not encourage any increase in the capacity of the private sector; but if on occasion the private sector can usefully assist the NHS to the benefit of patients, we are content that that should happen—as long as there is no displacement of staff or resource from the NHS.

I move amendment S3M-3796.2, to insert at end:

“, while ensuring that the use of the private sector does not destabilise local NHS provision or undermine the recruitment and retention of NHS staff.”

09:40

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak about the success of the Scottish regional treatment centre at Stracathro from a local perspective. Many of my constituents from Mid Scotland and Fife, particularly those from the Tayside and Fife areas, have benefited from the facility, which operates within the independent health care sector.

Stracathro hospital has always been valued by the community in north Angus and the Mearns. Like many local hospitals throughout the country, it developed into a general hospital providing a range of treatments. Situated on a large well-laid-out site at the foot of the Angus glens, it provides an attractive environment for patients and is easily accessible because of its proximity to the A90 dual carriageway. The hospital has also been an important part of the economy in north Angus, providing employment to doctors, nurses and ancillary workers—employment that was often well paid and secure in an area where the main employers were in the fields of tourism and agriculture, where jobs are often low paid.

Like others, I can remember around 10 years ago when there were serious doubts about the future of the hospital at Stracathro. At the time, Tayside NHS Board seemed intent on running down the hospital or even closing it altogether. That would have meant people from north Angus having to travel to Ninewells in Dundee for treatment. Closure would have been a serious loss to the area.

As we have heard, a long and energetic campaign was fought by local activists against the downgrading of Stracathro. In due course, NHS Tayside started to change its mind. An important milestone in the process was the establishment of the regional treatment centre in 2007. As we have heard, that was a decision of the previous Scottish Executive. It is a decision for which I must commend in particular the former Minister for Health and Community Care, Andy Kerr—a man of intelligence and vision. How disappointing it is that the Labour Party amendment seeks to delete our recognition of his success. Perhaps Iain Gray is nervous of praise for his erstwhile leadership challenger.

Understandably, there were some local reservations about a private company coming into Stracathro to provide services, but the creation of the SRTC was nevertheless widely welcomed as representing a substantial new investment in a popular local hospital. As we have already heard from Mary Scanlon, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers there will be a projected saving of £2 million in cash terms to the NHS over the lifetime of the contract. There has also been a positive impact on waiting lists and times; and there has not been a single case of a hospital-acquired infection at the SRTC. Patient satisfaction is very high, with an overall 84 per cent rating.

Shona Robison: Murdo Fraser and I have been party to the detail of the financing of the pilot. Of course, it would not be appropriate for us to discuss that here, because the information was given in confidence, but does he acknowledge that

the financing arrangements for a pilot are not necessarily what would be required for wider applications?

Murdo Fraser: When the contract goes out to tender, I dare say that we will find out whether the excellent deal secured by NHS Tayside for the pilot can be repeated. I hope that the SNP Government will not rule out, for ideological reasons, the opportunity to save the taxpayer millions of pounds that could be spent elsewhere in the NHS. The figures speak for themselves and they reflect the high quality of care and the excellent work of the staff at Stracathro.

Opponents of the independent health care sector will often argue that independent facilities will poach NHS staff. That point is covered in Ross Finnie's amendment. The technical term here is "additionality"—in other words, the principle that staff employed in the independent sector should bring additional capacity to the local health care system and should not be recruited at the expense of NHS staffing levels. In its report, PWC found that additionality had not been a significant problem at Stracathro. Part of the reason for that is that the hours operated in the SRTC tend to be outwith normal NHS working hours. As a result, staff are often happy to add to their existing part-time work by also working part-time in the Netcare project. There is therefore no negative impact on the work that people do for the NHS. People are able to enhance their earnings, which puts more money into the local economy. It is a win-win situation all round.

We should not threaten, for ideological reasons, the future of this very welcome project. It has secured the future of Stracathro hospital, and it should continue.

09:45

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): I am sad to say that the Conservative motion is misleading and premature. It is misleading for the reasons that the Minister for Public Health and Sport has already given, and it is premature because the Stracathro treatment centre has not been functioning long enough to allow its success or failure to be properly judged.

There is plenty of evidence from England about similar independent sector treatment centres, as Labour began the experiment there much earlier and it involves greater numbers. In 2007, a Department of Health report claimed that of the £1.4 billion-worth of contracts to English independent sector treatment centres, only £1.18 billion-worth of services and procedures were carried out, but the remaining £222 million still had to be paid to the private sector. Payment was

made for nothing, because the contracts obliged payment whether or not any service was provided.

In 2006, English ISTCs were paid for 50,000 operations that never took place—one centre was working to only 5 per cent of capacity. As a result, the second wave of ISTCs in England was drastically pruned, which obliged the Government to pay up to £25 million in bid costs to unsuccessful contractors. That is another case in which NHS money has been spent on nothing.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Would the member, as a former general practitioner, like to comment on whether the new GP contract is a case of providing money for nothing?

Ian McKee: As a former GP, I think that the new GP contract was perhaps the most unsuccessful thing that the Labour Government has ever organised, and it should be completely renegotiated. It is an enormous waste of money.

The problems that have been generated by ISTCs in England are not only financial. The accusations that the centres creamed off the easy cases and left the health service to foot the bill for more complex cases could not be adequately investigated by the Healthcare Commission, as the data from the independent sector was so poor. Most ISTCs did not take part in schemes to train young NHS doctors, so medical education suffered; and there was poor communication between the centres, which meant that transmission of test results and patient notes became more difficult.

It is no wonder that Gwyn Bevan, professor of management science at the London School of Economics, stated last year that even after seven years, there was little hard evidence that any benefit had been derived from that expensive initiative. However, perhaps things are different at Stracathro, and perhaps we have learned those lessons. I hope that that is the case, but there is, as yet, no robust evidence.

The Conservative motion states that the Stracathro centre is

"rated as excellent by its patients",

but it would be surprising if a new centre on which millions of pounds have been lavished—whoever it was provided by—was not welcomed by patients. The PricewaterhouseCoopers survey is very short on methodological detail, and replies were received from only 39 per cent of those who were surveyed. The provision of extra facilities is bound to reduce waiting times, whether those facilities are provided privately or on the NHS.

The motion states that the centre is saving the NHS millions of pounds. However, although the PricewaterhouseCoopers report states that there

were 2,200 referrals to the Stracathro regional treatment centre in its first 10 months of operation, the Tayside delivery committee reported on 12 March 2008 that there had been only 1,720 procedures to January 2008 since work began in February 2007, which is a shortfall of 480. It is possible that those procedures were paid for but not carried out—there is certainly such a penalty clause in the Stracathro agreement—and we need to know.

I hope that, one day, the facility—which is paid for from public funds—will be restored to NHS ownership and play its role in serving local communities as an integrated part of the national health service. The truth is that, in England, Labour's flirtation with the independent sector has been nothing short of a disaster. Hospitals have been forced to tender for services that they already provide, but have been prohibited from reducing their charges below an amount that is set by the Government, so they automatically lose the contract. GP practices have been taken over by large private companies against the wishes of the communities that they serve. There are also, of course, the ruinous private finance initiative contracts that have made fortunes for United Kingdom and foreign companies.

I understand the Conservatives' support for that flirtation with the independent sector—it is what they do—but I do not understand the support from those Labour Party members who profess respect for the ideals of Nye Bevan, or from the Liberals who boast about William Beveridge as the true father of the national health service. Those worthy gentlemen must have birlled in their graves when Labour and Lib Dem members in this chamber voted in 2004 to promote the private sector.

The NHS is a public service, and the SNP promises the people of Scotland that we will keep it that way. I support the SNP amendment.

09:50

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): It is wrong to rewrite history in any partnership, whether domestic or political. Ross Finnie said that it had been suggested that I would recite a "litany of failures", but Richard Simpson did not say that—he said that I would be "critical" of the failures. As Ross Finnie is always careful about detail, I remind him that that was exactly what was said.

With regard to the petition to keep the hospital open, we should not confuse Stracathro hospital with Netcare. Stracathro, which I have visited, is a very good hospital, but I am not happy with the report on the private company, Netcare Healthcare UK.

In response to Brian Adam's point about the private sector, I tell him—although I see that he has disappeared from the chamber—that as a caring socialist, I would not stand by and watch anyone suffer. To pick up on Ian McKee's point, Nye Bevan and the other pioneers in the movement would never have wanted us to do that—if the capacity was not available in the NHS, they would have wanted us to ensure that we built capacity by using the private sector if that was necessary. I do not have a problem with that.

I say in response to Ross Finnie's point that I always want to ensure that we try to build capacity in the NHS and use the private sector as little as possible. The private sector—if Brian Adam wants an idea of how best to use it—should be used for infertility services. According to one report, patients are waiting up to six years for infertility treatment—the situation is critical, and the Government must do something about it.

It is a revelation that, although the SNP Government claims to be committed to avoiding the use of the private sector, it has in its first 18 months in office delivered a massive expansion in that area. In Fife, only 17 cases were authorised for treatment in the private sector in 1999, but by the end of 2008, that number had risen to 270 patients. In Forth Valley, only three patients were treated by the private sector in 1999, but by the end of 2008, the number had reached 525. In Grampian, only 92 cases were treated in the private sector in 1999, but by the end of 2008 the figure had reached 969. In Tayside, no cases were treated in the private sector in 1999, but by the end of 2007, the sector was treating 426 cases.

Ian McKee: Does that not indicate that the Government of the time, which the member supported, did not provide enough NHS facilities and therefore caused the shortfall that required private intervention, which she says should take place only when the NHS cannot provide the services itself?

Helen Eadie: I ask the member why his party's Government has continued to expand the use of the private sector with great haste and vigour. That just shows that the SNP uses the private sector when it suits, which is a case of duplicity and deceit on a grand scale.

I am sure that other members will be interested to note what is contained in the minute of NHS Tayside's board meeting on 26 June. It states clearly that the director of public health for NHS Tayside, Dr Walker, requested that his dissent be recorded in relation to the value-for-money report by PricewaterhouseCoopers—the 10-month contract review of Netcare's three-year contract. I believe that his dissent was well founded, and anyone who carefully reads the report will see that it raises important questions.

The more I read of the report, the more incredulous I became—it made me raise my eyebrows, sit up and take notice. The figures that are used in the value-for-money assessment are taken from unaudited data sets, and no attempt has been made to verify or audit data sources. Astonishingly—and worryingly for the Scottish taxpayer—the contract requires that the NHS pay “unavoidable costs” in respect of any underreferral below the agreed threshold of 90 per cent. The figures to September 2007 show £139,000-worth of underreferral charges for that period, of which £128,000 was for “unavoidable costs”—as stated in the contract—that are required to be paid to Netcare in respect of activity that has not been undertaken.

If we seek to analyse the structural reasons why the NHS is more expensive—a figure of £2 million has been mentioned by the Tories—we need only consider the following to see how the dice are, as ever, loaded against the NHS. The report states:

“the SRTC has acceptance criteria meaning that clinically unstable patients, or those with significant co-morbidities are unlikely to be referred. This gives an overall more efficient and safe service appropriate for its setting but would, on average, lead to a lower cost per activity than in the NHS.”

The report also states:

“Post operative quality of major joints is unproven at this stage.”

In addition, the report shows that the patient satisfaction survey response rate was low—39 per cent is not excellent—which Mary Scanlon should acknowledge.

Financial records—including audited and unaudited accounts for the service provider—and any related reports should be made available, but such records have not yet been provided, or even requested. Initial difficulties with Netcare’s management systems for collecting, processing and delivering the required information have meant that a degree of prompting by the NHS has been necessary to obtain that information. The fact that Netcare has changed management teams three times since the start of the pilot has created instability.

As if all that was not bad enough, the report goes on to say:

“We have not reviewed and therefore do not make comment on the completeness of any legal documentation, in relation to health and safety, insurance and any necessary registrations, warranties and licences which are assumed to be in place.”

Frankly, I would make no such assumptions—

The Presiding Officer: You must close now.

Helen Eadie: I would make no such assumptions, most especially on health and safety

and insurance. I would want to be absolutely certain.

09:56

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Stracathro hospital is an ideal setting for patient treatment and recuperation, with an excellent and dedicated workforce. Historically, the hospital has treated NHS patients not only from Angus but from a much wider—indeed national—catchment area.

The hospital is important not only as an excellent medical facility but as an essential provider of employment in Angus and the Mearns that contributes to maintaining educational and other public services in the local area. That is why I fought to save Stracathro from threatened closure and why I have visited and welcomed the new Scottish regional treatment centre. The SRTC is part of the new growth of services at Stracathro—growth that is essential to ensure the hospital’s future as part of the overall NHS hospitals system in Angus and Tayside.

Although the Tory motion is correct to state that the pilot project has added value to NHS services, any attempt to turn a specific, highly specialised, excellent but limited service into a whole new generalised national system would be a very different proposal. Such attempts elsewhere have led to public bail-outs of private facilities, which were not capable of dealing with wider workloads. Where justified by results, the two-year pilot project should rightly be praised for its contribution. However, to claim that the pilot should be extended to the whole NHS system or become the basis of our national system is simply dangerous dogma.

Mary Scanlon: Where do we propose to extend the SRTC pilot to the NHS across Scotland? Can the member provide a reference for that?

Andrew Welsh: I refer the member to Mrs Thatcher—I had the misfortune of watching her in action—who tried that before. I remember the real consequences of her attitude: NHS cutbacks and closures. I remember the campaigns to save Arbroath infirmary and Stracathro hospital as well as other NHS services. The Tory philosophy leads to privatisation by stealth and should be opposed.

The real long-term answer to NHS improvement is the SNP Government’s action in strengthening our national health service system. We need a system that is available to all and which is supported by its professionals and workers. The SNP rejects utterly any idea of an exclusive, cheque-book health care system that is based on profit rather than on need.

The challenge of providing better, faster, more local and more flexible access to health care is, by

definition, on-going, but Scotland's greatest challenge is in tackling health inequalities nationwide. Private facilities are a useful addition where they can be proven to be effective, but they do not address that wider problem. The Tory motion certainly does not address that point either.

The primary objective should be to grow NHS capacity by building on the Scottish Government's increase in health spending of 13 per cent over three years, taking the total NHS budget to £11.5 billion. The objective should be to strengthen and build our national system rather than to privatise it. Such public investment in, and commitment to, our national health service is the way forward. We do not need any large-scale farming out of core services to the exclusive private health care industry. That is the underlying subtext of the Tories' attitude and of the motion. They might not state that, but we know their history and we should be wary of it. There are few things worse than unrepentant Tories, but we obviously have a few here this morning. Clearly, the Tories have failed to learn anything from their mistakes. I will most certainly support the SNP amendment.

10:01

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this morning's debate on the NHS and the independent sector. Before I turn to the substance of Mary Scanlon's motion, I pay tribute to her for the amount of work that she does on health and other issues in the Parliament. She really is a credit to the Conservative group.

The motion deals with the NHS and the independent sector by making specific reference to the success of the Scottish regional treatment centre at Stracathro hospital. When that centre was opened in 2006, it was welcomed by Shona Robison, who represents the SNP on the front bench today. At the time, the centre was put forward as a solution that would meet local needs. Stracathro has been successful in reducing waiting times and helping patients, so, from that point of view, it is to be complimented.

As well as that solution for the east of Scotland, the Labour amendment refers to a solution that was used in the west of Scotland, where the Golden Jubilee hospital was taken into NHS control. The Golden Jubilee is becoming a very modern hospital.

Nanette Milne: Does the member acknowledge that the NHS could have used those facilities for its patients without buying the hospital from the private sector? Does he accept that it would have been better to use that money—I recollect that it was at least £35 million—for front-line services?

James Kelly: Given the Golden Jubilee hospital's development since that decision was taken, there is no doubt that patients feel that the decision was worth while. There have been practical benefits and improvements in health care for those who have attended the Golden Jubilee hospital in Clydebank. Indeed, given that one of the big issues in the west of Scotland is heart disease, the west of Scotland has benefited from having such a facility under public control.

On the challenges facing the NHS, given the importance of achieving what the Conservative motion refers to as

“the best possible healthcare for the people of Scotland”,

there is no doubt that the issues that the Parliament needs to face up to include not just health inequalities—that is, how we improve access for all—but the treatment of cancer patients. Along with clinicians, patients and other MSPs, I attended the Scotland against cancer conference in Glasgow last Friday. In a number of presentations and workshops, we heard people speak about the important issues of diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle choices. There is also no doubt that, in coming up with solutions to address the issues raised in those workshops, we need to remember the importance of retaining staff and expertise within the NHS. That point is acknowledged in the Liberal Democrats' amendment.

The fact that a third of the Scottish budget—more than £10 billion—is at the disposal of health and wellbeing shows the size not only of the resources at our disposal but of the issues that we face. In deploying that budget, the default position should be to retain a publicly funded NHS. However, given the challenges that we face, I acknowledge that we should not be completely inflexible. In instances such as the Scottish regional treatment centre, we should consider other mechanisms.

We must put patients first. The NHS—Nye Bevan's tremendous creation—was 60 last year. We must maintain it, consolidate it and build on it, ensuring that we give the NHS another successful 60 years.

10:05

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): My colleague Ross Finnie referred to the debate as being “rather artificial”. However, some of the main threads have become apparent. I associate myself with his remark that there is no plea in the Conservative motion for an increase in private medicine in Scotland. I back him when he says that there should be no displacement of NHS services. Full competition and duplication are simply not the way forward.

There is perhaps broad consensus among members on that.

Mary Scanlon was ably supported by a splendid backing chorus—the choreography and timing were impeccable. The Conservatives clearly have an excellent artistic director. I pay tribute to the number of Tories who managed to rise out of their beds in good time to join us.

David McLetchie: Unlike our colleagues, the Liberal Democrats.

Ross Finnie: We have more sense.

Jamie Stone: I will stick to the main subject of the debate.

Mary Scanlon wisely referred to benefit claimants. We sometimes forget, in our devolved Parliament, that the issue can affect Scotland's revenue stream. We should always keep an eye on that.

I liked Shona Robison's expression that we should use the private sector "tactically, not strategically". That is the right approach. She used the mantra "the tightest settlement", which her master has been using and which he has instructed all SNP members to use. I think that we will hear more of it. We might debate whether the settlement is the tightest yet or whether, in fact, it is the most generous yet. There would be some mileage in having that debate.

I admonish Andrew Welsh for frightening members by summoning up a ghost from the past—but the past it is. I believe that she was on television last night, and I am sure that we wish the grand old baroness the best of health.

Ian McKee and Helen Eadie gave us what was probably one of the more extreme views in the debate. However, it was a timely reminder—indeed a stark warning—of some of the possible problems. The missing figures—the difference between 2,200 procedures and 1,720—is a very curious issue. An audit is essential to find out where the money has gone. As long as such discrepancies exist, doubt is cast on any evaluation of what is being delivered at Stracathro.

Murdo Fraser and Andrew Welsh's point about employment is hugely important and should not be forgotten. In my and Mary Scanlon's part of the world, the delivery of quality jobs—for instance, at Caithness general hospital, where consultants deliver maternity and other services—brings cash into the local economy. That may be a side factor, but it is a factor that should not be forgotten during the current recession. I have no doubt that that is an important aspect of Stracathro.

Helen Eadie: Jamie Stone talked about my and Ian McKee's extreme views. Is he therefore saying

that the views that I referred to, which were the views of PricewaterhouseCoopers, are extreme?

Jamie Stone: Perhaps the word "extreme" was wrong, but there was a lot of colour in what the members said, and it may have been a reminder to them of a proper attitude that we would be unwise to forget. The challenge to us from Helen Eadie and Dr McKee to check and evaluate was entirely appropriate.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Jamie Stone: No. I really must conclude now.

Dr Simpson was challenged in an intervention to give examples of where the private sector has delivered, and he was correct to mention the treatment of breast cancer and infertility. Although the private sector has a role, I go back to what Ross Finnie said, which is that my party does not seek to displace NHS services. I very much associate myself with the minister's language: the use of the private sector should be "tactical, not strategic".

I support the amendment in Mr Finnie's name.

10:10

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Ross Finnie began his speech by saying that, given the wording in the motion, the debate was "rather artificial"; nonetheless, it has been interesting, not least because I do not think that I have, in recent times, heard so many tributes paid to the former Executive by the Conservatives. Forgive me if I feel ever so slightly suspicious of Tories bearing gifts.

Mary Scanlon was praised by my colleague James Kelly for all her work on health. I add my thanks to her for that. However, I am perhaps slightly more suspicious than James Kelly—Jamie Stone referred to a choreographed chorus line, and the Conservatives have indeed been pretty well choreographed so far this morning. However, we have not heard the wind-up speech yet, and it may well be a wind-up, depending on what the Conservative member who sums up has to say to us.

David McLetchie asked whether we deleted all reference to the previous Executive in our amendment because we were unhappy with its record. I shall be very clear on that. We have no difficulty with the record of the previous Executive; indeed, our amendment seeks to get on the record our pride in taking the former Health Care International hospital—now the Golden Jubilee—back into the NHS. That important step has been, as James Kelly outlined, of great benefit to patients. I put on record my thanks to Malcolm Chisholm for all his work on that.

Further, I recall a number of occasions on which we were accused of lodging self-congratulatory motions when we were in government. I hope that the Tories will accept that this morning we are being slightly modest by not only seeking to gain plaudits for what we did in the past but looking to the future.

It is a fundamental principle of the NHS that it should provide everyone with the best possible treatment, irrespective of ability to pay. That is why the Labour Party is so determined to ensure that the NHS's fundamental principles remain. That means that we should scrutinise everything in detail. We welcome the pilot and want to ensure that it goes ahead, not least to keep Stracathro hospital open, providing that local service. However, Helen Eadie and Ian McKee raised the issue of looking in more detail at the results of the pilot. That is a fair point.

Mary Scanlon referred to the position of other forms of independent health care provision in the NHS, such as locum doctors and work with the Scottish Prison Service. Like Richard Simpson, I am pleased that the health services that will in future be provided to the SPS will come back into NHS provision.

Mary Scanlon: They are not all coming back into the NHS. In fact, Northern Constabulary has just signed another contract with Medacs. I think that Atos, too, provides a good service. Helen Eadie and Ian McKee did not mention the fact that Netcare had to provide £112,000 of activity free of charge due to contracted waiting time breaches. The figures are not all one way.

Cathy Jamieson: I am sure that Helen Eadie and others will scrutinise that in detail.

I say to the minister that the trade union Unison is concerned about the continued use of agency and bank staff to fill shortages and vacancies in the NHS, especially as some of them are on zero-hours contracts. I hope that we can address that in the future.

I want to correct a misunderstanding—if such it was—by Mary Scanlon, who suggested that our amendment deletes all references to supporting or recognising the value of the staff at Stracathro. In fact, it does not do that; it ensures that we recognise the value of the staff at both Stracathro and the Golden Jubilee hospital. We have also said that we will support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Mary Scanlon: It is important that I put on record the fact that I commented on the SNP's amendment, which "congratulates" NHS staff on their treatment of NHS patients but only "notes" the role of private sector staff in treating NHS patients. I made no reference to the Labour amendment in that context.

Cathy Jamieson: That is a helpful clarification. If there was no intention to criticise the Labour amendment, I hope that the Conservatives might consider supporting it.

Murdo Fraser suggested that ideology should not threaten Stracathro. I would argue that ideology should not threaten the national health service. It is the jewel in the crown and something of which the Labour Party is extremely proud, having developed it. Of course we want it to continue as the way in which we provide services for the vast majority of our patients.

10:16

Shona Robison: This has been an interesting debate. The most revealing aspect of it has been the slightly confused and uncomfortable position of Labour members, as reflected in their speeches, some of which had a history-starts-today feel about them.

Our position is clear, as set out in "Better Health, Better Care: Action Plan", which stresses public ownership through a more mutual approach, distancing the NHS in Scotland still further from what we would describe as the divisive market-oriented models that are favoured by some members. That document confirms the NHS's place as a public service that is delivered in partnership with the public.

We have made it clear that we are committed to investing taxpayers' money in the NHS rather than in building up private sector capacity. However, we have no difficulty with NHS boards using existing independent sector capacity at the margins for the benefit of NHS patients, although any use of the private sector by boards will continue to be minimal.

I correct Helen Eadie, who clearly did not listen to a word that I said in my opening speech. The statistics that she cited were based on a false premise. She did not mention the fact that half the figures that she was using included the figures for private nursing homes and care homes that are run by local authorities, charities and hospices. I say to her that the figures for acute activity—leaving aside Stracathro, on which she clearly has her own views—show a 37 per cent reduction in the use of the private sector between 2006 and 2008.

We continue to provide increased resources to enable NHS boards to invest in their infrastructure, which supports the delivery of modern health care services. By allocating resources directly to NHS boards, we are ensuring both that local priorities can be addressed and that there is consistency with national and regional planning agendas. For example, in November 2007 and January 2008, the Golden Jubilee hospital successfully opened

two new dedicated orthopaedic theatres. That has enabled the hospital to increase the number of major joint replacement operations by around 1,000, taking the total capacity to around 2,500 hip and knee replacement operations. In addition, a range of minor procedures is undertaken each year. That benefits patients from throughout Scotland. It is now one of the biggest such units in Scotland. Also, last April, we announced £550 million of additional funding towards the development of the new Southern hospitals project in Glasgow, which incorporates the new 240-bed children's hospital.

NHS boards are also making resources available to expand services from their capital and revenue allocations. Examples of that include the extension to Ayrshire community hospital out-patient department; the creation of a new endoscopy suite at Borders general hospital; and an upgrade of X-ray and computed tomography facilities and the creation of a new magnetic resonance imaging suite in Dumfries and Galloway. That move enabled the repatriation of a significant contract from the independent sector in July 2008. Those developments are all aimed at ensuring that NHS boards are expanding their services to meet their populations' needs.

However, the NHS is not about adding new capacity without making best use of existing resources. Initiatives such as lean in Lothian have released significant additional resources for investment in front-line services, which is reflected in increasing activity. The overall number of procedures undertaken in NHS acute hospitals increased by more than 27,000 in 2007-08 compared with the previous year. All of that is leading to the success of the NHS in delivering significant reductions in waiting times. No doubt, we will have a further opportunity to discuss that in next week's debate. I look forward to highlighting the achievements of the NHS in reducing waiting times in that debate.

We are very pleased that there are now more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals working in Scotland than ever before. The total number of staff who are employed by the NHS in Scotland has increased by more than 2 per cent, bringing the head count to more than 165,000 at September 2008. That figure includes a significant increase in the number of medical staff. The actions that are being taken by the Government and by NHS boards clearly show that the health service is well equipped to meet the needs and expectations of the people of Scotland.

10:21

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I thank all members for what has been a good-humoured debate. More than on any other issue

relating to the future of health care in Scotland, we take a different view from the Government in our readiness to work enthusiastically with the independent sector to the benefit of the NHS.

Although the independent sector works at the margins in providing health care to a country that for 60 years has benefited from its NHS, we have never believed that those who work in the independent sector—whether as nurses, doctors or auxiliary workers—are any less committed to the care of their patients, any less hard working or any less deserving of our support, gratitude and praise. They are not second-class health workers but first-class health professionals, so the contempt of the rhetoric that has been thoughtlessly directed at them is unworthy and misplaced.

The inherent hostility of the SNP towards the independent sector is well documented. It is worn brazenly as a badge of honour, yet contradicted every day by the Government's actions. As the debate has illustrated, it is precisely because the SNP in government has recognised the opportunity that the independent sector presents to offer a better service to NHS patients that more NHS patients than at any time since devolution are being treated by the independent sector. The most dramatic increase has taken place since the SNP Government came into office.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that point?

Jackson Carlaw: No, I will not give way on that point, because I know that the minister would repeat the same dull statistic that she gave us before, which selectively slices away all the patients to whom she does not care to refer.

No doubt, all of that explains the diplomatic absence of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing from the chamber this morning—blushes have been spared.

Andrew Welsh told us that, despite the Stracathro pilot being an undoubted success, we should dismiss it out of hand because, 19 years ago, the Conservative Party was led by Margaret Thatcher. I am sure that that will be a great comfort to the staff at Stracathro.

I recognise ministers' mealy-mouthed acceptance of the fact that the independent sector can be used almost as a disposable asset whose primary role is to improve treatment waiting times, not for the sake of patients but to add to the spin that polishes ministers' haloes when they take the credit for waiting time reductions. However, that is poor reward. Today offered ministers the opportunity to be a bit more fulsome in their thanks and tributes to those in the independent sector who work as hard as anyone else; yet, as Mary Scanlon observed, the most that they could find it

within themselves to do was to note those people's contribution.

I find the Government's hostility to the independent sector perplexing. We are talking about a very practical partnership that was established at Stracathro by Andy Kerr under the previous Executive. It is a bold initiative from which Richard Simpson and Cathy Jamieson have sought to distance themselves this morning by deleting the fulsome tribute that we are prepared to offer. Perhaps in disavowing Andy Kerr's record as health minister they will also accept the mistake that he made in proposing to close accident and emergency facilities throughout Scotland.

The pilot had a clear intention, which was to consider the potential additional use to which NHS operating theatres could be put when they were not being used by the NHS. Dr Ian McKee advised us that two years was not long enough to judge the success of the pilot. I assume, therefore, that he is similarly unconvinced about the success of the SNP Government after just two years. On that, at least, I think that the chamber is agreed.

By any standard, the Stracathro pilot has been a success. We have heard how it has performed operations successfully at a cost of some £2 million less than the NHS. We have heard about the outstanding patient satisfaction. Those patients would probably also be concerned about any creeping privatisation of the NHS. However, having benefited from the treatment that they have received, they can also see that a practical partnership with the independent sector that is designed to benefit the NHS makes political sense.

We can celebrate, too, the record at Stracathro of no hospital-acquired infections. I imagine that a number of us have visited the hospital and have seen for ourselves the commitment of those involved.

The model has worked. Given that, why would any Government not wish to do for patients across Scotland what is being done for patients in Tayside, Grampian and Fife? This Government, however, positively sizzles at the very presence of the independent sector, as is witnessed elsewhere by its determination to end all contracted-out cleaning, allegedly to improve performance in tackling health care acquired infections, even though the worst example of deaths due to an outbreak of *Clostridium difficile* occurred at a hospital that had in-house cleaning and, in any event, the reasons for the outbreak were complicated and extensive and the outbreak was certainly not simply the responsibility of the in-house cleaning team.

We have a Government that has used the independent sector to provide more treatments to

NHS patients than any other Government and has inherited a pilot that is supported by all of the other parties in the chamber and is proving to be a success.

We call on the Government to shelve its caustic rhetoric, to recognise the outstanding incremental contribution that the independent sector has made and to set aside its misplaced prejudice against anyone outside of the NHS who might have a contribution to make. We are not asking the Government to set aside for one moment its commitment to the NHS or to the many worthwhile improvements that it has embarked on; we are asking only that it bury its dogma and put the interests of patients first. Perhaps we are asking for too much, though. SNP dogma will disadvantage patients in Scotland, which is surely the most damning indictment of all.

Alcohol Strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3778, in the name of Bill Aitken, on alcohol strategy.

10:27

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I rise to speak to a motion on a debate that has been running for some months. In one respect, at least, we are making progress. Only two days ago, the Government seemed determined to railroad its measures through the Parliament in subordinate legislation regulations, but it has now thought better of following that anti-democratic line. I have to say that not since Saul went on his celebrated excursion to Damascus has there been such a conversion. Indeed, some might think that it is a deathbed conversion.

Having dealt with the process, we now need to deal with the practicalities. We should start on the basis of a common agreement not that Scotland's relationship with alcohol is problematical, but that some people's relationship is highly problematical and that we require to apply our minds to ways of resolving or at least improving the situation. That will not be done by taking a scattergun approach. We need to consider seriously whether we are using all available tools prior to considering further measures.

The one truth is that the existing law is not being applied with the necessary vigour. It is an offence to serve drink to people under the age of 18 and it is an offence for those under that age to seek to purchase drink. It is an offence to enter licensed premises while drunk or to be in licensed premises while drunk, and it is an offence to serve a drunk person. The number of prosecutions for those offences has been derisory, and only with test purchasing have any significant moves been made to combat underage drinking and the difficulties that it causes.

The weak approach that has been adopted by licensing boards has not helped. Sellers who persistently or recklessly sell drink to young people should forfeit their licence. Licensing boards require to get real. However, licensing boards do not need to have the buck passed to them by the Scottish Government, which is what is happening with regard to the ban on 18 to 21-year-olds buying drink from off-sales premises. That crass policy should be scrapped, and the aim of imposing that duty on local authorities is a device simply to keep face rather than to recognise the reality.

We need to consider how we can get all agencies and the public to co-operate. Some

excellent work has already been done by the licensed trade in combating underage drinking, but more needs to be done. We are attracted to the community alcohol partnerships that have been piloted down south, particularly in Cambridgeshire, where information sharing between off-trade retailers, the police and trading standards officers has made a significant contribution. For example, in St Neots, it has delivered a 42 per cent decrease in antisocial behaviour incidents over a six-month period. The way forward is through co-operation, not diktat.

We have to recognise that problematical drinkers in Scotland represent a minority of the population, and we must take action that is properly targeted and effective.

"We do not want the responsible, sensible majority of moderate drinkers to have to pay more or suffer as a result of the excesses of a small minority."

In that respect, I do not claim that the Conservatives have the monopoly of wisdom on this matter. Indeed, I am prepared to accept that there might be some criticism of the words that I have just used and that they might lack the eloquent phrasing and clarity of expression that one would expect from a speaker from this side of the chamber. However, they are the precise words that Gordon Brown used last Monday morning at a press conference in Downing Street. My authority for that is no less an organ than *The Guardian*, which, as people such as Cathy Jamieson might expect, is not my preferred reading.

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Does the member recognise the worryingly high level of people who consistently drink more than the recommended limits? Does he think that that is a problem or not?

Bill Aitken: I think that it is a problem, and that those are the people who require to be targeted. We must target the problem drinkers and the problem drinks. We can target the problem drinkers, as is happening in Glasgow, by an approach that uses much more hands-on policing and involves licensed premises being visited with the aim of ensuring that the existing laws are obeyed in full. We can deal with the problem drinks by working with the Westminster Government to increase tax on some of the products that do the most damage, such as super-strength ciders and beers. Targeted duty changes are the answer, not across-the-board price increases.

The Scottish Government has got it all wrong. In formulating an alcohol policy, we should work with the trade and the public, insist that the police and the Procurator Fiscal Service play their part, and let the public see for once that we are attacking those who are the source of the problem and not

attempting to deal with the matter in an unrealistic and simplistic manner.

The health service has a role to play, and we have to ensure that there is greater education in schools. We have to offer alcohol counselling to those who are admitted to accident and emergency units as a result of alcohol incidents, and we have to encourage the drink trade to ensure that 125ml glasses, for example, are provided. However, above all, we have to recognise that only by working together will we get the result that we all seek to achieve. We cannot rule by diktat.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the decision of the Scottish Government to incorporate its proposals for reform of the law relating to the sale of alcohol into a new health Bill, which will facilitate democratic accountability and greater parliamentary and public scrutiny of its proposals; calls on the Scottish Government to place greater emphasis on a much more rigorous application of the existing licensing laws and to recognise that any changes can be introduced only on the basis of a wider and meaningful consultation with the licensed trade and Scotland's communities, and believes that any measures taken to tackle binge drinking and underage drinking must be properly targeted and effective so that the responsible, sensible majority of moderate drinkers do not have to pay more or suffer as a result of the excesses of a small minority.

10:33

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I do not know whether the Tories were trying to be helpful—I suspect not—but I welcome this debate, because it gives us an opportunity to reflect on the scale of the problem and set out our determination to show bold and clear leadership.

Members might want to reflect on the fact that today is the third anniversary of the ban on smoking in public spaces, which is a perfect example of what can be achieved when parties are prepared to come together and show collective leadership. However, I am sure that the fact that the Tories initially opposed that progressive social change as well will not be lost on anyone.

There is no doubt that alcohol misuse is holding us back. As today's Audit Scotland report reminds us, it is costing us £2.25 billion a year—a staggering figure that amounts to £500 for every adult in the country. However, the human cost in health harms is even more alarming. More than 40,000 hospital admissions a year are due to alcohol-related illness and injury, and we have one of the fastest growing rates of liver disease and cirrhosis in the world. We have a major health issue on our hands, and it ranges across social groups and ages. The Tories must recognise the number of people who regularly exceed the

recommended limits and acknowledge that that is not just a minority problem. We all have a responsibility to tackle the issue. The question is how we do that. As our alcohol framework makes clear, cultural change, education, preventive measures and better treatment and support are all essential. Indeed, only within that broader context will the more far-reaching measures that we propose be effective.

It is also right to say that we should focus more on ensuring that there is better enforcement of the current laws, and we are doing that. The test purchasing programme has already resulted in a tightening up of sales to underage young people. That work is continuing and it will be reinforced as the licensing regime comes fully into force in September with the mandatory “no proof of age, no sale” provisions. We will monitor the effectiveness of the new regime and continue to work closely with stakeholders, including the licensed trade, to identify what more we can do.

However, given the scale of the problem, we believe that we must go further. That is why we set out such a far-reaching range of proposals in our framework—a ban on promotions, a duty on licensing boards to consider increasing the off-sales age to 21 and a right for the police to ask them to do so, a social responsibility fee for some retailers, and, yes, minimum pricing for alcohol.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The minister mentioned the proposal to ban off-sales to under-21s. She made the point that there was cross-party support for the smoking legislation and that the Parliament's voice was known. The Parliament has made its voice known on the proposal on under-21s, but the Government is not listening.

Nicola Sturgeon: I did mention that proposal. If Mike Rumbles reads our framework, he will see that we have listened and substantially modified the proposal. People have a duty to reflect on that.

I will say a little about minimum pricing. We are convinced that we need to tackle pocket-money prices. The evidence shows that increases in health harms are driven by increased consumption, which in turn is driven by price. Alcohol is nearly 70 per cent more affordable than it was in 1980 and consumption has increased by about 20 per cent since then. There have been claims, mostly from the alcohol industry, that a minimum price would be illegal, but those claims are unsubstantiated, because they lack detail and a crucial piece of information—that is, what the minimum price would be. As the Parliament would expect, we have carefully considered the legal issues and will continue to do so as the proposal is taken forward. We want it to succeed, which means we must do things properly and carefully.

We have also heard claims that minimum pricing will hit the majority of responsible drinkers in their pockets and punish them for the habits of a minority, but the products that will be most affected are the low-cost, high-alcohol products, which tend not to be consumed by moderate drinkers. That is why the research on minimum pricing shows that a minimum price of 40p a unit would require moderate drinkers to spend, perhaps, only an extra 11p a week.

We believe that minimum pricing has a big part to play, but we also recognise that, on this issue, as on all our proposals, we have a need and a duty to take people with us as far as we can. We are a minority Government, and I therefore recognise the need to work with other parties in the Parliament. Our willingness to listen to others' views was, I hope, well demonstrated this week by our decision on the parliamentary route that we intend to take for our reforms. We will now bring the measures together in a single health bill to be introduced later in the year. The bill will include the full package of reforms that we outlined in our framework and it will allow for extensive scrutiny and debate.

Let me be clear: I want to work with others, but for that approach to be productive it requires other parties also to be prepared to act. To that end, I welcome Labour's indication earlier this week that it will support some of our key proposals. I hope that we can make some common cause with the Liberals and even with the Tories. However, let me also be clear that the bottom line is that the Government is determined to show leadership. We believe that our package of measures provides the bold but effective response that is required to tackle what has become a major health challenge for Scotland, and a challenge that we believe everybody in the Parliament has a responsibility to face up to and meet.

I move amendment S3M-3778.2, to leave out from "binge drinking" to end and insert:

"harmful drinking and underage drinking must be workable and properly targeted so that, while the responsible, sensible majority of moderate drinkers are not unnecessarily penalised, wider issues of excess consumption contributing to huge costs to Scottish society are effectively addressed."

10:40

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is an important debate in terms of its merits and the parliamentary issues that lie behind it.

The Scottish National Party Government has rightly identified the problem of alcohol—Scotland's shame, one might say—as a key challenge. It is interesting that we now have "bold" policies in the health realm and "tough" policies in the justice realm. One sometimes wonders

whether the words and the presentation are more important than the substance. The reality is that the SNP Government has made a right hash of putting in place the policies to tackle the problem of alcohol. It is rightly inspired by what happened with the smoking ban, but its search for a totemic idea first led it to suggest that young people were the heart of the problem and that all would be well if the age for the purchase of alcohol from off-sales premises was increased to 21. At that point, everyone in sight rounded on the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, including the trade, the public and even the youth wing of his party. The policy was clearly a dead-parrot policy.

Attention then switched to his other big idea, which was minimum pricing. Unfortunately, he had the clever wheeze of trying to slip the measure through the Parliament in subordinate legislation rather than exposing it to public and parliamentary scrutiny. That was a constitutional outrage that undermined the whole point of having a Scottish Parliament. The policy had other problems, too. No details were produced of how it would work.

Nicola Sturgeon: Now that we have got the process argument out of the way, I wonder whether the Liberal Democrats will tell us where they stand on minimum pricing. Does Robert Brown believe that Nick Clegg, Chris Huhne and the Liberal Democrat health spokesman at Westminster are wrong to support minimum pricing?

Robert Brown: I was going to give some of the background to the matter. We are talking about the problems with the SNP Government's policy.

We do not have the details of the minimum pricing policy, but the examples suggest that it would hit the Scottish whisky industry at home and abroad. It seems that the general public would pay for the policy, yet one study predicts that it would change the drinking levels of hardened drinkers by only 2.3 per cent. That is hardly the totemic answer. The SNP Government has managed to produce not bold and clear leadership, as the cabinet secretary suggested, but a mix of policies that will cause the maximum controversy and hit the average citizen and many businesses hard with both higher costs at a time of great economic crisis and greatly increased bureaucracy. The policies seem likely to have the least beneficial effect.

However, I am sure that the Parliament will want to give credit to the SNP Government for bowing, if belatedly, to the criticism that has been levied at the process and announcing that it will proceed by way of a health bill in the autumn, thus meeting the demand that I made of it in my motion on 9 March. Why it did not do that in the first place is, frankly, beyond my comprehension. The result is that, for the second week in a row, an Opposition

motion has been pre-empted by an SNP Government strike. Last week, that involved Labour and police numbers—again, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice was involved—and this week it is the Tories and alcohol. That is clever politics but poor statesmanship. The manoeuvres reveal growing problems at the heart of the SNP Government.

Let us examine the position further. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice's position on police numbers has been all over the place. He is the grand old Duke of York of police numbers, marching his troops up and down various hills to no good effect. The cabinet secretary got his fingers burned on a legislative consent motion on data sharing under the Coroners and Justice Bill. He appeared not to have read the documents and was ready to surrender wide-ranging powers to Westminster. At best, he had not recognised the obvious scorpions that were lurking in the grass. He has now been relieved of control over a key policy that he had made his own but which has mutated seamlessly, without change of substance, from being under the control of the justice department to suddenly being included in a health bill that will apparently be taken forward by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. One wonders what sin Nicola Sturgeon has committed to be handed this poisoned chalice.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Robert Brown: No. I need to make some progress.

In short, we have an SNP Government that has demoted its justice secretary and stripped him of key functions. The Government has lost its way on one of its few remaining flagship policies. It has delayed the whole process by six months and it still lacks the coherent policies that are needed to tackle Scotland's alcohol challenges. It is a Government without clear direction or the strength of purpose to act in Scotland's interests.

Nevertheless, there is good will in the chamber to come to the aid of a drifting Government on this key issue. Today's debate can help to give a bit of direction and focus to the necessary policies. The motion and the amendments contain elements that we can all agree with. The motion focuses on the parliamentary process, the need to consult various relevant interests and the absolutely necessary requirement to enforce the existing laws more rigorously. The Liberal Democrats have loudly led calls on such matters and have been supported by all parties. However, I take slight issue with the thrust of the rest of the motion. It properly targets binge and underage drinking and the rights of moderate drinkers, but it fails to identify the fact that problem drinking exists as part of a more widespread culture in all age groups in Scotland. I

agree with some of the cabinet secretary's comments in that regard. That culture is different from and more deep-seated than the culture in the rest of the United Kingdom or across Europe, and it is at the heart of the issue. Changing our culture requires to be at the heart of our approach.

Earlier, I said that the mix of policies has to be right and that the SNP minority Government is still not fully listening. If, as appears to be the case, its health bill includes its watered-down version of the under-21 ban, its arbitrary social responsibility fee or the bureaucratic minimum pricing proposal, it will be difficult for the bill to obtain parliamentary support. Lots of time and public money could be wasted on developing proposals that might have to be dropped at the end of the day. The sensible way forward is to dump them now and concentrate on things that can obtain parliamentary support, such as the highly innovative idea of the youth commission on alcohol, on which work is proceeding. That work will have enthusiastic Liberal Democrat support. The proposals to limit irresponsible alcohol promotions and the initiative on wine glass sizes can also obtain parliamentary support.

In conclusion, the Liberal Democrats stand ready to work positively with the Government and to contribute our ideas to tackle the challenges of excessive alcohol consumption and problem drinking—which have evil effects on violent crime rates and result in burdens on the national health service—and the central need for cultural change.

The Government has had a false start, but it now has a chance to do things properly. The Conservative motion as amended by the Liberal Democrat amendment would identify the right target and strike the right balance. I hope that our amendment will attract support.

I move amendment S3M-3778.1, to leave out from “any changes” to end and insert:

“tackling Scotland's complex relationship with alcohol will require significant and long-term cultural change, and believes that any proposals for reform of the law should be targeted and evidence-based, introduced on the basis of strong public support and following meaningful consultation with all relevant interests and stakeholders to ensure that measures to address problematic alcohol consumption do not unfairly penalise the majority of individuals who enjoy alcohol responsibly.”

10:47

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I hope that we will have a mature debate today and in the coming weeks and months so that we can tackle a serious problem. Indeed, I hope that the debate will be more mature than the relationship that Scots have with alcohol, which is anything but mature. We have a very uneasy—indeed, sometimes a dangerous—

relationship with alcohol. At times, we have promoted a hard-drinking culture and people have assessed how much they have enjoyed a night out at the weekend by how little they can remember of it. We cannot be proud of that in Scotland. We must change that culture.

We must acknowledge what the Audit Scotland report that was released this morning identifies. We need greater focus on a number of issues. We must focus on how our spending patterns follow what needs to be done to treat people who have alcohol problems and misuse alcohol and to prevent alcohol problems arising in the first place. The Audit Scotland report contains salutary points about the balance between the money that is spent on treatment and the money that is spent on prevention.

We must recognise that more women are drinking far more than the recommended levels of alcohol and that many of them perhaps do not realise the dangers that they are putting themselves in by consuming what they might think are relatively small amounts. Such women probably do not get drunk or binge drink, but they are nonetheless putting their health at risk. We must also recognise the strain on our accident and emergency units, not only on Friday and Saturday nights and not only because of teenagers who overindulge; others also put strain on those units. Violent crime and other issues go along with problem drinking. The status quo is not an option. We cannot simply say that we are not going to do anything.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's shift of emphasis from considering implementing proposals by regulations that will not be properly scrutinised to having a full and proper debate and consultation. We support the amendment in the name of the cabinet secretary—indeed, I lodged an identical amendment last night—because we want to build consensus, and the way to do that is to involve as many people as possible in the debate. The cabinet secretary must bring together industry representatives, work on a cross-party basis and work with the communities and those who are affected on the front line by having to deal with the problems of alcohol misuse. In building that consensus, I hope that she will recognise that some of her proposals have not found universal favour and that she will be prepared to compromise.

I want to raise a couple of issues about which we need to have a serious debate. Nicola Sturgeon talked about the pocket-money prices of alcohol, the relative cheapness of some alcohol products, and the possible need to introduce minimum pricing. Many people—the family that cannot afford an expensive night out at the pub or in a club, for example—will wonder what risk is

posed by a £10 meal deal that includes a bottle of wine, which a minimum pricing regime potentially would outlaw. A unit pricing regime could mean that the price of some premium products that our whisky industry exports would increase while nothing would be done to tackle the problems caused by alcopops and other drinks that are favoured by those who cause mayhem on our streets. Communities that are plagued by antisocial behaviour would wonder whether the balance was right. People who could go online and order drink from south of the border if there was no minimum pricing regime there would, of course, have an advantage over people who go to the corner shop. Those issues are real and serious. That is not to say that we do not have to do something; rather, we must address those real and serious concerns if we want to move on.

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with much of what Cathy Jamieson says. I want to build consensus and look forward to working with her. However, I ask for her views on two issues. First, does she agree that, although consensus is important, sometimes politicians must lead public opinion and not just follow it? Secondly, does she acknowledge that we have given absolute assurances that the meal deals that she mentions will be excluded from the proposals?

Cathy Jamieson: It is important that politicians of all parties lead public opinion, which is why it is so important that we try to build consensus. Changing public opinion is not simply about stating a case, refusing to move and refusing to consider what the public have to say. I welcome the cabinet secretary's assurance that so-called meal deals will be excluded. We must have debates on such issues, because surely we should be able to talk to and educate people about drinking responsibly.

Mike Rumbles *rose—*

Bill Aitken *rose—*

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

Cathy Jamieson: I am sorry that I do not have time to take further interventions.

We should not have a situation in which only people on the lowest incomes think that they are being squeezed when others, particularly those who cause the mayhem on our streets, find that they are being let off the hook.

I make a plea once again: the issue is too important for any one political party or individual to think that they have all the right answers. We have not arrived at the right answers yet or at a public or political consensus. If the cabinet secretary is willing to work at building consensus, I will support her. However, that is not to say that we will agree

with everything. I hope that she takes what I am saying in the spirit in which it is intended.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. Speeches should be of around four minutes.

10:53

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): There is no doubt that we are facing a serious problem in this country. This morning's Audit Scotland report highlights some of the significant issues.

I congratulate the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the way in which he has raised the temperature in the debate. I understand why he has done that. We had to have a debate and we must confront serious problems. I am also pleased that ministers' emphasis has shifted towards the health problem, to some extent.

Although Bill Aitken is absolutely right that the alcohol-related behaviour of a minority of people in this country causes problems and it is right that we use enforcement and preventive measures with justice-related powers and responsibilities, he did not dwell significantly on the fact that the health of too many people is beginning to suffer because of the hidden consumption of alcohol at home, which is perhaps not so hidden on a night out. We have to realise that many people who do not necessarily pose problems with antisocial behaviour and crime, or who might not regard themselves as problem drinkers, have a growing problem with alcohol. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing documented well some of the significant impacts that such a problem is having.

Bold measures are absolutely necessary—Robert Brown was right to point out the distinction between justice and health, in terms of the language that is used—and Kenny MacAskill was right to raise the debate in the way that he did, but in a Parliament of minorities, it is not enough to talk about agreement and consensus; we need to deliver it. To be frank, there is no party-political advantage to be gained on this matter, and no party-political argument should be advanced to score points over one party at the expense of another; we are in this together. Nicola Sturgeon is right that, as politicians, we should take the lead on the issue. Sometimes there is a question about whether we attempt to lead public opinion, but we cannot do that by trying to ram ideas down the throats of other parties in this Parliament of minorities.

On alcohol policy, above all others, we need a cross-party approach. We should be looking back to some of the historic work that was done by Strathclyde Regional Council, for example, and the officer/member working group reports on which all parties came together to make bold,

imaginative and radical suggestions to advance social policy. If either of the cabinet secretaries here today wants to be bold, the bold measure on alcohol policy is to implement a mechanism whereby all parties can come together to work on the issue and come up with some agreement.

The last thing that we need in trying to deal with the alcohol problem is parties trying to score points against one another or fraying at the edges as the argument develops. If we cannot work out together a solution to the problem, the present generation of Scots will suffer and future generations will continue to suffer. We are dealing with too big an issue for us to revert to our party-political dogma and political bunkers. I appeal to the cabinet secretaries to reach out to other parties and I appeal to other parties to approach the problem in the way that it demands—to rise above our political perspectives and come together to work out a solution that will have a lasting effect. It might require radical and bold solutions, but the problem needs that type of approach. For once, can we not do the right thing in this Parliament?

10:58

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Cathy Jamieson and Hugh Henry on their thoughtful speeches, which show Parliament at its best. However, Robert Brown's speech was rather glum. I tried to prise some substance from his speech, which was larded with metaphors, but he kept dancing on the head of a process pin. I think that he has misjudged the mood of the Parliament in this debate.

I turn to Bill Aitken. Moving the debate to being about health has made it an entirely different debate, in which I hope there can be consensus. Mature members of the Health and Sport Committee, rich in life and parliamentary experience and for whom I have high regard, will take on the burden of hearing the evidence.

One problem that we have not addressed is that some of our young Scots suffer from alcohol even though they have had no part in taking it. I am speaking of foetal alcohol syndrome, which was raised with the chief medical officer when he briefed the Health and Sport Committee. It is a great tragedy, not only for the mother but for the staff who deliver a baby who already has alcohol withdrawal symptoms. It is trite but true to say that the healthy mothers who have healthy and responsible pregnancies give children the best start, which continues throughout life. I welcome the survey on foetal alcohol syndrome that is proposed in the framework because it will be a wake-up call to society. Nobody can sit back and say that society should sustain a situation in which

babies are born with alcohol withdrawal symptoms.

As members know, when we first discussed the ban on the sale of alcohol to those under 21 I did not agree with my Government, which was pursuing a national policy that I felt was unjust. I very much welcome localisation, whereby the remit is with the local police and licensing boards. I do not think that we will see a geographic purchasing shift from one area to another, but if that happens, the licensing board can adapt to the situation.

I come to the buy-one-get-one-free offers and minimum pricing, which is a thorny issue. The subject was first raised by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice when he was a shadow minister and I was in my great days in the shadow cabinet. I did not agree with him at that time and thought that the policy would penalise those on lower incomes. However, after a great deal of thought I have come round to the view that we must go down the road of minimum pricing, because I do not accept that it is just the young who are purchasing alcohol.

I have great concern for the hidden numbers behind the net curtains of Scotland, who are putting alcohol in their supermarket trolleys on buy-one-get-one-free promotions when they would not normally buy it; because alcohol is within easy reach, they are taking it in the way that they used to drink a cup of tea at night. There are concerns that we will never be able to investigate that situation, and perhaps only the supermarkets can tell us from their stock control the constituency of people who are buying alcohol. It is not just the young and that is where Bill Aitken's targeting argument loses its place; we must look at the whole of society and not just the young, who buy a different type of alcohol.

Mike Rumbles: I am interested to hear the views of the convener of the Health and Sport Committee on promotions. The cabinet secretary said that offers such as the Sainsbury's £10 deal would not be affected by the new approach, although we want to affect other deals. How can one possibly differentiate between such deals in legislation?

Christine Grahame: The cabinet secretary appears to disagree with Mike Rumbles's comment, so I will let him clarify the position in summing up.

In Scotland, we could take the alternative approach of using taxation to deal with the problem, but we are not doing that. Taxation might be a way to tackle it, but pricing is the route that we must take.

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I will conclude, if I may.

We accept many things in life for the greater good—income tax, national insurance and council tax, which finance services that we might not need. In the case of alcohol, society should consider minimum price levels as a burden to bear for the greater physical and mental health of our community and for those babies, who we hope are born without foetal alcohol syndrome.

11:03

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): All of us realise the toll that alcohol misuse takes on Scottish society, so I welcome the opportunity to debate once more that concern in this chamber. I also welcome the Scottish Government's change of heart on full parliamentary scrutiny of the alcohol framework.

In advance of the publication of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, we called for it to be divided into two separate bills. It is clear that to have debated those major policy proposals only as regulations would have been wholly inadequate, so the fact that they will be decided on in a separate bill is a move forward. However, that is not the only change that must come.

The Conservatives are right to highlight the genuine concerns about enforcement of the current licensing laws. Last year, there were 576 recorded offences of underage drinking and only 88 of them were proceeded against. That is not good enough. There should be a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy for licensees who sell to those who are underage. For ministers to have credibility in introducing their framework, such issues must be addressed properly, particularly as we are discussing further policy initiatives when many of the new provisions in the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 are yet to come into force. There must be further changes in the way that the Scottish Government takes forward its proposals on alcohol.

We in the Labour Party genuinely wanted to see more details in the final framework than were in the consultation document, which would allow us to make informed choices about the kind of issue that Mr Rumbles raised. However, additional detail was hard to find, and we still do not know how irresponsible promotions will be defined or how legislation will be framed. It is vital to know that, because there are serious questions of legality.

However, as Hugh Henry said, that does not mean that we should not consider bold measures. Some alcoholic drinks are sold too cheaply, and we are well aware of the scale of the problem of harmful drinking, which is clear from the Audit Scotland report. Nevertheless, whatever the Parliament does has to be legal and workable.

Scottish Labour held a summit to discuss the proposals with a range of organisations but, up until now, the Scottish Government has failed to engage properly with stakeholders on the issue. It is no wonder that the responsibility for this area has been removed from Mr MacAskill and given to health ministers, because the case for the measures to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour has not been made. I refer not only to the flawed proposal to ban 20-year-olds from purchasing at an off-licence—a localised injustice—but to the key proposal on minimum pricing, which will not touch the price of certain alcoholic products that have been identified again and again not only with antisocial behaviour, but with violent crime.

It is right that we have been challenged not simply to criticise and question the Government's policies but to produce our own, which we have done. Our proposals for a mandatory challenge 21 scheme and for alcohol treatment and testing orders have received wide support, but ministers rejected both proposals out of hand for spurious reasons. To do justice to this issue of real concern for Scottish society, the debate must move on and real efforts must be made to reach consensus on policies.

Bill Aitken: I agree with much of what Richard Baker said, but he has skipped over the point about minimum pricing. We need clarification from the Labour Party. Is it in favour of minimum pricing? Does it repudiate the views of Gordon Brown, which I included in the wording of our motion?

Richard Baker: Yes, there needs to be action on pricing, but such action must be explored and considered properly through the bill that we now have before us. It would be wrong to pre-empt that. I welcome the fact that Mr Aitken is reading *The Guardian*. Who knows where Tory justice policy will end up as a result? Just as Mr Aitken's reading *The Guardian* is very much out of context, the words of the Prime Minister are very much out of context in Mr Aitken's motion. That is our concern.

If the Scottish Government is prepared to embrace a consensual approach, we can make progress. Attitudes to alcohol in Scotland will not change overnight and laws on their own will not make the difference. We know that whatever we do now will be done after careful consideration and full debate. I hope that the real victory will be a Scotland with a better and more mature relationship with alcohol.

11:08

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): As I look at the notes that I have made for my speech, it occurs to me that I do not recall ever seeing a

page quite as cluttered—perhaps I need some help from Jim Mather. However, my cluttered notes show just how complicated the debate will be. I am very glad that we will have the debate in the context of a health bill, rather than having a perhaps shorter debate in the Justice Committee. I also think that the Justice Committee is overworked, despite our wonderful convener's attempts to keep us in order, and I am therefore absolutely delighted that some of its work will disappear to the Health and Sport Committee, which I am sure will bring wisdom to it.

We are talking about two very different issues and we will help ourselves if we separate them in the debate. The first issue is the alcohol misuse that is evident on our high streets and in our town and city centres on Friday, Saturday and, increasingly, Sunday nights, when people respond in public to their overdrinking. The police, and all manner of other folk, including our A and E departments, have to deal with that. Most of the folk who have been overdrinking have come out of pubs and clubs and, therefore, the comments that Bill Aitken made about enforcing the licensing laws are entirely to the point. We must ensure that everything possible is done to minimise the difficulties that such behaviour causes.

However, in the meeting of the cross-party group on drug and alcohol misuse, which Mary Scanlon, Richard Baker and I attended yesterday evening, it became clear that the vast majority of the health problem relates to those who are in middle age and who probably do most of their drinking at home. I sense that that is the essence of the health issue. I respectfully suggest to all parties that we must separate that issue from the public order issue. If we allow ourselves to confuse the two, we will not have a sensible debate. My plea is that we distinguish between those issues, so that we recognise which issue we are trying to address and where measures are targeted.

Unlike some others, I congratulate Robert Brown on his performance. I thought that it was a wonderful tribal dance; he managed to dance all the way round the subject without getting anywhere near it. It was a wonderful example and I will look up his speech later to learn the lessons from it.

The wonderful thing about the Liberal Democrat amendment is that it uses the phrase "evidence-based", which I have not found in the motion or the other amendment. I point Robert Brown and his colleagues to the evidence that was presented yesterday evening. As it happens, no one from the Liberal Democrats was at the meeting; I know how busy we all are and I do not mean that as a criticism. A lot of the evidence was produced by Petra Meier at the University of Sheffield last year.

We have to look at the academic evidence on which of the various interventions will have an influence on drinking and its consequences. I will persuade the Health and Sport Committee to look at that evidence, although I do not think that it will require much persuading. I do not think that it will be terribly difficult to work out what we should be doing.

There are a few other issues to pick up. Bill Aitken referred quite properly to policing issues around St Neots. I suggest that those who are not familiar with East Anglia look at the map. I had to check this, but I found that St Neots is 10 miles from anywhere. I have nothing against St Neots, but I think that it is relatively straightforward to police somewhere that is 10 miles from anywhere on not-very-good roads. I question the lessons that our larger cities can learn from the St Neots experience, although I recognise entirely that it might be relevant in the Borders and other remoter communities.

11:12

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I thank members for bringing forward the debate. Rather belatedly, we can have an honest discussion on a fundamental issue, about which I do not think that there is any disagreement. We must try to deal with alcohol much more sensibly and effectively.

However, I am concerned that some of the language that predated the debate was alarmist. The policies that members of the Government were advocating before being held to account today—I hope that they will be held to account after today—demonised the taking of alcohol, whereas the real issue is the culture of binge drinking at home and the exhibition of binge drinking in public places throughout the towns and cities of Scotland.

I have a philosophical concern. I acknowledge that the debate we are having is the beginning of a fundamental debate. However, I am concerned that some fundamental issues are not being addressed properly. I worry when I hear the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing say in response to some speeches that our responsibility is to show leadership and to lead public opinion, rather than follow it. Tackling alcohol is substantially different from tackling smoking and to try to equate the two shows a level of sophistry that is beyond belief, given the debate that we should have.

Nigel Don mentioned tackling the issue of isolated drinkers. I come from a family in which the males had substantial problems with alcohol misuse. The reality of my experience growing up was that if the price of alcohol was increased,

people would find ways of getting round that to access the alcohol; they would find alternative drinks or a different way of acquiring the alcohol in the first place. The debate has been about absolutes, when the real experience of those who have family experience of alcohol abuse is quite different.

We have been here before. Although the debate in Scotland is not equivalent to the prohibition debate in the United States of America following the first world war, the language is similar. The anti-saloon laws of 1916 in the USA were an attempt

“to improve health, solve social problems and to reduce crime”

Herbert Hoover called prohibition the noble experiment. The legislation was debated in the House of Representatives on a single day. More than 16 hours were given over to a debate on one of the most important and well-known decisions of the House of Representatives in the 20th century. During the debate, one member said that, in tackling alcohol misuse, the Government

“might as well have been trying to dry up the Atlantic with a post-office blotter.”

The reality of the debate in Scotland is similar: how do we take a measured view on tackling alcohol misuse, which is an issue that people across the country know about only too well.

I welcome the Government's change of approach on the 18 to 21s, but I am not convinced by its proposals, which might lead to a postcode lottery on access to alcohol off-sales. I question whether its proposal is the most appropriate way of doing things.

I turn to two important issues that have not been raised in the debate thus far, the first of which is our contradictory relationship with alcohol. Everyone, including cabinet ministers, needs to reconcile themselves to that. Indeed, our national rugby team was sponsored by an alcohol product and the Scottish rugby union, two major football clubs and our biggest music festival are all sponsored by alcohol products. The debate with the industry on that sponsorship and how to tackle alcohol abuse is legitimate. Demonising alcohol serves only to jeopardise the private sector sponsorship that is necessary for such sport and events to happen. None of them happens because of public sector investment; they happen as a result of private sector commitment. We need to address the issue.

Secondly, the point about alcohol being cheaper than bottled water is sometimes repeated. Perhaps the question should be why bottled water is so expensive.

We need to have a much more measured debate on the issues. I hope that that is what we will hear today in the summing up, and over the weeks and months ahead in the Parliament.

11:17

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The Liberal Democrats welcome the SNP Government's decision to bring forward a bill on its controversial alcohol proposals. On this matter, it has dropped its take-it-or-leave-it attitude to lawmaking in Scotland.

We are glad that the Government has seen sense. It has realised that it will not get away with trying to bulldoze its controversial proposals through Parliament by way of regulations that Opposition MSPs cannot amend. Four of the Government's six proposals—minimum pricing per unit of alcohol, alcohol promotions, limiting the use of marketing materials, and regulating the size of wine glasses—were put forward in such a way that they could not be amended by Opposition MSPs. Only two measures—the sale of alcohol to under-21s and the social responsibility fee—were to be examined in a parliamentary bill. That is despite the fact that the Government lost a parliamentary vote on the proposal to raise the purchase age to 21—yet here we are again with the same kind of proposal.

Unfortunately, the Government's change of heart on process came about neither as a result of reasoned argument, compromise and co-operation nor—to use the First Minister's fine words—because it is a “listening Government” but because the Liberal Democrats, the Labour Party and the Conservatives made it clear that we would simply vote down the undemocratic method that it was intent on using to push through the measures. Let us have no more nonsense from this SNP Government about it being a “listening Government”; let us instead have a reality check.

The SNP Government is very slow to learn. Just yesterday, it came to light that it was using another parliamentary tactic to try to stop Opposition MSPs lodging amendments to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: Wait a minute.

In order to stop that Government tactic and misuse, I had to come to the chamber yesterday afternoon and, with the support of my Labour and Conservative colleagues, request a special meeting of the Parliamentary Bureau. This is a minority Government with a majority ego. It wants to stifle proper debate and prevent Opposition MSPs from lodging legitimate amendments to its

legislation. What a way to treat Scotland's national Parliament.

Nicola Sturgeon: Whatever the member thinks about our motivation, we have conceded that there should be a bill, so surely that should bring an end to the argument on process. Will Mike Rumbles do what Robert Brown signally failed to do and tell us where the Liberal Democrats stand on the substance?

Mike Rumbles: It is clear that the Government wants to forget about the mistakes that it has made so far with its proposals on alcohol. It does not want us to talk about using the Scottish Parliament properly and having a proper debate about all the issues. It wants to forget about all of that. The Government has seen sense over the way in which it will put its proposals on alcohol to Parliament. I had hoped that ministers had learned their lesson, but yesterday's shenanigans over Opposition amendments made it clear that it has learned nothing.

Although Bill Aitken did not use this phrase, I took from his speech that he opposes the position that the Government knows best. I rather agree with him.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing falsely compared the Government's alcohol proposals with the smoking legislation. How wrong could she be? The smoking legislation was radical and it was accepted across the chamber. It was not made into the sort of partisan issue that the SNP has made its proposals on alcohol.

In a very good speech, Cathy Jamieson highlighted concerns over minimum pricing and the missing of Government targets. She questioned why, although some promotions need to be stopped, the Scottish whisky industry should be damaged in the process. That was a good point.

When I intervened on Christine Grahame about the outlawing of alcohol promotions, she could not answer the question that had been put earlier to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. I think that this is important. How can the cabinet secretary say that a £10 meal deal from Sainsbury's that includes a bottle of wine will not be outlawed when other offers will? What about unintended consequences?

The Government says that it will take over six months to work up the detail of its bill proposals—well, what a surprise! Has the Government not done that work? Did it not bother to do the detailed work for a piece of legislation that it wanted the Parliament to rubber-stamp and to either take or leave? It is a disgrace. We cannot operate a Scottish Parliament in that way. We cannot have a Government coming to the Parliament with such ill-thought-out plans and ideas. It is not sufficient

for the Scottish Government to ask the Parliament to legislate on such important issues when the Government does not have a clue about the detail.

11:22

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Unlike my Liberal Democrat colleagues, I welcome the Government's acceptance that the issue should be moved to the health portfolio and that there should be proper debate on it. The issue is too serious to do anything else.

I am wearing four hats in the debate: as shadow public health spokesperson, as a member of the Health and Sport Committee—as Christine Grahame said, the committee will have an important role to play in all of this—as the chairman of the cross-party group on drug and alcohol misuse, and as a former psychiatrist who dealt with the alcohol problems with which we are confronted.

As Frank McAveety said, the problem with debating alcohol as a justice issue is that it runs the risk of demonising drink. The difference between drink and smoking is that smoking is totally pernicious—there is no benefit—whereas drinking in moderation is a health benefit. We run a grave risk of demonising drink and of being perceived by the public to be doing that, and some of the debate on justice aspects has contributed to that.

In the sort of thoughtful speech that we have come to expect from Nigel Don, he said that we have to separate out the issues. As other members rightly said, the central problem in the debate is excessive drinking by a very substantial minority and not the public safety issue that we have all seemed to concentrate on and which has taken up much of the debate in the press.

There has been a massive rise in cirrhosis among the over-40s. Also, 11 per cent of emergency attendances are associated with alcohol, and they relate mainly to the over-40s. Indeed, the most significant growth is among over-60s. We need to tackle the group of people who have developed an inappropriate cultural approach to alcohol over a long period of time.

We also need to look at the growth of alcohol consumption among women, which has been even greater than the growth of consumption among men.

What we do in Scotland has to be the subject of debate in the Scottish Parliament. Why? Because the problem is hugely greater in Scotland than in England. Over the past few years, there has been a marked rise in alcohol consumption in England, but England has reached only the European Union average for cirrhosis whereas the figure for

Scotland is 2.3 times that average, and rising. We need to find Scottish solutions to what is essentially a Scottish problem.

Labour will not act in haste. We did not do so on the proposal to raise the off-sales purchase age to 21—we took a few weeks to examine the evidence before saying that, as a public health measure, it was a non-starter. We will consider proposals carefully and take the opportunity that has been afforded by the Government's change of heart to enter into a debate. That is reflected in the fact that, for the first time in this session, we produced an amendment that was identical to one lodged by the Government.

Bill Aitken *rose*—

Dr Simpson: I am afraid that I do not have time to take an intervention.

Last night, we looked at the issue of minimum pricing and heard a presentation by a consultant psychiatrist who favours the measure. A representative of the Scotch Whisky Association told us that there might be problems with what he called commoditisation—at some point, I will look up the word to find out what in heaven's name he meant by that. We need to balance the industry's concerns with those of clinicians, who definitely favour minimum pricing. However, there must be no doubt that the consumption of alcohol is price sensitive; all the papers, including those from Sheffield and the Australian medical colleges, are clear on that fact.

We need to have a debate but, as Cathy Jamieson said, we must ensure that we are not seen to punish impoverished moderate drinkers. We need to achieve a balance. When we see that alcopops and Buckfast are not affected by minimum pricing, we realise that we have a job of work to do. Undoubtedly, some of the problems are not price related but cultural.

Thirty-nine of the 150 sections of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005, which was Labour's attempt to move us forward on the issue, have not yet been implemented. Those include sections relating to drunkenness and to the consideration by licensing boards of overprovision of licensed premises. It is important not only that we implement all sections of the 2005 act but that we enforce them. So far, enforcement of the legislation has been tragically weak—it needs to be reinforced.

Labour is up for this debate and is prepared to try to reach agreement on issues. However, it must be a careful and mature debate.

11:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We welcome the debate. There is a

great deal of consensus around the chamber on the problem that we face. Two strands—the problem and the process—have run through the debate. I thank Richard Simpson for his comments on the process; the Liberal Democrats should have taken those points on board. It would be churlish of me not to say that the procedures that were suggested for many issues were introduced by Tavish Scott and George Lyon. However, at the end of the day, we want to resolve differences over process so that we can concentrate on tackling the problem. We will do so through a health bill. Hugh Henry and Cathy Jamieson acknowledged the huge damage that alcohol misuse is causing to our society. We hope that we can draw a line under debates on process and start addressing the problem that so many speakers have highlighted.

Bill Aitken spoke about a road-to-Damascus conversion. Perhaps the biggest such change in the Conservative party is its recognition that there is such a thing as society. Speaker after speaker recognised that alcohol misuse is damaging our communities. Clearly, it is not simply a criminal justice matter, as the effects of alcohol misuse are not limited to problems with behaviour. Frankly, it is killing far too many of our communities and damaging individual citizens. We must move on.

Issues to be considered include the action that must be taken, enforcement and education. More can and should be done on enforcement. Richard Simpson referred to the 2005 act, the provisions of which are being rolled out. There will be a big bang in September, when many of the changes will kick in. At that point, licensing boards will have more power to take appropriate action. We are surprised that some people wish to restrict licensing boards to a policy of three strikes and you're out. We want to ensure that boards can adopt a policy of one strike and you're out; if there has been a flagrant breach, licensees should not be given the opportunity of further culpability. That is why we ask members to support the action that is being taken to give boards the power to adopt such a policy.

Enforcing provisions against underage drinking is problematic for the police. Reference has been made to pocket-money prices. If we impose fines on our children—as some seem to be suggesting—those fines will be taken out of their pocket money, because some of the youngsters whom the police are taking in as drunk and incapable are not 16 or 17-year-old laddies who are in work or apprenticeships, but 12 or 14-year-old young girls who, if they are lucky enough to have pocket money, are blowing it on alcopops. We accept that enforcement is necessary and will work with members to ensure that appropriate action is taken. The Government will ensure that the police, procurators fiscal and licensing boards

are joined up and communicate with one another, and that licensing boards are aware of who is offending.

Dr Simpson: One of the things that disappoint me most is the Government's failure to follow through on the work of the national licensing forum, which provided essential support to local boards, and to monitor the extent to which support for boards varies. The Government said that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities could do that job.

Kenny MacAskill: We have met COSLA and Alcohol Focus Scotland and have made clear that we think that such a forum is appropriate. However, it would be better for it to come from them than from us because, as today's debate has shown, there may be issues on which they disagree with the Government. We will support COSLA and Alcohol Focus Scotland fully in setting up a forum that is able to deal with Government, but it should come from them, because they are distinctive stakeholders with particular interests in the area.

We have addressed the issue of process; the Liberal Democrats must address the issue of what they will do about the problem and, as Christine Grahame indicated, the substance. We have a rather perverse situation, given that the Liberal Democrats are a federal party that recognises that devolution should allow one part of the United Kingdom to go in a particular direction to deal with particular problems. As Richard Simpson and Cathy Jamieson pointed out, the problem of alcohol abuse is greater in Scotland. The irony and shame for the Liberal Democrats is that they do not want to act in the part of the United Kingdom where the problem is significantly greater than it is elsewhere. I compare that position with the courageous steps that have been taken by Christopher Huhne and Nick Clegg.

Mike Rumbles: It is clear that the Government does not have a clue about the detail of the legislation that it intends to introduce. Surely the most important point is that it should provide us with that detail, so that we can examine it properly. The Government has not done that.

Kenny MacAskill: It is rather tragic that, whereas Nick Clegg can make proposals that this Government supports fully, in the part of the United Kingdom where the Liberal Democrats wish to make a difference and where the problem is significantly greater than it is elsewhere, they take no action.

We recognise that issues will have to be worked through and that we must work with the trade. The Scottish Licensed Trade Association is squarely behind the Government on many issues. We will work with the appropriate stakeholders to make

clear that the suggestion that the meal deals and offers will be affected is spurious.

We must take action. We recognise the problems that Scotland faces and accept that there is not one quick-fire bullet that will solve them. It is about enforcement, education and making changes. Three years after the smoking ban, we can change the situation. However, we need legislative change to ensure that we deliver cultural change.

11:33

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): As we have heard from a number of speakers in today's debate, excessive alcohol consumption is a major issue for Scotland. We all agree on that point and acknowledge the health concerns that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing set out in her speech. Research has revealed that Scotland is eighth in the world for alcohol consumption per head of population. One in three men and one in four women in Scotland exceed recommended daily alcohol limits.

As our motion states, we welcome the Scottish Government's U-turn on railroading its alcohol proposals through the Parliament by regulation, which was an attempt to sneak through a deeply unpopular policy in the most undemocratic manner, by avoiding proper parliamentary scrutiny. However, we remain concerned that the Government's proposals penalise responsible retailers and consumers and fail to address overconsumption.

I will address a couple of issues that were raised in the debate, beginning with the minimum price proposal. The Scottish Government's plans for a minimum price for alcoholic drinks will adversely affect many of the communities and local economies that we represent. What is more, the proposal sends out confusing messages and fundamentally fails to target the problem drinks that contribute so significantly to Scotland's alcohol problem. Retailers have suggested that the cost of problem drinks such as alcopops and high-strength spirits, which are often used as shooters, would not be affected by a minimum price.

J D Wetherspoon was recently criticised for selling a pint for £1, but if minimum pricing were applied to the on-sales trade, that pint could be sold at no profit for as little as 70p. The minimum price plan would primarily increase large volume cider prices; most single bottles or cans would remain unaffected. The pricing plan would have the biggest impact on wine, which is a drink that I—and many members, I am sure—occasionally enjoy responsibly. Minimum pricing would raise

the price of 19 per cent of the wine and 15 per cent of the spirits that are currently sold in Scotland.

Hugh Henry: Does the member agree that we should be wary of a minimum pricing strategy that would put money into retailers' pockets but not into funding additional nurses, doctors or police officers? Does he agree that we should consider a United Kingdom-wide strategy that involves a more effective and equitable taxation system?

John Lamont: I agree. The way forward is to tax problem drinks. Nearly half the young men who were charged with an offence in 2007 revealed that they had been drinking Buckfast immediately prior to committing the offence. Conservatives think that the Scottish Government should be working with Westminster to put forward proposals to address alcohol abuse by taxing problem drinks such as alcopops, strong beers and ciders and Buckfast, while reducing the duty on low-strength beers and ciders, to maintain cost neutrality.

Blanket minimum pricing would penalise responsible drinkers and could have unintended consequences. I am concerned that the Scottish Government's proposals would create a booze-trip culture in the south of Scotland, which could hit traders in my constituency in the Borders. A trend could be started whereby responsible drinkers travelled across the border to places such as Berwick and Wooler to purchase cheaper alcohol, which would have a clear effect on traders in the Borders. I wanted to make that point during Christine Grahame's speech. Has the Scottish Government thought about the issue and would it allocate additional resources so that it could be policed?

All members know that opinion polls are important bedtime reading for Alex Salmond and the SNP Government. What do opinion polls say about the Government's plans? When 10,000 people were asked what they thought of the Government's proposals for a minimum price for alcohol, 61 per cent were opposed to the idea. When they were asked what they thought of the proposal to ban three-for-two and other multibuy promotions, 67 per cent opposed the proposal. What does the Government think about the overwhelming public opinion against its proposals?

There is no amendment from the Labour Party and, from what we have heard, it seems likely that Labour members will vote for the SNP amendment. It is important to record that, if that happens, Labour members will be voting to remove from the motion words that were used by Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Perhaps someone from the Labour Party will tell us whether Labour members intend to vote with the SNP

because the motion expresses Gordon Brown's view in his own words.

Dr Simpson: We are in a devolved Parliament. In Scotland, the level of alcoholic cirrhosis is more than twice the EU level and we have a much more rapidly developing problem. Along with the SNP Government, we will seek a Scottish solution to our problems, and I hope that there will be a consensus in that regard.

John Lamont: I wonder how out of touch Gordon Brown is. He is a Scottish member of Parliament, so I would have thought that he would be fully aware of those points and would be more than happy to back Scottish Labour's proposals, although we have yet to hear what they are.

Rather than pursue ineffective and unpopular proposals, we should be enforcing existing laws on licensing and the sale of alcohol, as Bill Aitken said. Police and local traders and other stakeholders should be working much more closely in community-based alcohol partnerships and we should learn from how that model is working in Cambridgeshire, London and many other parts of England. Work is needed in our communities to help to tackle alcohol abuse through education and counselling. We should not punish people who drink responsibly; we should work towards legislation that will address the problem of alcohol abuse in our communities. Conservative proposals to target problem drinkers through increased taxation should be pursued. We need responsible and reasoned legislation, which will properly address alcohol abuse in Scotland. I hope that that can be achieved through further debate.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:39

Jobcentre Vacancies

1. **Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):**

To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it is providing to people looking for employment in Scotland in light of recent figures showing that an average of 10 people apply for each jobcentre vacancy. (S3O-6434)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): Although employment policy is a reserved matter, the Scottish Government is doing everything in its power to help people to look for employment in Scotland. Since January, we have invested considerable effort in strengthening our national redundancy service: partnership action for continuing employment, or PACE. For example, Skills Development Scotland dedicated 80 staff to work with Jobcentre Plus staff, some of whom will be on site in jobcentres. That is unique in the United Kingdom and represents a step towards the wider integration of employment and skills services, so that people get the most effective help to get back into work.

Stuart McMillan: The community of Inverclyde, where I live, has suffered vast job losses in the shipbuilding and heavy engineering sectors and, more recently, in the electronics sector. Now that the UK economy is in recession, Inverclyde and every other part of Scotland face even more job losses as a result of the UK Government's shambolic handling of the economy.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the confusing messages from the UK Government and the Bank of England might well be exacerbating the unemployment statistics in Inverclyde, which is 14th in the list of UK parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, ranked by unemployment rate?

Fiona Hyslop: I very much appreciate the situation in Inverclyde. I have experience of the area and I have visited Port Glasgow jobcentre, where one of the integrated employment and skills pilots is taking place. It is essential that we all pull together to seek resolution.

It is right to identify the responsibility of the UK Government in relation to the recession. There are issues about what would benefit areas in Scotland where there are shipbuilding and construction skills. In such areas, investment in capital

infrastructure might be better than some of the support that is currently being provided.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): The Scottish Government is not doing everything in its power to support employment in Scotland. Thousands of construction workers are sitting at home because of the Government's failure to plan and deliver capital projects, such as new schools and houses. Will the Government move to deliver on a capital works programme and at least get us back to where we were in 2007, when investment of £1.3 billion was in the pipeline—as opposed to investment of only £300 million now?

Fiona Hyslop: I hate to contradict Cathie Craigie, but she should have listened to Tony McNulty, the Minister for Employment, Welfare Reform and London at Westminster, when he agreed that the Scottish Government is doing everything in its power to support employment.

The member quoted a figure of £1.3 billion for the previous Executive's investment in schools. This Government is investing £2 billion in schools—

Cathie Craigie: Where is it? Where are the schools?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Fiona Hyslop: Some 250 schools are currently under construction.

On a positive note, I ask the Opposition to acknowledge that this Government brought forward £100 million of capital investment in housing to support the construction industry. Only on Monday, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council outlined which colleges will receive investment, to ensure that the £20 million that has been brought forward for construction can be invested now to provide for construction workers. I will take no lessons from the Labour Party on the matter.

National Testing (Primary Schools)

2. Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will instigate national testing in reading, writing and maths for 10-year-olds, to ensure that underachieving pupils have the opportunity to catch up before starting secondary school. (S3O-6367)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): No. Good literacy and numeracy skills need to be developed from the early years. Curriculum for excellence is our means of ensuring that there is rigorous, on-going assessment of literacy and numeracy skills in primary and early secondary stages, based on clear, nationally agreed benchmarks.

Margo MacDonald: I thank the new minister and I welcome him to his post. He will be hearing more from me if I get more answers like that.

It is acknowledged that the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic have been falling over the years. Scotland is falling down the league table of achievement in those skills. It is not fair to wait until some children leave school to think about testing them, as the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has suggested. Will the minister turn back the clock and allow primary teachers to decide whether their pupils can read, write and count before they go on to secondary school? Will he ensure that we come up with a means of enabling pupils to catch up without embarrassing them?

Keith Brown: That is exactly the approach that we are taking, but it will be done through assessment and not through testing, which is not supported by anybody in the teaching profession that I have been able to find. In fact, Greg Dempster, the general secretary of the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland said that

“proposals ... to test P7 pupils in literacy and numeracy need to be re-thought ... An 'exam' at this stage would offer nothing other than a baseline for secondary schools or, at worst, an opportunity for the secondary sector to point the finger of blame at primary schools ... It would do nothing to address literacy and numeracy problems, as these are best tackled as early in schooling as possible.”

That is what we intend to achieve. The curriculum for excellence includes assessment, so teachers will have an understanding of the literacy and numeracy skills of their pupils. In our view, that is the major change going through Scottish schools from August this year to August next year and it is the best way to proceed.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In light of that answer, will the new framework for assessment include a specific recommendation on the type of literacy and numeracy testing that will be introduced in Scottish primary schools by the end of primary 7?

Keith Brown: Yes, it will include that. The member will understand that the exact process of assessment is being discussed. However, it is also true that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will announce next week the outcomes and experiences under the curriculum for excellence. That is the next milestone in the process towards achieving an agreed assessment process. For the reasons that I have outlined, we are very much against the idea of testing P7 pupils. There is no support among teacher trade unions or teachers more generally for the testing of children of that age. There will be assessment, but only on the basis that teachers agree to it.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): On the question of basic skills and literacy, the minister will be aware that, in its inquiry on pathways into sport, the Health and Sport Committee has uncovered a lack of reporting on physical literacy and physical skills in school reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and, indeed, a similar lack of reporting by schools in pupil report cards. Does the minister share the committee's concerns about that?

Keith Brown: Having spent, along with Shona Robison, an hour and a half answering questions from the committee on that and related subjects, I am well aware of the committee's concerns. I am well aware, too, of the committee's interest in ensuring that physical literacy is developed in schools. As I have said previously, it will be for schools to assess an individual pupil's progress in ways and at times that are appropriate for the young person's needs. Through the health and wellbeing strand of the curriculum for excellence, assessment must take account of the breadth and purpose of the wide range of learning that children and young people experience in that curriculum area. I am confident that, through curriculum for excellence, we will address some of the concerns that the committee raised.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Does the minister recognise that there is some concern that the strategy on primary school class sizes may be at the expense of specialised learning support, which is particularly important for youngsters who underachieve at that stage? Can he reassure me that, no matter what happens on class sizes, he will sustain the level of specialist learning support in our primary schools to ensure that children's support needs are picked up quickly and that individualised support can be given to them?

Keith Brown: I can only say that there are no plans in the class size strategy to reduce the current provision for specialist learning. It is our view that, through curriculum for excellence, we will improve the ability to deliver those services to pupils who are in need of them. I do not therefore think that the member's concerns are well founded. I am certainly happy to discuss the matter further with her, if she has a concern.

Green Jobs Strategy

3. David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will announce a strategy on creating green jobs. (S30-6414)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): In February, we announced 10 pledges that form the basis of our approach to ensuring that Scotland's energy sector is an aid to economic recovery and

creates new jobs. We estimate that at least 16,000 new jobs could be created in the renewable energy sector by 2020. Our renewables action plan, which is to be published this summer, will map out the contribution of each renewables sub-sector towards meeting our 2020 energy targets and delivering economic benefit.

David Whitton: As the cabinet secretary has said, the Government has set a target of 50 per cent of electricity to be generated by renewables by 2020. He mentioned 16,000 jobs, but is that the only estimate that he has of jobs to be created? I would have thought that he could have been a bit more ambitious, given the target that he has set. What steps is he taking to encourage modern apprenticeships, for example, in areas that will provide the jobs for the future?

John Swinney: First, the 16,000 jobs figure is an estimate, not a target. The Government produced that estimate on the basis of looking at the position within the wider estimates of United Kingdom employment and consider it to be reasonable. I can assure Mr Whitton that it is by no means the sum of our ambitions. We are seeing a range of different developments and the approval of different consents for new renewable energy schemes. The Government is very confident that new employment will be created in the renewable energy sector. I am sure that we will hear more about that in due course.

Mr Whitton asked about apprenticeships. We must ensure that we identify the apprenticeship places that are relevant for future employment. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has therefore taken the key approach of guaranteeing that we will have the closest dialogue with business and different sectors of the economy to ensure that our education institutions and training providers educate people in the right skills for the jobs of the future, which will be in the renewable energy sector.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): On Tuesday, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee visited Caithness to study the potential of tidal energy in the Pentland Firth. Constructing subsea turbines would offer a large number of high-quality green jobs. Making that happen is crucial as Dounreay decommissions and skills become available. Will the cabinet secretary look closely at how we can make that development happen? Turbine fabrication could take place onshore in Caithness and in the Nigg yard. Will the cabinet secretary look at both areas with a view to establishing what financial resources are necessary and what impediments must be overcome, such as the unfortunate stalemate at Nigg?

John Swinney: The Government will do everything that it can to try to bring the relevant

parties together to ensure that the enormous prospects for wave and tidal energy in the Pentland Firth can be realised. We are greatly encouraged by the opportunities that now exist as a consequence of the decisions announced by the Crown Estate. We have made it clear that we are determined to create a strong renewable energy industry. We look forward to further announcements on that in due course. Certainly, if particular obstacles stand in the way of onshore developments to support offshore activity in the Pentland Firth, the Government will be happy to do all that it can to resolve such issues. Jamie Stone knows that I will respond promptly to any requests for assistance in that respect.

Child Protection

4. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to protect children who live with a parent with a drug addiction. (S3O-6402)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): The needs of children who are affected by parental substance misuse is a key priority for the Government. Within a year of coming into office we issued "The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem", which sets out the Government's national drugs strategy and includes a chapter specifically on protecting children. It has been followed up by a project board on children affected by parental substance misuse, which involves the Scottish Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector, that meets on a six-week cycle. Among a range of actions, we have increased funding to health boards for drug treatment by 13.5 per cent for 2009-10 and established a learning partnership under the getting it right for every child programme with Angus Council and partner agencies to explore further ways to identify, protect and support better children whose parents misuse drugs or alcohol and ensure that adult services working with such parents make their children's interests a priority.

Duncan McNeil: I am more interested in action than in publications and meetings. In a written question in 2007, I asked the minister how many children were living with a parent with a drug addiction. He estimated the number to be between 10,000 and 20,000. When asked the same question two weeks ago by my colleague Karen Whitefield, he gave the same unsatisfactory answer. What has he been doing over the past two years to identify and meet the needs of those children? On a day when Audit Scotland confirms that billions are being spent on adults with an addiction, is it not time that he got a share of that budget to tackle the real issues for the real victims of abuse?

Adam Ingram: What children need from us are services that meet their individual needs and risks, not number crunching. The statistics are a means to an end. Duncan McNeil's views on this issue are well known and he is welcome to them. While we share his concerns for children who are affected by parental substance misuse, we do not agree with his prescription for action.

The Government trusts the front-line professionals who engage daily with these vulnerable children and families. Our job is to provide the support and back-up that they need to do their jobs effectively. The getting it right for every child programme encapsulates the approach that we believe in. Its key aims are to ensure that every child is safe and has their needs met holistically, and that family relationships are strengthened.

School Building Project (Aberdeen)

5. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on refinancing the Aberdeen 3Rs school project to allow building work on the affected schools to restart. (S3O-6454)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): Landsbanki hf has commenced a refinancing of the project on behalf of the NYOP Education (Aberdeen) Ltd consortium. It would be inappropriate for the Scottish Government to comment on matters that are the subject of commercial negotiations.

Nicol Stephen: If the current situation is what the minister calls accelerating major capital projects, his foot might be on the pedal but his tank is full of empty rhetoric. The First Minister likes to take credit for new schools that are built by local councils. Will the Government now take some responsibility when projects stall? This is a crucial time for that major project in Aberdeen. We were promised that building would be under way again by the end of March but, so far, as the minister explained, the project has not even been refinanced. The Treasury has announced a scheme in England and Wales to support private finance initiative and public-private partnership projects when finance is no longer available from the private sector. Will the minister confirm that similar support will be provided in Scotland and will be available to underwrite the restart of building new schools in Aberdeen where there are currently empty building sites?

Keith Brown: The Treasury scheme to which the member refers has not yet been implemented fully, but we are considering its implications and the benefits that it might have for Scotland. On the member's point about delays to projects, everyone is well aware that the project in Aberdeen is delayed because of the collapse of the Icelandic

banking system. I point out to the member that schools that he approved in my area in 2002 are still not finished or opened, seven years on, and are massively over budget, so perhaps he should look to himself when he asks such questions.

Town Centre Regeneration Fund

6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in developing the details of the town centre regeneration fund, whether it will include plans to inform local communities about how they can apply for funding. (S3O-6423)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The full details of the town centre regeneration fund will be announced shortly. Every effort will be made to ensure that the information is widely disseminated.

Kenneth Gibson: The minister will be aware that, from Whiting Bay to Wigtown and from Largs to Lerwick, the Tories have been encouraging people in every community in Scotland, big or small, to nominate their community for an award from the fund via a Tory party website. Does he agree that that is irresponsibly raising false expectations of what the scheme can deliver and that it will have no bearing on how funds can be distributed?

Alex Neil: The decision-making process on awards under the town centre regeneration fund will be made by ministers in consultation with other stakeholders, which does not include the Conservative party.

Local Authority Leaders (Meetings)

7. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what meetings are planned between ministers and leaders of local authorities to discuss education. (S3O-6379)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Minister for Children and Early Years will visit Tarbolton primary school nursery in South Ayrshire on 31 March, during which the leader of South Ayrshire Council will be present. I plan to meet Councillor Steven Purcell from Glasgow City Council soon to discuss education matters. In addition, plans are being developed for the Minister for Schools and Skills to visit a number of local authorities. Those are examples of our frequent meetings with leaders of councils, other councillors, senior officials from local authorities, representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and many others to drive forward our shared commitment to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people.

Rhona Brankin: On 12 March, the cabinet secretary told Parliament that it is up to Glasgow

City Council whether it spends its £196 million of capital funding on school buildings. In fact, £115 million of that funding is ring fenced for projects including the M74 extension and the White Cart Water flood prevention scheme. Will the cabinet secretary apologise to Glasgow City Council and the Parliament for her misleading remarks? Will she tell us when the Scottish Government plans to stop hiding behind spin and bluster and put in place adequate funding for school building, so that pupils and teachers in Glasgow and elsewhere can benefit from fit-for-purpose learning and teaching environments?

Fiona Hyslop: The Government is investing £2 billion in schools, and 250 schools are under construction. I would be delighted to meet Steven Purcell to discuss some of the concerns that many parents have about schooling in Glasgow. Glasgow City Council is undergoing a process of school closures, but that is a matter for the council, and it would be inappropriate for me, as minister, to comment on that publicly at this moment.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-1574)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme. Earlier this morning, I wrote to Mr Gray following my commitment to look into the case that he raised during First Minister's question time last week. Given the clear interest of the Parliament in the matter, I will place a copy of that letter in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Shortly after question time, I will travel to Kintyre to announce the latest investment in renewables in Scotland—a truly transformational announcement for the Mull of Kintyre. It is hugely significant for Scotland, and the Parliament will no doubt hear more about it during the economy debate this afternoon.

Iain Gray: I got a letter from the First Minister a few minutes ago, and I am happy to have a look at it, but I make no apology for standing up for a young apprentice last week. I am delighted that, on Friday, he heard that he would be able to complete his apprenticeship. So is his dad—he thanked me at the weekend. There are dozens of people in the position that Lewis Doig was in last week, with an uncertain future, and we need the apprenticeship guarantee to be made good for them all.

Today, I want to ask about another of the First Minister's promises. The SNP manifesto said:

"We will maintain teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls to cut class sizes".

Why has the First Minister not done that?

The First Minister: It is not a question of whether members are able to stand up for their constituents—I am sure that every member of the Scottish Parliament tries to do that. It is simply a question of getting the facts right, as the correspondence will indicate that Iain Gray so palpably failed to do.

The Scottish Government has delivered the best pupil teacher ratio in history, for not just this year but the second successive year. That is important in itself but, at 13.1:1, the pupil teacher ratio in Scotland is significantly better than the ratio in England where it is 17:1, than the ratio in Wales where it is 18:1, and than the ratio in Northern Ireland where it is 17:1. Perhaps Iain Gray should have a word with his colleagues south of the

border and try to get them to emulate the Scottish experience on pupil teacher ratios.

Iain Gray: This is not a question about England, Wales or Northern Ireland; it is a question about a promise that was made in Scotland to the parents and pupils of Scotland. The man who promised to maintain teacher numbers is right here in the chamber, and he is the one who is breaking that promise. Will he tell us what he is going to do to put that right?

The First Minister: It is interesting to note from the statistics that many councils in Scotland have managed to maintain teacher numbers; indeed, some have managed to increase them. I welcome that, as I think that the concordat has enthusiastic support across local government in Scotland.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Oh no.

The First Minister: I know that Andy Kerr did his best to destroy the concordat at the outset and that he has tried to instigate problems for it, but the concordat has delivered for the people of Scotland across a range of issues.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will pursue with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—at its invitation—and with individual councils the question why not every council in Scotland has managed to achieve the teacher numbers that we would all wish. On that basis, and given Rhona Brankin's remarks of just a few minutes ago, we might wish to reflect on the fact that 20 per cent—one fifth—of the fall in teacher numbers in Scotland seemed to come from the city of Glasgow.

Iain Gray: If the First Minister is not blaming Westminster, he is blaming councils. However, this is not about a promise made by council leaders in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Renfrewshire or anywhere else; the man who promised to maintain teacher numbers is Alex Salmond, and Alex Salmond is breaking that promise. When will he put it right?

The First Minister: As Iain Gray will remember, in the concordat the idea was to make year-on-year progress towards lower class sizes in Scotland—and, of course, we now have the best class sizes in Scotland that have ever been recorded.

If Iain Gray wants to argue that I would wish that some councils in Scotland made faster progress towards that commitment, then the answer is yes. I would like to hear an explanation of why, when the education convener of Glasgow City Council says that there is record education spending in the city, the spending does not translate into maintaining the number of teachers in the great city of Glasgow.

Iain Gray: We are not making progress on the promise. In four years, Labour increased teacher numbers by 2,000; in half that time, the SNP has wiped out half of that progress. We are going backwards.

I do not know about the concordat, but the First Minister's school report is certainly a disaster. Teacher numbers: failed. Class sizes: failed. School building programme: failed. Physical education in schools: failed. Free school meals: failed. Nursery school teachers: failed. The buck stops on the SNP front bench. Who will take the blame—the First Minister Alex Salmond or his hapless cabinet secretary Fiona Hyslop?

The First Minister: I would not get on to the school building programme if I was Iain Gray; that was his mistake two weeks ago, before his mistake about his constituency case last week.

Within the past few days, we have heard about the full extent of local government finance that the concordat makes possible. We have also heard the comparison, which Iain Gray does not want to make, with England and Wales. This coming year, local government finance in Scotland is increasing by 5.5 per cent.

Andy Kerr: Standstill.

The First Minister: In England, the figure is 4.2 per cent.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Ferguson): Order, Mr Kerr.

The First Minister: Andy Kerr says, "Standstill." If 5.5 per cent is a standstill in Scotland, what is 4.2 per cent in England? And the figure in Wales is 3 per cent.

One of the great things about the concordat is that, because we work in agreement, it has allowed record council funding in Scotland, it has delivered a freeze in council tax, and it has delivered the small business bonus. Those things are important to people in Scotland. The biggest threat to local government finance, and to every other public service in Scotland, is the £500 million of cuts that are coming down the tunnel from the Labour Government in London.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-1575)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: Last year, as one of the conditions for supporting the Scottish Government budget, the Scottish Conservatives called for a national audit report on drug abuse. The report

published today is chilling. Five people die every day in Scotland from drink and drug abuse, and the abuse has a wider impact, costing Scotland an estimated £5 billion a year. That is a horrific verdict on eight wasted years under the previous Executive.

Alarming, the £5 billion figure is only a guesstimate. The audit report makes clear that actual Scottish figures for drug abuse were expected last May, and the Auditor General for Scotland's office confirmed to my office this morning that the Scottish Government commissioned that information. Nearly a year later, why has the First Minister not published the figures? What is being kept hidden?

The First Minister: I will investigate the matter and get the figures that Annabel Goldie wants as soon as possible—just as we, for the first time, have investigated the scale of the alcohol abuse problem in Scotland and have published the figures.

On the burden of Annabel Goldie's question, I agree whole-heartedly. We were delighted to commission the Audit Scotland report, which has identified many of the issues that she and I and others in the Parliament felt were wrong about the direction of drugs policy.

There are three issues at stake. One is to get the strategy right, and we have made a substantial step forward on drugs in moving towards the road to recovery and putting the emphasis on recovery—that also applies to alcohol abuse.

The second issue is to get the balance right and to understand, as the Auditor General's report indicates, that the alcohol problem in Scotland is even greater than our huge drug problem. Those problems together cost £5 billion in financial terms, but in terms of human misery they cost a great deal more. It is about getting the balance of funding right, and I am sure that Annabel Goldie will acknowledge that that is exactly what we have done, with a 230 per cent increase in alcohol funding and a 14 per cent increase in drug abuse funding during the comprehensive spending review period.

The third issue, which is of huge significance and which the Auditor General's report identifies as a factor that is perhaps greater than any other, is that the delivery of and the mechanisms to deliver the policies that we all want in Scotland must be correct, must be audited and must translate into helping real people in real families.

Annabel Goldie: I hope that the missing report will be published, as that information is urgently needed.

Prevention should be at the heart of any strategy, but the report states that only 6 per cent

of spending goes into that area. Will the First Minister commit to increasing that? Will he commit to simplifying the dog's breakfast of funding and treatment structures? Finally, with two thirds of prisoners testing positive for drugs on admission to jail, will the First Minister commit to drugs-free prisons? [*Interruption.*]

The First Minister: I heard "no more money" in a sedentary intervention. In fact, Mr Rumbles—and as Ms Goldie well knows—the drugs budget is increasing by 14 per cent during the CSR period, and the alcohol budget for preventing and addressing abuse is increasing by 236 per cent. Substantial resources are going in.

The point on which I agree with Annabel Goldie—and on which the Auditor General's report greatly reinforces concerns—regards delivery and the impact of the investment that is being made. Annabel Goldie has written to me to suggest a number of things with which I am happy to agree. That includes her idea of a summit, albeit with one proviso: the summit should not be another discussion about the concepts because we have moved beyond that stage. We have a new direction for drugs policy, and the alcohol and drug abuse budget has been rebalanced. The summit must focus on delivery and the auditing of delivery, and it should ensure that the good intentions and the huge budget that go into those areas are matched by real help on the ground to real families and people.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-1576)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Tavish Scott: Following the December fisheries council, the Scottish National Party fisheries minister said that it was a "huge relief"; it was "blazing a trail"; there had been "breakthroughs"; he was "delighted" by it; and fishermen "would sleep easier".

I spoke this morning to skipper Michael Henderson who was sailing back to Peterhead. He says that the fishermen get "no sleep" in the storms because there is nowhere for them to shelter—he has been forced by the Government's regulations to fish 240 miles beyond Rockall, out in the Atlantic. Men will lose their lives if that goes on, skipper Henderson told me this morning. Scottish fishermen face "bankruptcy" because of the deal that the Government signed in December.

Those are not my words but those of Scottish fishing leaders. When will the First Minister act to change the fishing regulations that his Government is imposing on the industry?

The First Minister: Tavish Scott is wrong in his analysis of the situation. The deal that was signed in December introduced flexibility into the common fisheries policy, and its application will stand the fishing industry in good stead—that point is agreed across the industry's representative organisations. As Tavish Scott should know and as any fishing MP is well aware, the biggest pressure on the fleet at present is the substantial decline in langoustine prices. That is not to do with what is happening in the home market but with what is happening in markets elsewhere. It is putting substantial financial pressure on the industry, as I am—and every fishing MP is—acutely aware.

Tavish Scott: It is interesting to hear that the First Minister is an MP now: that will be news to people in Banff and Buchan and in the House of Commons, given that he missed the fisheries debate there last December.

The First Minister's answer was utterly in denial of what is happening in the fishing industry in Scotland today. To ignore the fact that men are being injured on boats while fishing in the Atlantic around Rockall shows that he is in denial about this very serious issue for the industry. Those men are fishing out there not from a desire to fish those dangerous waters in winter but because of the implementation of the European deal by the SNP Government.

The fisheries minister is being told today that scores of fishermen could be out of a job. The industry is saying that this is the deepest economic crisis for 15 years, and half the Shetland fishing fleet—including new boats—face a 20 per cent cut in fishing days. There is complete chaos over the nets to be used. A skipper from Macduff said last night—[*Interruption.*] This is a serious issue, despite the groans about it from the SNP members.

A skipper from Macduff said last night that the Scottish Government's fishing regulations mean that he must tie up his boat for five weeks then fish for three. Fishermen are angry—how can they make a living out of that? Ministers can give the fishing industry no answers other than platitudes and rhetoric. They give no detail where detail is needed. Will the First Minister tell his Government to sort out this mess and to work out the details? The fishing regulations that are crippling boats can change from the end of April—

The Presiding Officer: Come to a conclusion, please.

Tavish Scott: Will the First Minister make that change happen to help the fishing industry in Scotland?

The First Minister: This Government has always stood up for, and always will stand up for, the fishing industry of Scotland. At the previous

two fisheries councils, faced with extraordinary difficulties, by general acknowledgement we have managed to gain valuable flexibility in allowing fishing effort to be placed in Scotland.

Let me say to Tavish Scott that, unlike him, I would never be in a Government from which I had to resign because it would not represent the fishing industry of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I will take a constituency question from Angela Constance.

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): The last remaining branch of Lord Roberts Workshops, which is in my constituency, faces closure this June. The workshop provides sheltered employment for disabled ex-servicemen and women, many of whom suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Given the First Minister's stated support for veterans and ex-servicemen and women, will he ensure that the Scottish Government actively explores all the options to save that service? Will he consider accepting an invitation to visit the workshop in Livingston?

The First Minister: Extensive dialogue between the management of Lord Roberts Workshops and Scottish Government officials has culminated in an offer of a £10,000 Scottish Government grant to meet the cost of a comprehensive business review and evaluation of the workshop. That offer was accepted only today. In addition, the Scottish Government has pointed Lord Roberts Workshops to the assistance that is available from the enterprise fund, and we understand that the organisation is exploring that option. Furthermore, we have recommended that contact is made with the local authority and the local enterprise company, and we hope that Lord Roberts Workshops will pursue that proposal. By all means, if a ministerial visit would help the matter, I will make that arrangement.

The Presiding Officer: I will take a further question from Jamie McGrigor.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In the light of last Saturday's dreadful tragedy on Loch Awe, where two men from Glasgow lost their lives and two more are sadly still missing, and considering the high number of deaths by drowning in Loch Awe in recent years, will the First Minister or his relevant representatives respond to the wishes of local people by meeting me and other politicians, local Royal National Lifeboat Institution representatives, community councillors and members of other relevant bodies around Loch Awe to create a framework to improve safety and aid rescue operations on Scotland's longest freshwater loch?

The First Minister: I thank Jamie McGrigor for giving notice of his question.

On behalf of the whole Parliament, I express my deepest condolences to the families of the four victims William Carty, Craig Currie, Steven Carty and Thomas Douglas. As the constituency member knows, the incident is now part of an on-going police investigation and potentially other investigations. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to comment in detail or to draw conclusions from the information that is available, but I would be happy to arrange for the Minister for Community Safety, Fergus Ewing, to meet Mr McGrigor and the organisations that he identified.

Mental Health (Children and Young People)

4. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to support children and young people who may feel depressed or suicidal. (S3F-1586)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting children and young people who have mental health problems or are suicidal, and we will continue to build on the excellent work that has been undertaken to date in Scotland.

We are currently working with national health service boards and other partners to deliver the specific objectives set for children and young people's mental health. That includes continuing investment in programmes to reduce stigma, to improve the capacity and capability of services to respond to those in distress, and to achieve faster access to those vital services.

Aileen Campbell: The First Minister will be aware of the recent report from ChildLine Scotland that indicates that Scotland has had a sevenfold increase, in five years, of calls from children who are reporting suicidal feelings. Indeed, the Scottish rise is steeper than that of the United Kingdom.

Does the First Minister share my shock and concern about those disturbing and upsetting figures and my concern that, while those who call ChildLine receive expert help and advice, there may be many more distressed children and young people who do not make the call and cannot be reached? Will the First Minister confirm that the Government will consider how best it can make information available to young people, parents and, particularly, carers, on spotting the signs of depression and potential suicide, which is one of ChildLine's key recommendations?

The First Minister: I certainly agree that we must work together to promote the wellbeing of children and young people and to address their needs as early as possible. We must build on their strengths and promote resilience using existing networks and support whenever possible. When necessary, we must provide additional help, as

identified by the member, that is appropriate, proportionate and timely, whether that is through schools or the health service, through supporting parents or, indeed, through expert services such as ChildLine.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I very much welcome the commitment on the part of the First Minister and his Government to tackling the issue. Access to specialist psychological services is vital for those children. Is the First Minister aware that the child and adolescent mental health service in Lanarkshire believes that it requires £1.8 million to improve staffing levels to a level comparable with other CAMH services in Scotland? Will the First Minister agree to meet me to discuss how, together, we can lift that much-needed service from the bottom of the table in the Scottish Government's recently commissioned survey by ISD Scotland?

The First Minister: I hear what the constituency member says. I would be delighted to arrange a meeting with the Deputy First Minister to pursue the points that she has identified.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I advise the First Minister that the Health and Sport Committee this week launched an inquiry into mental health services for children and adolescents. In our evidence, we found that 33,000 children had contacted ChildLine this year. I ask that his Government gives weighty consideration to our report when it is finally published, as I think that it is the first such inquiry on the subject by any committee during the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament.

The First Minister: I agree with the convener of the Health and Sport Committee. The mental health of our children and young people is a key priority, and we will certainly listen carefully to what the committee has to say.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): In the light of the First Minister's comments, will he explain how blocking amendments to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill and reducing the availability of training opportunities through the getting ready for work scheme for some of the most vulnerable young people in Scotland will contribute positively to the outcomes that he seems to support?

The First Minister: As has generally been agreed, the bill is designed to correct the deficiencies in the previous legislation. As the member well knows, if financial provisions or provisions that have financial implications are introduced into bills, they have to be considered differently. A bill that is identified to correct previous deficiencies should not in itself have financial implications.

Gang-related Violence

5. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to tackle gang-related violence. (S3F-1578)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Last December, we announced a £1.6 million package to support the community initiative to reduce violence. As the member knows, it is a project that is being delivered in the east end of Glasgow. The groundbreaking project is delivering a mix of tough enforcement and intensive services to turn around 700 young lives and make those communities safer. We are also supporting a Scotland-wide initiative that is delivering a range of programmes to more than 500 young men, in an attempt to challenge their negative attitudes and change their behaviour.

All of that work is being supported by visible and sustained police enforcement, which is being co-ordinated by the national violence reduction unit through its anti-violence campaign, the current phase of which is targeting gang violence. That is aided by the 441 extra police officers that have been delivered throughout Scotland by this Government since May 2007—record police numbers, which enable the police to help in initiatives to reduce violence.

Paul Martin: The First Minister will agree that gang-related violence is unacceptable and blights far too many communities throughout Scotland. I seek assurances from him that, in tackling such unacceptable behaviour, the Government will stop making excuses for the tiny minority of people who commit antisocial behaviour and start to represent the majority of decent men, women and children in our communities by ensuring that it delivers the legal measures in the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, which was introduced by the previous Executive. Will the Scottish Government enforce those measures properly instead of diluting them, as is set out in "Promoting Positive Outcomes: Working Together to Prevent Antisocial Behaviour in Scotland"?

The First Minister: I am sure that Paul Martin welcomes the initiatives that I have outlined. The Government never makes excuses for those who perpetrate violence. That is why there are record numbers of police officers in Scotland and why it seems that, over this term, we will exceed the target of 1,000 more police officers on the streets of Scotland than we would have had if the Labour Party had stayed in government.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The First Minister rightly touched on the projects in the east end of Glasgow, not least operation reclaim, which operates in Petershill. That project uses football as an incentive and a motivator to break down gang

divisions and to foster positive attitudes. Has he seen the figures that suggest that there has been a 35 per cent cut in crime in the surrounding area as a consequence of such initiatives? I acknowledge the investment that has already been made, but is it a model that the Government will support and replicate more widely, both in Glasgow and throughout Scotland?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree with Robert Brown. He is entirely correct that the initial figures show a dramatic result from the investment that is being made in those initiatives. In my first answer to Paul Martin, I mentioned the Scotland-wide initiative that is targeting 500 young men in an attempt to challenge negative attitudes and behaviour. However, we do not claim that gang violence is specific to Glasgow and Strathclyde; it is a problem in many parts of Scotland. The success of the initiatives that have been taken suggests that they should be applied on an all-Scotland basis.

Junior Doctors (Working Hours)

6. Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what forecast the Scottish Government has made of how many junior doctors will be working more than 48 hours per week from August 2009. (S3F-1594)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): On the basis of the figures that have been supplied by national health service boards, around 57 per cent of junior doctors are already working an average of 48 hours or less a week. That is up from the figure of 51 per cent that was recorded six months ago. We expect that, as NHS boards continue their efforts to comply with the working time regulations, the figure will continue to rise and will approach full compliance by 1 August. In order to get a more accurate projection of the number of junior doctors who may still be working more than 48 hours a week by August, the Scottish Government is issuing guidance to all NHS boards to require them to provide details of current and projected compliance levels.

As Ross Finnie knows, overall compliance with the working time regulations is a reserved matter, but the Scottish Government is doing what it can to help individual NHS boards to achieve compliance by their junior doctors by disseminating information on good practice, issuing guidance, holding seminars and providing practical advice including advice on the redesigning of junior doctor rotas.

Ross Finnie: The First Minister and his Cabinet colleagues are always swift to take the credit for health boards' meeting waiting time targets, so I am sure that he would not want to duck any responsibility in relation to the working time directive. He tells us that he hopes that the target

of full compliance will be met by August but, in replies that were given to me by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing on 9 March, she not only confirmed the figure of 50 per cent to which the First Minister has referred but talked about the fact that almost 100 per cent of junior doctors are meeting the new deal target of 56 hours a week. On that basis, there is a shortfall of 16,000 hours in meeting the working time directive, which equates to 330 junior doctors working 48 hours a week. Where will the First Minister find those 330 junior doctors by August?

The First Minister: The figures are moving in the right direction all the time. The latest figure is 57 per cent, not the 51 per cent of six months ago. What the United Kingdom Government does or does not do in these matters is of some importance, not least because it has just announced its intention to apply to the European Commission for a derogation from the working time directive.

The figures in Scotland are moving substantially in the right direction, and I would have expected Ross Finnie to find it in his heart to welcome that progress as well as, rightly, focusing attention on what remains to be done.

12:29

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Rural Affairs and Environment

Agricultural Production

1. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the recently published December 2008 survey of agriculture, what action it will take to halt the decline of agricultural production. (S3O-6366)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The statistics illustrate a long-term global trend and put into perspective the challenges that face one of Scotland's most important industries. The Scottish Government provides agriculture with more than £500 million annually in direct support. In response to suggestions from stakeholders, we are considering other ways of helping, such as seeking to identify ways of strengthening the link between those payments and active farming.

John Scott: The minister will be aware of increasing concern that the critical mass of the livestock sector is reducing to such low levels as to threaten the future of our abattoir sector, our haulage industry and other ancillary suppliers and processors. Our dairy industry in Ayrshire and our pig industry in the north-east have been particularly affected. Will he suggest how those industries should plan for the future? Is he considering, through the Scotland rural development programme, ways of helping to secure the future of those sectors and other parts of the food-producing industry?

Richard Lochhead: The member makes an important point. Part of the debate is about critical mass. The jobs concerned are those not just of farmers in fields and livestock farmers, but of many others in related sectors, such as haulage and abattoirs. It is important to bear that in mind when we discuss the future of those sectors.

My message to livestock farmers in Scotland is that they must take decisions in line with the commercial environment in which they operate, first and foremost. We as a Government—and, I am sure, the member, his party and other members—believe that the livestock sector in Scotland needs a vibrant long-term future, especially given the need for food security, which is an issue not just for this country, but globally. Our farmers are of course at the heart of food production in Scotland.

We will continue to look for ways to address a trend that is global but which has an impact on Scotland. We will consider what we in Scotland can do at least—I hope—to stabilise livestock numbers. As the trend has been long term in recent years, there is no overnight solution. We want to work with other parties, our stakeholders and wider rural communities to ensure the best possible future for the livestock sector.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): As the minister knows, productivity in the most marginal part of Scotland's agricultural sector—crofting—faces an enormous practical challenge from European proposals for the electronic tagging of sheep. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that those proposals do not make crofting impractical altogether in the view of many crofters?

Richard Lochhead: I read in today's press that some lambs are fetching up to £100, so—thankfully—prices in the sheep sector seem to have improved in recent months because of increased exports and other factors. That is some good news for the livestock sector.

The member raises a potential threat to sheep production in Scotland—the regulations that propose to introduce individual tagging of sheep and electronic identification as part of that. Only this week, I met the commissioner in Brussels who has responsibility for those regulations to discuss the severe impact that they will have on Scotland's sheep sector. It is clear that the management challenges for sheep farmers and the costs will far outweigh any potential benefit of traceability, which is the supposed aim. I am pleased that in her meeting with me and at the subsequent council of ministers meeting, the commissioner said that she recognises Scotland's problems—other countries also have such problems—and that she is willing to look for flexibility, which we hope to obtain. In the meantime, we must keep up the argument and the fight against the regulations.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments about sheep identification tagging.

I will ask about an issue over which he might have more control: fallen stock. Free collection has ended and, although islands have a derogation, people in remote crofting counties must pay for fallen stock to be uplifted. Through the rural development programme, will he allow for funding for that purpose that is provided not competitively but in a straightforward and easily accessible way?

Richard Lochhead: Rhoda Grant highlights an important issue. I met the NFU Scotland in January to discuss it. Last year, we also negotiated some transitional funding to help with

the impact that the changes that have taken place within the National Fallen Stock Company will have on livestock keepers in Scotland. She is right that the end of free collection is a potential extra burden for many producers in Scotland. I am in dialogue with various representative groups about how we could assist, but we do not have a solution yet. Our farming communities make many demands on the SRDP and other funding mechanisms, but we are keen to continue the dialogue with them to understand as much as possible the potential impact on producers and determine what we can do to help.

Environmental Improvement Projects

2. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what support is available to individuals and community groups to undertake targeted environmental improvement projects in their local areas. (S3O-6449)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): Support for individuals and communities to undertake local environmental improvement projects is available from a variety of sources. Direct Scottish Government funding streams include the climate challenge fund, increase III, which supports community-based waste projects, and the Scottish community and householder renewables initiative. Support is also available from local authorities and organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage.

Mike Pringle: The minister may be aware of the success of the recent Nicholson Street corridor week of action in Edinburgh. That joint venture by Lothian and Borders Police, the City of Edinburgh Council, Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service and local community groups has significantly improved the local environment. Initiatives such as the do a little, change a lot campaign, which was initiated by the previous Executive, have also highlighted how lots of small projects and actions taken by many individuals can make a big difference. With those successes in mind, will the Government commit to using the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill to foster greater engagement with individuals, households, communities and businesses that want to do their bit to improve their local environment and tackle climate change?

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank Mike Pringle for raising the issue. I am aware of the initiative that he talks about. Indeed, a number of other initiatives in his constituency are currently being funded—Marchmont St Giles church wildlife garden to name but one.

It is important that local organisations understand that there are a variety of different sources of funding. For example, there has been a tendency to think that, because increase III is

about waste, the climate challenge fund cannot also be applied to for the same purposes. It is important for people to understand that there is a broad range of funding streams.

I am not sure that the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill is an appropriate vehicle to take that forward, as a legislative burden is not necessarily the way to do it. It would be much better if local organisations explored all the options that are available. If Mike Pringle wishes to speak to me about some of the options of which he may not be aware, I would be only too happy to point him in their direction.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I took part in my constituency in the spring clean that Mike Pringle mentioned—it is a long corridor. One of the key issues that many members of the public raised was the difficulty of getting ready access to information for new environmental projects. The project that we were considering would be around Holyrood park down to the Dumbiedykes. Would the minister consider publishing an EasyRead document for communities so they do not need to be experts or consultants to work out where to go for the variety of grant funding that is available?

Roseanna Cunningham: Yes—and I hope that all MSPs will take part in the national spring clean, as I intend to do myself.

Sarah Boyack raises an important issue. My department is already considering it, because it is clear that there is some confusion about what money can be applied for and where people can go for support. It is important that funding is easily accessible for all small groups in all communities.

National Spring Clean

3. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it intends to give to the Keep Scotland Beautiful national spring clean campaign. (S3O-6436)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government provides annual core funding to Keep Scotland Beautiful. In the year of homecoming, we aim to make the national spring clean the most successful yet and have provided an additional £115,000 to KSB.

Gil Paterson: A number of clean-up events are planned in my constituency. How does the Scottish Government intend to encourage volunteer participation in such events?

Richard Lochhead: I am delighted to hear that Gil Paterson and people in his communities will be participating in the national spring clean. During the previous question other members also indicated that they are enthusiastically behind the campaign.

More than 28,000 people have already signed up to take part in the campaign, and I urge MSPs across the chamber to broadcast the fact that, simply by going to the Keep Scotland Beautiful website, people can sign up to become volunteers and can get more information on how to take part. The campaign is becoming very successful; it is clear that people are volunteering the length and breadth of Scotland. A lot of effort has been put in by Keep Scotland Beautiful and by MSPs to broadcast the fact that even more volunteers are needed.

Farming (Scottish Borders)

4. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to support farming in the Scottish Borders. (S3O-6361)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): For 2007, the latest year for which full figures are available, the Scottish Government paid out £60,759,000 across all farm support schemes in the Borders, for 1,824 claimants. That is an average of £33,310 per claimant. Under the rural priorities scheme, in 2008 we approved more than £5 million of support for projects in the Borders.

John Lamont: The cabinet secretary will know that many young people are considering a career in farming but are struggling to find a way into the industry. Can the cabinet secretary tell me what measures the Government is taking to support agricultural apprenticeships in the Scottish Borders?

Richard Lochhead: I would be happy to look into the specific issue of apprenticeships in the Scottish Borders, because I do not have any statistics to hand.

We are very keen to encourage apprenticeships. I recently spoke at the annual dinner of Lantra, which is involved in rolling out all kinds of programmes and training opportunities for young people in land-based sectors throughout Scotland. I was absolutely delighted to meet some really enthusiastic and impressive young people who have chosen to get into careers in land-based industries. I was taken aback by how impressive and enthusiastic they were.

A lot of good work is going on. I will certainly look into the situation in the Borders to ensure that the area is getting its fair share. The industry needs life-blood for its future, so we need to look for new ways of encouraging young people to come into agriculture and other land-based sectors.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The cabinet secretary will know that a number of concerns have arisen in relation

to the size of SRDP awards, for small farms in particular. One farmer e-mailed me this morning to say that the application process is akin to a consultants charter because of the uncertainties that surround it. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that the review that he is undertaking of the SRDP will address the concerns of small farms and hill farms, as well as the bureaucracy involved in making applications?

Richard Lochhead: I recognise the phrase "consultants charter"; I recall that it was applied to the previous rural development programme as well. However, we have taken some steps to address that.

I acknowledge the importance of this issue. We are taking the points that the member raises into account as part of our short review of the SRDP. We should not forget that a bigger review will take place next year, as is required under the legislation.

I will be happy to send details to the member, but I think that I am correct in saying that, in many cases, fewer consultants are being used for applications than were used in the previous scheme. I will send a note to the member about that.

When people are applying for £10,000 or £50,000, or even several hundred thousand pounds, of public money for their business, it is only right that the Government and the application bodies should ask them to put together a business plan to justify receiving such an amount of public money. In many cases, it is perfectly appropriate that people should hire consultants as part of that work. We should not get into the game of making criticisms any time that consultants are required to put together complicated applications for large sums of public money. After all, such applications have to be justified.

NFU Scotland (Meetings)

5. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent meetings ministers have had with representatives of NFU Scotland. (S3O-6405)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I regularly meet NFUS national representatives, most recently at this week's European Union agriculture and fisheries council in Brussels. Moreover, on 20 February, I attended and spoke to the NFUS council meeting in Aviemore, and I meet NFUS local representatives throughout Scotland in the course of my duties.

Mary Mulligan: The cabinet secretary will be very aware of the many concerns that have been expressed about milk production. Previously, he agreed with my colleague Sarah Boyack's

proposal for a milk summit to discuss related issues. Did he discuss that proposal when he met NFUS representatives and can he say when the summit might happen?

Richard Lochhead: The Government certainly shares Mary Mulligan's concerns about the important issue of the future of Scotland's dairy sector, which is under severe pressure at the moment. The issues that affect that important sector are often discussed with the NFUS and other agricultural organisations; indeed, over the past few weeks and months, I have met representatives from many sectors that play a specific role in the dairy sector to discuss its future.

As for the dairy summit that I undertook to pursue in response to suggestions from Sarah Boyack and other members, we are still working on it. Unfortunately, I cannot snap my fingers and demand that representatives from every part of the retail chain get round the table when I want them to. However, I assure Mary Mulligan that we are pursuing the proposal and that we will keep her, Sarah Boyack and other members with an interest in the issue up to date with developments.

I point out that, in the meantime, my colleague Roseanna Cunningham has chaired a meeting of the retailers forum, which, as members will recall, is an innovation of this Government. Ms Cunningham used that opportunity to raise directly with retailers the concerns of the industry, the Government and the Parliament about the future of Scotland's dairy sector. We will continue to look for other such opportunities, including having some form of summit as soon as possible.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 6 was not lodged.

Biomass Energy Industry

7. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the 2008 wood fuel demand and usage data published by Forestry Commission Scotland, whether it considers that the biomass energy industry is sustainable. (S30-6365)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): Sustainability is at the heart of the Government's forestry and renewable energy policies. Last year, the wood fuel task force reported on the potential additional woody material that could be sustainably produced from a range of sources and demonstrated that there is still scope for considerable expansion of the current market. Biomass is clearly a finite resource, but we are working to ensure that standards for sustainable production are in place. The Scottish Government is liaising with the United Kingdom Government to support the development of European Union sustainability criteria.

Nanette Milne: As the minister will be aware, the 2006 report by John Clegg Consulting on wood availability and demand from the biomass energy sector in Scotland and northern England forecast that demand for wood would outstrip supply from 2008. Given that incentives for energy recovery from biomass have put greater pressure on existing forest industries, such as Scotland's wood panel industry, will the minister support specific incentives to encourage energy recovery from underutilised forest materials and contaminated waste wood for which there is no market? Such a move would mobilise a large source of renewable fuel while at the same time helping to reduce landfill and protect existing industries.

Roseanna Cunningham: The member will be pleased to hear that some of that work is already being undertaken. There is no doubt that demand for wood fuel is increasing and that, although the scope for new, very large plants is perhaps limited, huge opportunities are still available. It is absolutely the case that a wider range of materials, including waste biomass or imported fibre, will have to be used.

The wood fuel task force has already identified significant additional sources of woody biomass that, if brought to market, will allow the biomass energy industry to develop alongside the existing wood processing sector. As the member has suggested, that will include the use of stumps, branches and other such material.

Members should realise that these issues are being addressed monthly by a number of different groups. We are very aware of the industry's concerns and are trying to address them.

Agricultural Regulations

8. Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many agricultural regulations it has removed since 2007. (S30-6372)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Since 2007, 47 Scottish statutory instruments have been revoked and replaced by 26 new instruments in order to reflect the updating and consolidation of existing legislation to ensure compliance with European legislation.

Other Government initiatives have helped to reduce the burden of regulation on farmers. For example, by October 2009 we will have cut the number of farm inspections by 2,000. We have also reduced the number of questions on the June annual census form by 70.

Gavin Brown: Given the good start made by Scotland's environmental and rural services partnership on reducing duplicate inspections and

so on, will the cabinet secretary consider incorporating other agencies—for example, local authority trading standards activities—into the SEARS partnership in order to reduce costs and duplication further still? That would be of enormous benefit to our farmers.

Richard Lochhead: I assure Gavin Brown that we are discussing that with partners in SEARS. Some of the agencies that he mentioned are not formally members of SEARS, but I assure him that we are certainly discussing how we can take that general theme forward. Given that SEARS has been very successful, we want to take the partnership to another level. We believe that there is widespread support for that, as is evident from the member's question.

Justice and Law Officers

Unlicensed Taxis (Assaults)

1. Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many incidents of assault in the last year involved unlicensed taxis or private hire cars illegally picking up passengers. (S3O-6437)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We do not collect information on the circumstances that lead to an offence being committed. However, we are determined to stamp out criminality in the taxi and private hire industry. Regulations are currently before Parliament on the licensing of taxi and private hire car booking offices. Those measures will both act as a deterrent to unlawful activity and send a clear message that there is no room in the taxi industry for those who want to use it as a front for illegal activities.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I welcome the Government's work on the issue to date, but I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the four sexual assaults that we know about that have taken place in Edinburgh recently as a result of bogus taxis picking up passengers. That is a known problem in Edinburgh, where private hire cars—which are far less recognisable than black cabs—illegally ply for trade in busy city centre streets.

I welcome the City of Edinburgh Council's proposals to increase the signage on private hire cars to make it clear that they must be privately booked, but I recognise that, on a cold night, most people are more interested in getting home than in the nature of the vehicle. Will the cabinet secretary work with the police in Edinburgh and throughout Scotland to consider whether the police need to crack down on the issue by targeting specific city centre areas where illegal pick-ups are known to be a problem and by ensuring that the licensing

regulations, which protect the safety of our public, are enforced?

Kenny MacAskill: I thank Shirley-Anne Somerville for raising the issue. The matter was also raised in the recent discussions that local MSPs had with the chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police down at Fettes Avenue, so she will be aware that the police are on the case.

Clearly, improvements are required in how we obtain information on those who come into the country and then apply to become a private hire or black cab taxi driver, but such enforcement matters are not so much for the police as for those who regulate the industry. However, Shirley-Anne Somerville should realise that the Government is happy to work with the City of Edinburgh Council and the police to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to secure the safety of travellers. Clearly, as she mentioned, there have been some nasty incidents recently, so we need to ensure that we retain the good name of the well-regulated taxi network that exists in the city.

Strathclyde Police (Meetings)

2. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent meetings it has had with the chief constable of Strathclyde Police. (S3O-6385)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I am due to meet Chief Constable Stephen House tomorrow afternoon. I last met him on 19 January at a meeting of the serious organised crime task force, at which we discussed a number of issues including co-ordinated operations by the eight Scottish police forces against serious organised crime. Such operations resulted in the arrest of 473 people between September and December 2008, the seizure of drugs worth nearly £13 million and the seizure of 42 firearms.

Patricia Ferguson: When the cabinet secretary meets the chief constable tomorrow and the issue of drugs comes up—as it no doubt will—will he discuss with the chief constable the problem that arises when landlords attempt to evict tenants because of a conviction for drug dealing? As the cabinet secretary will know, it can take six months to obtain a conviction for drug dealing but the landlord must then raise a separate action for eviction, which can take a further six months to come to court. That time lag causes understandable frustration and fear in communities. Will he undertake to meet me to discuss ways in which the eviction process can be accelerated to help protect the constituency and communities that I represent?

Kenny MacAskill: The member makes a valid point. Communities are blighted by those who deal

drugs. It is important that, through the police and the prosecution system, the court ensures that justice prevails.

The issue has a knock-on social effect on housing, and the question is whether that is best dealt with by me, as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, or whether it would more appropriate for it to be dealt with by the Minister for Housing and Communities, because some of it falls not so much within the justice portfolio as within the housing portfolio.

I am more than happy to consider any proposals that the member may have. Whether we are talking about evictions from private and public sector tenancies or closure orders, we have to ensure that our communities are protected from those who peddle drugs and that those who do so are dealt with through formal prosecution or through other methods, such as eviction.

Young Offenders Institutions

3. Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): I begin by offering the Presiding Officer and members an apology. I have been asked to take part in a panel debate at 2.45 this afternoon and will have to leave immediately after I ask my question.

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it plans to take to overcome the long-term problem of overcrowding in young offenders institutions. (S3O-6456)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Polmont young offenders institution will open a new hall that is designed to hold 136 young offenders in around September this year. That will ease the current overcrowding in Polmont. In the longer term, the Government's plans for a coherent penal policy, making use of community payback, will reduce pressure across the prison system.

Jim Tolson: I welcome any progress by the Government, but recent answers to parliamentary questions from my colleague Robert Brown reveal that Darroch hall at Greenock and Friarton hall at Perth have been operating at well above safe limits for the past 14 months. Half of Scotland's young offenders institutions have been seriously overcrowded for more than a year, and 85 per cent of young offenders serving time in Scotland's prisons have previous convictions. Tackling overcrowding is the key to ending that revolving-door policy. Will the justice secretary ensure that tackling prison overcrowding, particularly in young offenders institutions, becomes a priority?

Kenny MacAskill: I assure the member that it is already a priority, which is why we are investing £120 million per annum in the prison estate. We have opened Addiewell prison; the planning

proposals for HMP Grampian and HMP Bishopbriggs are under way; and we are preparing the ground for new prisons in Inverclyde and the Highlands. The prison estate pressures are being addressed as a matter of urgency.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I am sure that the cabinet secretary is well aware of the benefits for tackling reoffending of maintaining, as far as possible, the community links between families and offenders. Will he outline any plans the Scottish Government may have to make further progress on that, and to allow more offenders to serve their sentences locally?

Kenny MacAskill: We are working with community justice authorities on that. I met, in Irvine, Jackie Clinton and Peter McNamara from the CJA in the area. It is clear that we have to ensure that offenders retain links with their families and that, wherever possible, those who have not committed a serious offence or who are not dangerous are not detained. We are seeking to have community payback as opposed to free bed and board. That is the Government's direction of travel. We want to ensure that those who offend against our communities pay back for the harm that they have done. When they are dangerous or have committed a serious offence and no other sentence is due, off to prison they will go. With regard to the others, it is time that they did some hard work and were not given free bed and board at the taxpayer's expense.

Community Service Orders

4. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that offenders begin community service orders within seven days. (S3O-6450)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We are committed to improving the timescales for the start of orders so that offenders understand that crime will be speedily punished. The intention is that offenders who are the subject of a community service order should start their work placements within seven working days. To assist local authorities to reorganise service provision to meet those much tighter timescales, we have provided an additional £1 million to community justice authorities in 2009-10. Following extensive consultation with the Association of Directors of Social Work, we issued revised guidance on the operation of community service schemes at the end of February. That is being followed up by a series of staff training events over the coming weeks.

Jeremy Purvis: The cabinet secretary will be aware that the area that I represent in the Borders has a low number of community service order

disposals. There may be a number of reasons why sheriffs take such decisions, but it is critical to the Government's policy of reducing the number of short-term prison sentences that community service orders and other restorative community disposals are not only used but effective. What is the Government's ambition for reducing the number of such prison sentences, and for increasing the number of community service order disposals in areas such as the Borders?

Kenny MacAskill: We recognise the fact that rural areas—not just in the Borders, but in the north as well—have specific problems. That takes us back to the point that I made to Mr Coffey. We want to see community payback, which was proposed by the McLeish commission, as opposed to the free bed-and-board culture that has existed at the taxpayer's expense for far too long. We must work with the community justice authorities and social work departments to ensure that we have the appropriate resources and facilities.

The issue of speed in dealing with offenders is partly an attitudinal matter. I remember Lesley Riddoch on the McLeish commission challenging the practice by which someone who was given a custodial sentence was immediately sent down to the cells, whereas someone who was otherwise dispatched was dealt with in due course by the social work department. An attitudinal change had to be made. For 20 years as a defence agent, I never challenged that system; it was accepted as the orthodoxy.

It has been made clear in Liverpool and in New York—as Bill Aitken often says—that justice should take place as quickly as possible. Whether someone gets a custodial sentence or a community sentence, we must ensure that we provide a fair, fast and flexible response, and that is where the Government is heading.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): The cabinet secretary correctly identified my interest in the example of New York. Does he agree that the system that operates there, which has an immediacy that we simply cannot replicate, is the way forward, bearing in mind its success rate in cutting summary offences and in ensuring that community service is actually done—an accusation that could not be often levelled here?

Kenny MacAskill: As I said to Mr Purvis, that is the Government's intention. The matter was raised by the McLeish commission, and we are delivering both through "Protecting Scotland's Communities: Fair, Fast and Flexible Justice" and by putting in additional resources.

I am more than happy to send Mr Aitken an article that I read recently in *The New York Times*, which says that the United States now has 7.3 million people in prison, on parole or on probation.

The US has recognised that continually locking people up does not work. Even Governor Schwarzenegger, who has a Republican ethos, is seeking to reduce expenditure and ensure that investment is made in tackling the root causes, whether they are drug related or whatever. There is something absurd in the fact that, although the state of California has the fifth largest economy in the world, its second largest item of expenditure is corrections.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): If ministers believe that it is important that community sentences are served quickly, why were they unable to tell me, in parliamentary answers, how long offenders are waiting to serve their community sentences? It was found through freedom of information requests that the figure for offenders who begin to serve such sentences within seven days is appallingly low. Surely ministers need to know that information not only to progress their flawed plans for a massive and unresourced increase in the number of community sentences, but because of the other offences that occur while offenders wait to carry out their community sentences. That is hardly payback.

Kenny MacAskill: Mr Baker criticises the system that we inherited from him and his colleagues. The fact is that there was no previous direction that community sentences should begin within seven days—we are introducing that through "Fair, Fast and Flexible Justice". Yes, bail breaches are unacceptable; that is why we introduced tougher measures and why the matter is being dealt with. Any criticism relates to the situation that we inherited, not to the action that the Government is taking.

European Union Law (Compliance)

5. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what responsibility its justice directorates have for ensuring that Scottish Government proposals comply with EU law. (S30-6409)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): In accordance with its obligations under the Scotland Act 1998, the Scottish Government ensures that all policy proposals are compatible with Community law.

Peter Peacock: Can the minister tell Parliament what legal advice the Government has sought on the legality of setting a minimum price for alcohol and whether it feels absolutely confident, in the light of any advice that it has taken, that it can proceed on that matter legally? Will it publish any such legal advice?

Kenny MacAskill: As a former minister, the member is aware that such legal advice is never published. Our legal advice from Government

lawyers, who previously advised Mr Peacock when he was a member of the Administration, makes it clear that the proposal is lawful and acceptable. It is surprising that so many people accept as gospel the advice of lawyers who are retained by and receive money from those who have vested interests in the alcohol industry. Somehow or other, people seem to believe their advice rather than the advice that the Government has received from its lawyers.

I cannot share the advice that we have been given, but Mr Peacock can take it as read that there are many lawyers out there who have a vested interest in opposing the proposal. It is clear to us that we must act against the scourge of alcohol—as mentioned in the chamber—and the proposal for minimum pricing is perfectly legitimate. That is why we have received support for it from the likes of the chief medical officer south of the border.

Alcohol Misuse

6. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what legal or other measures it will put in place to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse. (S3O-6444)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): On 2 March we published “Changing Scotland’s Relationship with Alcohol: A Framework for Action”. The document is available on the Scottish Government website, and copies have been placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

The framework sets out a robust and proportionate package of measures to rebalance Scotland’s relationship with alcohol, reduce alcohol-related harm and contribute to a successful and flourishing Scotland. It includes legislative measures and a wide range of approaches for creating longer-term cultural change. Together, those actions will begin to make a real difference to the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland, to our economy and to our communities.

Jim Hume: None of us is complacent about the problems that society faces in relation to alcohol abuse by people of all ages, not just those who are under 21. Will the cabinet secretary therefore inform us how, exactly, the Government intends to ensure that any reform of the law will be effectively targeted and, importantly, evidence based?

Kenny MacAskill: We are doing that. We have been consulting and are intent on taking action. Clearly, our actions do not simply involve criminal justice. The member, who represents the South of Scotland, will be aware of Sheriff Kevin Drummond, who was on the radio today talking about the problems that people in the Borders

experience as a result of alcohol abuse and the behaviour that goes with it. Equally, as was mentioned today by Cathy Jamieson and Richard Simpson, alcohol abuse is fundamentally damaging the health and wellbeing of Scotland. It is not simply a small minority who are abusing alcohol; a large majority are exceeding their recommended limits and damaging themselves and others, including children and other people in their communities. That is why we have to act.

We have made it quite clear that we are prepared to change the process. We now have to work out a common agreement and strategy to tackle the problem. Part of the solution will involve new legislation, part of it will involve enforcing current legislation and part of it will involve education. However, the fact is that we cannot go on as we are.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that radical measures are needed radically to change Scotland’s relationship with alcohol? If, as I suspect, he does, can he tell us what radical suggestions have come from the Opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament? I thought that we all agreed that radical measures were required, but I have looked for some such suggestions from the other parties and cannot find any.

Kenny MacAskill: I welcomed this morning’s debate on the subject, which I closed on behalf of the Government. We welcomed the position that was expressed by Cathy Jamieson, Richard Simpson and Hugh Henry, whose speech was valuable and excellent.

There is now a recognition that the issue of the process has been resolved, and that we now need to consider ways of addressing the problem. The Government is more than happy to work with any and all parties in this chamber. We cannot go on as we are, and we have to ensure that we make the appropriate changes.

Criminal Law (Reform)

7. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to reform criminal law during the parliamentary session. (S3O-6422)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Frank Mulholland): The Scottish Government is taking forward its plans to reform the criminal law.

The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament earlier this month. The bill contains a number of important reforms to the criminal law including new offences to tackle serious organised crime and a new offence outlawing the possession of extreme pornography.

The Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill, which will reform an important area of the criminal law, and the Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Bill, which will send a strong message about the unacceptability of prejudice in a modern Scotland, will also make valuable contributions to the development of the criminal law in Scotland.

Joe FitzPatrick: The Solicitor General will know that concerns have been raised both inside and outside the chamber regarding the position of spouses testifying in criminal cases. What steps does the Government intend to take to address that important issue?

The Solicitor General: The member raises a good point. The bill will amend the law in order to ensure that a spouse or civil partner is treated no differently from any other witness. The current law causes difficulty where the crime is against a child or involves sexual abuse or violence and there is important evidence to be gained from a spouse or civil partner. Often, the evidence that is crucial to provide a sufficiency comes from the spouse or civil partner. At present, the spouse or civil partner is a competent witness, but not a compellable witness. If the spouse or civil partner elects not to give evidence, there is nothing that can be done, and justice can be frustrated and defeated. There have been cases in which, in the time between the commission of a crime and the trial, the accused has married the main witness against them, thereby frustrating and defeating justice. The proposal in the bill will make the spouse or civil partner a compellable witness, thereby closing that historical loophole.

Cornton Vale

8. Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it agrees with Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland that the conditions for young women at Cornton Vale are unacceptable. (S3O-6443)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We welcome the recent report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland on young offenders in adult establishments and note his recognition of the various aspects of good practice at Cornton Vale prison, including the treatment of the prisoners and the management of women at risk. We also recognise the areas of concern that he raised and will ensure that the Scottish Prison Service considers those issues appropriately. The Scottish Government is committed to a justice programme that is designed to manage offenders appropriately and reduce prison numbers.

Ross Finnie: Bruce house at Cornton Vale has been the national resource for young female offenders only since February 2008, yet less than a year since it was established, it received what is

on balance a highly critical report from Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons. Does the Scottish Prison Service have a timetable for implementing the chief inspector's recommendations?

Kenny MacAskill: A multifaceted approach is required to ensure that we ease the pressure. The Scottish Prison Service is doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances. The nature of the prison clientele—if I can put it that way—at Cornton Vale is extremely challenging. Many have a history of mental illness, many have a heroin or other drug addiction, and many have been victims of abuse. There are substantial and complicated problems.

Clearly, we require to address matters within prisons. However, it is equally important to seek to roll out and expand the turnaround project and build on the excellent work of, for example, the 218 project in Glasgow. The Government is doing that. Sometimes, we have to deal with the underlying problem and not simply the offending, and the underlying problem for so many of the offenders in HM Prison Cornton Vale is heroin addiction.

Supporting Economic Recovery

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a subject debate on supporting economic recovery.

14:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I welcome the opportunity to lead a further debate in the Parliament on the Scottish economy and the programme of activity that the Government is undertaking not only to protect the most vulnerable people during the recession but to build strong foundations for economic recovery.

The reality of the recession is now hitting homes and high streets throughout the country. We must fully understand the impact of the recession. Unemployment is rising, but here in Scotland it is still lower, comparatively, than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Economic activity also remains higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Having said that, we do face major challenges with the loss of employment and the loss of business activity. Behind the economic analysis statistics are real people who have the skills and willingness to work but are being denied the opportunity to access employment. That is the reality of the recession in all of our constituencies. The Government has pledged to do all that we can to support individuals to secure alternative employment should they face unemployment.

We should acknowledge that, as in any recession, some sectors and businesses remain resilient and some are well placed to adapt and seize the opportunities that the recession presents. The Government has every confidence in the ability of Scottish workers and businesses to respond to the challenges that we face and to build on our strengths and capture new opportunities as they emerge.

One opportunity that the Government is determined to seize in the face of the difficult economic circumstances is the chance to capitalise on the new commercial opportunities, new jobs and new technologies that will come from the transition to a clean, green economy. Since the summer of 2008, in a difficult financial climate, our renewables sector has announced nearly £1 billion of new private investment. That represents 1 per cent of our annual output. Renewables already provide us with more than 20 per cent of our electricity needs and they are set to provide us with an even greater proportion.

The Government is putting in place measures to incentivise and support that process. Our £10 million saltire prize is our clean, green energy challenge to the world. Through the prize, we will

draw in the talent and ideas to ensure that Scotland, which has about a quarter of Europe's tidal and offshore wind capacity, leads the world in marine energy. That ambition can only be supported by the welcome announcement today that, through the Government's work, the intervention of our economic development agencies and a co-operative partnership with Argyll and Bute Council, we have been able to secure almost 100 jobs at the Vestas wind turbine factory near Campbeltown. In doing so, we have created the prospect of a further 400 green jobs for Scotland. That will transform the prospects of the Kintyre peninsula economy, and it provides further evidence of the opportunities that exist for Scotland to establish a worldwide reputation for supporting green energy industries.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): On funding for marine energy, does Mr Swinney accept the point that the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and others have made that, after the completion of the current wave and tidal energy scheme and long before the awarding of the saltire prize, a funding gap of perhaps £40 million will kick in some time in the next year or two?

John Swinney: The Government will remain absolutely focused on ensuring that the wave and tidal industries can be supported through the challenges that there will undoubtedly be in ensuring that their products are fully deployed and that we see economic benefits from that deployment. Extensive discussions are taking place with companies in that sector. The Government will, of course, listen carefully to the sector's analysis and representations to ensure that we can fully absorb the opportunities in developing the area of activity. I think that we all agree that we were slow off the mark in capturing all the benefits of the onshore wind sector. We are determined to ensure that we fully capture opportunities in the wave and tidal sectors for the benefit of the Scottish economy.

The Government has focused on taking measures to support the Scottish economy for some time. Long before the current economic difficulties, we reduced business rates through the small business bonus scheme, which is now benefiting tens of thousands of Scottish businesses. From next month, thousands of businesses in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector will pay no business rates at all. We also took early action to ease the pressure on household bills by freezing the council tax. That is undoubtedly supporting households, and the small business bonus scheme is supporting businesses at this difficult time for the economy.

As economic conditions have changed, so the Government has adapted. Last summer, we developed our six-point programme for recovery.

That programme was set out in detail in January. In February, we secured a budget for economic recovery, which enhanced a number of interventions that the Government was making, and we published a progress report on our programme that provides a clear and coherent structure to our activities.

That report was welcomed by the national economic forum, which met last week. Ministers, including the First Minister, attended that meeting to listen to the concerns of forum members. I heard a commitment to focus on opportunities and to look forward to Scotland emerging stronger from the recession. The members of the forum heard an update from the Council of Economic Advisers—the Labour Party spoke about that in an earlier debate. Forum members will feed material to the Council of Economic Advisers, and they are key partners in driving Scotland's economic recovery. We will continue to listen to and work with Scottish business and our partners in the public sector for the benefit of the Scottish economy.

The Scottish Government continues to revisit and revise its economic recovery programme to ensure that it meets needs in the areas for which we are responsible and fully supports economic recovery. Since our previous debate on the economy, the Government has set out 10 energy pledges, which will more than likely support in excess of 16,000 jobs in Scotland. Those pledges demonstrate our commitment to a green economic recovery.

We have ensured that, this year, a record £644 million will be spent on social housing investment to assist the construction sector in Scotland. Earlier this week, we announced that £6 million of European Union funding will support jobs in the Highlands and Islands. That made good our determination to accelerate the allocation of our structural funds.

In collaboration with business organisations, we have launched the business club Scotland initiative to ensure that Scottish businesses get maximum value from the range of major events that take place in Scotland. We have provided an extra £1 million to Citizens Advice Scotland to help families with debt problems, and through implementing the progress that we made on the apprenticeship issue in the budget, we have made available funding for 1,000 extra apprenticeships in the city of Glasgow.

The Government is also taking forward the opportunities that arise from the year of homecoming, which shows that even in these times of economic difficulty we can find opportunities and benefits. We are well on track to meet our target of attracting 100,000 additional international visitors to Scotland, generating £40

million in tourist activity and creating more than 1,000 new jobs, and we are achieving that in difficult economic circumstances. All members who have interacted with the tourism industry in the past few weeks during tourism week and other events will have been impressed by the optimism and confidence of the tourism sector and its determination to contribute significantly to the year of homecoming and our economic performance in 2009.

In supporting economic recovery, the Government is putting a high priority on investment in Scotland's infrastructure. We are pushing ahead with accelerating £323 million of capital spending as part of a wider programme of investing £3.5 billion in the Scottish economy this year. Our swift action will support an estimated 5,800 additional jobs in Scotland, which are essential at this time.

The Government's clear view is that measures to boost and expand the economy should support capital investment projects and not reduce VAT—as the United Kingdom Government did some months ago—because such capital investment delivers significant benefit to the Scottish economy.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The VAT saving is comparable to the saving that is being made through the council tax freeze. Is John Swinney saying that the council tax freeze money could have been better used on public sector projects and investments?

John Swinney: The council tax freeze represents a way of tempering the significant increases in council tax that took place in the term of the previous Administration—there was a 60 per cent increase during the last term of that Administration. The Government has been determined to take steps to temper the increases in council tax and provide welcome respite to individuals in Scotland.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: I will give way to Mr Kerr in my closing remarks, because I am very close to concluding my opening remarks.

The Government believes that we will have proper investment in the Scottish economy when this Parliament acquires financial powers and has the ability to borrow effectively and take wise decisions about long-term investment. We made progress on that issue during the budget debate, and I look forward to our making further progress on ensuring that this Parliament has the ability to borrow to invest for the long-term future of the people of Scotland.

We face a challenging time in the Scottish economy, but I am certain that the measures that have been taken by the Scottish Government to date, within our competence and responsibility, will establish strong foundations for economic recovery. The Government pledges its determination to work with Parliament and the wider sectoral interests in Scotland to ensure that we create a strong Scottish economy. On that basis, the Government will take forward its programme for economic recovery.

15:08

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to open for the Labour Party. We have serious concerns about what is not being done by the Scottish Government, some of which I will highlight shortly. However, we all have a responsibility to debate in a constructive manner and make positive suggestions about what the Parliament can do to boost the Scottish economy.

We made some suggestions to that end back in October, as part of our 15-point plan, and many of them have been adopted by the Scottish Government. John Swinney said in this chamber in January that he

“acknowledged publicly that the Government has accepted and taken forward a number of the suggestions in the Labour Party’s plan”.—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2009; c 14411.]

Whether it was increasing support for the Scottish manufacturing advisory service, making improvements to partnership action for continuing employment or dropping plans for the local income tax, we believe that those were the right decisions for the economy.

The budget process showed ultimately that the Parliament can unite—or almost unite—when required, and we engaged in that process constructively from day 1. We wanted to ensure that the budget would support people who were facing redundancy and those who needed to develop their skills.

We recently agreed to establish the financial services jobs task force, which we hope will drive a positive agenda to secure jobs in the sector throughout Scotland. We did all those things because we in the Parliament recognised collectively the greater good of supporting our people and our economy.

That brings me to some of our concerns about the Government’s current approach in certain areas. The most obvious concern, which I think is shared throughout the chamber, is the lack of action on the Scottish Futures Trust. I remember seeing Alex Salmond on the television in the run-up to May 2007 saying that the not-for-profit model

would be up and running later that year. At the time, I thought that that was ambitious for an untested new model. Almost two years into the Administration’s term, the Scottish Futures Trust has failed to deliver even one school or hospital. Keith Miller, the chief executive of Miller Group, summed it up perfectly when he said in February:

“There has been a moratorium for a couple of years in projects.”

That has meant that public sector projects have not taken up the slack in the construction sector from the private house building market and therefore have not sustained employment and retained capacity in the sector more widely. The Scottish Government has to either get the Scottish Futures Trust building projects or forget the SFT and return to previous funding mechanisms.

Sustaining employment and retaining skilled capacity is vital, because, over the next few years, an increasing number of public sector projects will need skilled people not just here in Scotland but across the UK. One of the most obvious of those is the Commonwealth games, but we will also see two new huge aircraft carriers—we are fortunate that those projects are being allocated to Scotland. We will see a new Forth crossing and a plethora of other projects that were outlined in the strategic transport projects review and national planning framework 2. We have to consider how those projects will be delivered, and not just in financial terms. We must also consider how the projects will leave a legacy in human terms as well as infrastructure terms.

I will make what I hope is a constructive suggestion to John Swinney about how we deliver wider economic objectives through public procurement. I believe that ministers could do more to ensure that young people do not lose out on skills and training during the current recession. We should use the procurement process to encourage companies to invest in training. Public sector spending on goods and services in Scotland is around £8 billion per year, which is a huge sum by any account. In the current climate, that money could be used more effectively to support small businesses, local employment and training. I would like the Scottish Government to explore the greater use of community benefit clauses within public procurement to drive up standards in training and workforce development. I think that that would be welcomed by business, all sides of industry and the trade union movement. Good employers want to see that, too, because they understand that the development of skills and support for local businesses is vital to industry. I think that the Government would see supportive engagement from the business community on that idea.

We are witnessing an increasing number of job losses, particularly in the manufacturing sector. We obviously welcome the increase in advisers for SMAS and we know from first-hand experience how important the expertise that they provide can be. That is why Labour set up the manufacturing advisory service in England, which was copied here in Scotland.

It is important to put on record our concern about the consistency of the Scottish Government's approach on manufacturing job losses. When NCR announced its job losses a week or so ago, there was a high-profile intervention from Jim Mather, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism. I know NCR well, and I have been disappointed by the decline in manufacturing there and in Dundee more generally for the past few years. I support high-profile intervention by the minister. I absolutely agree with that approach, which is similar to the approach taken by ministers in the previous Executive. However, I am concerned that although we have witnessed closures in other parts of Scotland on a similar or larger scale over the past year, we have not seen such a high-profile response from Scottish ministers. I accept that work often takes place behind the scenes, such as in the case of Vestas, which we have heard about today, but I am sure that the cabinet secretary will acknowledge that, in future, members will expect ministers to take a similar approach to the one that Jim Mather took in the case of NCR.

Scottish manufacturing is as important now as it has ever been to our economy, which is why we called recently for a manufacturing summit. It is important to bring together all sides of industry with Government, so we are pleased that the Scottish Government has agreed to that suggestion. I hope that the cabinet secretary will spend some time giving us the detail on that in his summing up. It is important that we as a Parliament understand what the commitment will look like and what it will mean for everyone in industry who is keen to engage and support our manufacturing sector.

The apprenticeships summit, which was agreed to during our budget negotiations with the Scottish Government, is also taking place. I was disappointed not to see one mention of apprenticeships in the document "Progress on the Scottish Economic Recovery Programme", because they warranted one.

Since the budget, I have spoken to many companies that have an interest in apprenticeships. They are enthusiastic about what they can deliver—with the right level of Government support. The Labour Party believes that we should never return to the levels of youth unemployment that we witnessed in the 1980s,

and we strongly believe that apprenticeships are key to ensuring that that does not happen.

A number of issues must be addressed to support apprenticeship training and make it more widely available. We have spoken in the chamber previously about increasing non-traditional apprenticeships in areas such as management and information technology, which cut across all sectors of the economy but do not have individual skills councils batting on their behalf.

We know of the concerns of those who say that businesses cannot take on apprentices at this time. There is a need to consider how partnerships between large and smaller employers can be developed. Many larger companies in Scotland have their own internal training facilities, so they could support smaller employers in taking on apprentices and support training in supply-chain companies. That would help wider industry and help to address skills shortages in the future. Those measures could break down some of the barriers—either real or perceived—that SMEs often identify to taking on apprentices and retraining their workforce.

However, other barriers must also be tackled. I hope that the summit will give serious consideration to challenging the gender stereotyping that leads to occupational segregation—my colleague Johann Lamont will follow up on that issue in the debate. Serious consideration must be given to practical measures to increase the involvement of disabled and black and minority ethnic apprentices in the skills agenda. I too often hear concerns about the lack of apprentices from non-traditional backgrounds but no solutions as to how to increase their uptake of apprenticeships. I look forward to tangible solutions coming out of the summit.

We also recognised during the budget deliberations that we must help and support apprentices who are facing redundancy, because it is a waste of everyone's time and resources if young men and women are jettisoned halfway through their training or, even worse, when they have nearly finished. The issue was addressed at First Minister's question time both last week and today. We must make it easier for those young people to benefit from the apprenticeship guarantee. Members should put themselves in the shoes of someone aged 18 or 19 who is worried about losing their job and has been told to contact different agencies—it is incomprehensible. The Scottish Government should set up a hotline for apprentices who face redundancy. It does not matter whether it is local or national, but the Government must make it accessible and ensure that it delivers, not on the political deal that was done but for apprentices who face redundancy.

The Scottish Government can take a number of steps to ensure that shovels start hitting the ground in public sector projects. I hope to hear more about that from the cabinet secretary when he sums up, because I am sure that that is what all members want to see happening.

15:17

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

Throughout the chamber, we welcome the news about the jobs in Kintyre. Even just in my own area in the South of Scotland, the news on unemployment in the past year has been grim. Unemployment in the area has increased by 6,200 over the past year: 1,100 jobs have been lost in the Borders, 1,100 have been lost in Dumfries and Galloway, 1,000 have been lost in Clydesdale, 700 have been lost in East Lothian and 2,300 have been lost in Ayrshire. The same pattern applies across the country, and the situation looks set to get worse. The unemployment problem is very significant.

Aspiring to gain a competitive advantage in green jobs in the renewables sector is perfectly reasonable. To create a jobs base in Scotland in that sector, we should learn lessons from the oil and gas industry, which has been successful at creating jobs that are based in Scotland even when the work has not taken place in Scotland. Learning those lessons will allow us to build the foundations for a stronger recovery when the recovery comes.

John Park mentioned infrastructure projects. Although we might take a different view of the nuances of the Scottish Futures Trust, we are probably on the same page in relation to the importance of infrastructure projects to the economy and our economic potential.

Although it is not fashionable to talk about it now, we still have a very important financial sector in Scotland. It might not be the flavour of the month with the public or with the media, but there are still significant numbers of jobs and significant opportunities in the financial sector. We expect the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government to do what they can not only to protect existing jobs but to grow the sector. There is, of course, also the opportunity to attract inward investment and create jobs.

It is crucial that we set the right tone. Our ambition must be for Scotland to be a competitive place where people want to set up in business. The abandonment of local income tax is particularly helpful, because it sends an important message, although perhaps not the message that the Government wished to send.

In previous debates, I have highlighted the significance of the constraints that the increase in

debt under the current UK Government has placed on the options that are available to it, and the knock-on impact of those constraints on the Scottish Government. When I made that point in December's debate on the pre-budget report, Andy Kerr intervened to quote the governor of the Bank of England in his support. I suspect that he is less likely to do that today.

Along with the Confederation of British Industry, we have said consistently that the scope for a fiscal stimulus or an expansion in public spending is severely constrained by the level of public debt. The governor of the Bank of England has now said the same.

Andy Kerr: I will deal with Mervyn King's comments in my closing speech. Would the member care to comment on the fact that, according to International Monetary Fund statistics, the UK is second only to Canada in respect of positive indications of debt? France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United States of America and the euro area are all more indebted than the UK. If all those nations are below us, how do the member's figures add up?

Derek Brownlee: The problem is that national debt, which now stands at £717 billion, was £610 billion a year ago. Before the start of the recession and bank recapitalisation, national debt doubled under the Labour Government, even with 11 years of uninterrupted economic growth, so what will happen to it in the recession is truly frightening. There is therefore little, if any, prospect of any meaningful increase in the resources that are available to the Scottish Government through Barnett consequentials, and any actions that we seek from the Scottish Government will have to come from reallocating spending.

Regardless of whether the failure of the auction of Government debt is related to market concerns about the sustainability of UK debt or is due to a one-off factor, it should at least give pause for thought to those who argue that more debt is the answer. There may not be scope for more debt. The Scottish Government should think about what will happen if even the current projected level of spending cannot be supported and should prepare contingency spending plans in case the level of reductions is more than the £500 million that ministers commonly quote. I am sure that all parties would be happy to work on a cross-party basis to develop such plans.

As we have said in the past, there is a limit to what the Scottish Government can do to mitigate the impact of the recession in the short term, but it can lay foundations for economic recovery in the medium to long term. The substantial reductions in business rates that will take effect from next week are welcome, but there is more to do. Because of the constraints on spending, difficult decisions will

emerge. Traditionally, in a recession, spending on capital projects is scaled back and funding is focused on maintaining revenue spending. There are understandable political reasons for that, but we should avoid that approach in this downturn, because infrastructure spending has the capacity to improve our economic potential and to lay the foundations for a more successful economy in the future. We should protect the spending in the Scottish Government budget that grows the economy and prioritise spending on infrastructure and discretionary revenue spending in areas that will promote economic growth to the greatest extent.

Like the previous Administration, the Government states that its purpose is to promote economic growth. That has never been more crucial than it is now, and it should take precedence over other worthy objectives. Every action that the Scottish Government takes should be assessed for its impact on economic growth, and a much firmer stand should be taken against proposals that will reduce the potential of the Scottish economy to create jobs and investment. We should neither overstate nor be ignorant of what the Scottish Government can do.

15:23

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The Liberal Democrats said that they would work with the Scottish Government on shared priorities, not only during the economic downturn but during the budget process that concluded earlier this year. We were pleased that the Government changed its mind about making submissions to the Calman commission on how it can use the powers of the Parliament and the levers that are available to us to support the economy in the long term.

In the medium term, as part of the budget review process, we wanted the Government to shift its focus to supporting the economy and doing exactly the sort of things that Derek Brownlee mentioned. We wanted it to lock in benefits from spending that supports the economic recovery of Scotland and to move resources away from areas that might be good for headlines but are not good at supporting jobs in the economy. So far, we have had one meeting with the cabinet secretary on that shared agenda. I hope that there will be others, because the public finances in Scotland for the coming years demand that kind of work.

We also argued for a joint jobs task force for the financial sector in Scotland, given the sector's importance in providing jobs in our cities and rural areas.

During the past six months, there have been nearly 700 job losses in my area, many in the

textiles sector. Members know the human cost of the credit crunch that started months ago, which is why, towards the end of last year, we argued for a fiscal stimulus in the budget. We argued for income tax cuts and we shifted the debate in Scotland by proposing a more radical response, because, according to all the figures that are at the Parliament's disposal, the recession will be longer and deeper in Scotland than it will be in any other part of the UK. That means that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government need to do more to respond.

The Government's attack on the VAT cut is at odds with the support that the Scottish National Party expressed for the policy in December. The Government's claim that it wants to invest its way out of the recession is at odds with its creation of a hiatus in infrastructure investment in Scotland. The Government's solution is a council tax freeze, which the Parliament debated yesterday. That approach locks in the unfairness of the council tax and provides more support for people who are better off, instead of focusing on people on low and middle incomes and restoring confidence in the economy.

Derek Brownlee: I have heard that criticism of the council tax freeze from Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, but does the member acknowledge that for the criticism to be valid there would have to be a link between earnings and council tax bands? That would mean that the council tax was the progressive tax that the Liberal Democrats seek.

Jeremy Purvis: Mr Brownlee does not understand. The council tax is frozen across all bands. Because the bands are unfair in that they are not linked to ability to pay, a freeze puts more money in the pockets of people who were better off to start with. It is simple. That is perhaps why the Conservatives remain committed to the principle of the council tax, which angers many of my constituents.

If we are to recover from the recession, it is critical that we invest in skills and infrastructure. It is regrettable that in the Scottish Government's first two years of office there has been a real-terms cut in universities spending, for the first time since devolution, and a fall of 1,000 in the number of teachers, which is unheard of. It is understandable that there is concern in the education establishment in Scotland, which should be at the forefront of building a reputation for Scotland as the most innovative and entrepreneurial economy. We cannot build that reputation by lowering the priority of skills and education.

The Government published a skills strategy, which the Parliament has yet to endorse. The strategy envisages a starring role for Skills

Development Scotland, the new, centralised quango, but its regional structure, which was recently announced, does not use the boundaries that Scottish Enterprise uses. Therefore, under the new “more focused structure”, as the Government has described it, Scottish Enterprise does not have the same boundaries or programme as its skills partner, and the boundaries of both bodies are at odds with local government boundaries, which determine where businesses must seek help from the business gateway. There used to be a one-stop shop for support for small businesses and start-ups, but companies must now go to their local council for start-up support, to the national body Skills Development Scotland for skills support, and to Scottish Enterprise if they are forecast to have a turnover of more than £1 million. The Government’s decision on business support and its decision to reduce considerably VisitScotland’s ability to promote local areas were made with catastrophic timing in advance of the recession.

We were told that the Scottish Futures Trust would enable us to invest our way out of the recession, and the electorate was told that the SFT would fund infrastructure investment, but now we are told that it will simply give advice. In response to a freedom of information request that I made for information on how quickly the SFT will develop schools, I learned that it will be four years before the first school that the SFT supports is built, in East Renfrewshire. In defending the role of the SFT, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change said that it would bring together projects, but the SFT said in its FOI response that that was not necessarily the case.

Regrettably, the ingredients to get us out of the recession—investing in skills and in infrastructure—are two of the Scottish Government’s weakest areas.

15:30

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the chance to discuss the Scottish Government’s recovery programme, and I want to develop some examples of how we can create a smarter Scotland in these difficult times.

I will start with what is at the heart of driving the economy—the ability to borrow. It is a sad fact that, in today’s banking world, the safest bank in Britain is the Airdrie Savings Bank, but the message is that the kinds of deposits that back that bank provide the smart banking that we could have if we had a Scottish investment bank with arms in various parts of the country. I believe that people would be happy to invest what savings they had in such an organisation to help us deliver local projects.

Andy Kerr: Most of the members of the Council of Economic Advisers are among those who designed the banking system that the member has just criticised, so I suggest that he is on to plums if he thinks that they will produce a measure that is somehow safer than the rest of the institutions in Scotland.

Rob Gibson: The recovery of the private banks will of course take some time. Thanks to the Labour Government’s light-touch regulation over the past 10 years, much of the economy changed radically last autumn. We do not need any help from Labour members on the issue: indeed, they should listen for a minute because we might be able to build more local resilience by being a bit innovative.

As the cabinet secretary said, we need fiscal powers to make the changes that allow us to deploy money to best advantage. However, given the fixed sums that we have and the support that we gain from various sources, I advocate that we look carefully at how best to exploit the recovery plans that are being developed elsewhere—for example, the EU recovery programme. In particular, that programme would help us create green energy jobs that should be properly defined and measured so that we can show categorically that Scotland is in the lead in that direction.

I am delighted that the EU recovery programme will support with cash the development of the North Sea grid for the energy that we can produce, which our country will benefit from. That is one of the areas where the programme will be most helpful. In addition, the Aberdeen offshore wind farm will act as a demonstrator and, as part of our recovery, potentially lead on to many more jobs in the clean energy area. However, lest we think that that is the only way to work at present, and as work needs to be done speedily, we must consider how research is being conducted.

To some extent, complaints about the amount of money available are on the margins because we must consider examples of where excellence is produced, such as the environmental research institute in Thurso, which is undertaking research that will help us understand how the Pentland Firth works and how we can undertake more successful marine energy projects there. We must consider the green benefits of saving our environment and understanding, for example, the great carbon sinks that we have in the peat bogs of the north, particularly in the flow country. We must ensure that bodies such as the institute and the consortia of which they are part are given our full support.

I note from the EU programme, too, that it wants broadband to be developed in various parts of Europe. Part of our problem in Scotland is that, although BT has announced super-fast broadband for the cities, we still do not have proper

broadband in many rural areas. We need to concentrate on how to achieve that at this time.

Jeremy Purvis: The member knows that, in his and my areas, the previous Administration's pathfinder project has meant that school buildings in particular are connected to high-speed broadband. What is this Government's policy to continue and expand the momentum of the project that the previous Administration started in the Highlands and the south of Scotland?

Rob Gibson: The cabinet secretary will have in mind ways to build on the Avanti Communications programme and so on, with a view to ensuring that, when it comes to paying for high-speed broadband, people in rural areas who receive a low number of megabits per second do not pay for 8 megabits. I hope that the Government will argue for such an arrangement when it develops its demands for some of the European money to help broadband to step forward.

I will discuss the land sector, because the European recovery programme supports the common agricultural policy health check to an extent. People in this country can take measures now. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has told landowners that no right-to-buy legislation will be introduced in this parliamentary session, yet some people will not rent farms to tenants. Landowners could play their part in providing the equivalent of apprenticeships by allowing young farmers to get started in our rural market. Young farmers are frustrated at present.

The Government will have to consider carefully the creation of new crofts and forest crofts and community buyouts, especially given that—as I have said before—the Big Lottery Fund is sequestering a lot of its funds in the east end of London and has cut off any chance of communities buying land for such purposes. The Government needs to advocate that in order for us to have a better economy.

I have run out of time. I thank the Presiding Officer for the opportunity to speak.

15:36

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate. There is a danger of a little occupational segregation among MSPs in economy debates, with only men contributing to debates on big issues such as the economy while we reflect on social issues elsewhere. In my speech, I will try to bring the two aspects together.

It is essential to understand the impact of the global economic crisis not just in general terms but in particular terms and for particular groups. The

cabinet secretary reflected on that, but he spoke generally about the economy and did not address particular groups' needs. I will explore with the Scottish Government what its six-point plan and other approaches do to understand needs and impacts and to address them properly.

As John Park said, public procurement alone amounts to £8 billion. It is right to ask not only how that money is being disbursed but how it can be used to lever in social and economic benefits for the people of Scotland. We should not separate out that issue, which provides an example of how we can shift from general aspiration to making a difference to individuals, families and communities.

Concerns are already felt about the Scottish Government's willingness or capacity to address equality in its spending. Equality groups have flagged up their concerns about the lack of transparency in the budget and the step back from the progress that had been made on interrogating budgets on the basis of equality. Ministers have deprioritised equality in the development of single outcome agreements.

This morning, I searched the Scottish Government's website for an updated position, since May 2007, on women and employment, disability and employment, and employability. My search was fruitless, which is a concern because it suggests that the Government is not reflecting on those critical elements in economic recovery.

In these unpredictable and unprecedented times, I do not set the Government the task of solving everything, but we must ask one question: are the Government's actions making things better or worse? The first part of Rob Gibson's speech was deeply depressing because the Parliament has put in place opportunities to ensure that the general develops into the particular and to make a difference. I am concerned that, if the imbalance in need and the disproportionate impact are not understood, the opportunities to protect and support people will be lost. In that regard, the Scottish Government will make things worse and not better.

In the remaining time, I will flag up some issues. Low pay remains an important issue for women—16 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women are in low-paid jobs. What does our economic strategy say about that? On addressing vulnerability to unemployment and redundancy, what is being said about the fact that women are more likely to work part time? As for occupational segregation, the service industries have been hit more in the recession, and 19.5 per cent of women but only 4 per cent of men are in administrative and secretarial jobs. There is also segregation within sectors. In retail, women make up two thirds of the workforce, but still more men are in full-time retail

posts. Women are concentrated in part-time, low-paid jobs and men in management posts.

What is the strategy on the occupational segregation that faces black and ethnic minority communities? What is being done to address the challenge that people who live in poverty face in securing work when fewer jobs are available? What is being done to address the scandalous levels of unemployment among people with disabilities? It is essential that the Government focus on that.

The Government announced an apprenticeship summit, but it was silent on equal access to training. I challenge it on that: who will be invited to the summit? I hope that the minister will respond and reflect on what equality groups need to be at the summit to address equal access to training, which must be a key part of the agenda. The policy of concentrating adult modern apprenticeships in particular sectors has had the consequence of directing moneys away from the sectors in which groups such as women are found. We cannot leave it to the market to find modern apprenticeships for women while Government moneys are concentrated on construction, engineering and life sciences.

The update on the skills strategy is silent on diversity in need, and it is critical that the Scottish Government should speak on that.

What is being done to continue an employability strategy? I regret the ending of Scottish Enterprise's role in that, as I remember intermediate labour market initiatives in my constituency that took women who were unemployed, trained them in child care, provided child care, and offered a bridge into employment. Those initiatives have now gone but must feature once again in the Government's employment strategy.

What is being done to match the package of £42.5 million that has been made available in the rest of the United Kingdom to support the voluntary sector through recession? The minister often talks about the amount of money in the voluntary sector, but what is he doing to address the impact of recession? It is regrettable that organisations such as Community Service Volunteers Scotland have to cut back their services when the voluntary sector and volunteering can give people critical skills to face the recession.

Tackling disadvantage is not only for when the sun shines; it is an integral part of economic recovery. It does not get headlines, but it passes a more important test: it addresses needs and strengthens economic opportunities. I urge the Scottish Government to recognise that fact in its

apprenticeship summit, skills strategy and spending decisions.

15:42

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Like other members, I can readily list the hardships that my constituents have suffered as a result of the credit crunch and economic downturn. I do not want to enter into a bleak game of top trumps with other members, but I will mention some of the problems that have beset the islands since it first became obvious how poorly the UK's banking sector had been regulated over the years.

Some losses, such as the closure of the Woolworths store in Stornoway—ironically, virtually the company's most profitable branch in Scotland—are common experiences to many towns throughout Scotland, but they leave a particularly large hole in an island town centre. One shopper recently commented to me that there is now nowhere to buy a DVD in a 100-mile radius, although I have yet to test the accuracy of that assertion.

Perhaps most painfully, the islands lost their single largest private employer when Lighthouse Caledonia ceased operations at its fish processing plant in Marybank, with the loss of more than 100 jobs. That closure came at the same time as a convoluted situation emerged at the Kenneth Mackenzie tweed mill, in which the new owner made a welcome investment in plant but adopted the bold business strategy of not actually selling tweed—a long story for another day.

The islands do not have the highest unemployment in Scotland, but the statistics mask two underlying problems: the low wages of many islanders who are in work and the ever-present threat that the jobless will simply leave.

I am not stupid enough to talk to anyone about green shoots of recovery, but there is a lot of evidence in the islands and elsewhere to back up the Scottish Government's belief that, at a time like this, Government needs to invest in the economy, not cut it back. With Government support, much can be achieved for Scotland's economy.

I will give members a local example. The Arnish construction yard, which for so many years had struggled to find orders, now has a new tenant—one with a healthy order book. After many months of patient negotiation by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, BiFab construction is taking on 60 skilled workers. HIE continues to work with Lighthouse Caledonia and others to seek a long-term future for the fish processing sector in the islands and, despite the problems, there is overwhelming evidence of a demand for tweed, borne out by the fact that two smaller mills in

Carloway and Shawbost have been able to start to take up from where Mackenzie's has for the moment left off.

The tweed industry was given further support this week when the Scottish Government levered in £92,000 from the European regional development fund and £82,000 from the European social fund to set up an industry fund and training programmes for the industry respectively. That came the same day as the First Minister announced more than £1 million of funding for the creative industries.

Andy Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Alasdair Allan: I will indeed—although I think I know what the member is going to say.

Andy Kerr: I was listening closely to what the member had to say about the Western Isles. He has spoken about light-touch regulation, and he mentioned the First Minister just a moment ago. On 7 April 2007, the First Minister said that his Government was

“pledging a light-touch regulation suitable to a Scottish financial sector with its outstanding reputation for probity, as opposed to one like that in the UK, which absorbs huge amounts of management time in ‘gold-plated’ regulation.”

Which side of the argument is the member on? Is he with the First Minister or the UK Government?

Alasdair Allan: Anyone who has seen the banking sector regulation that has been on offer from the UK in recent years will conclude that it has been one of the most disastrous pieces of misregulation and under regulation in our history. I do not think that anyone needs to take any lessons on that one, because the evidence is easy to see.

As I was saying, the First Minister has announced that more than £1 million has been allocated to the creative industries in the islands to assist the development of the growing media industry. Aside from the few businesses that I have mentioned, virtually all the industries on the islands are made up of small businesses. Therefore, on the islands as elsewhere, it is important to create the environment for wider economic growth—whether by cutting the cost of transport, as the Scottish Government has done, or by cutting the cost of fuel, which the UK Government has not done. Fuel duty comes within the remit of the UK Government.

All the encouraging examples from the islands have a common theme, and it is a theme with a wider application. For a country such as Scotland to come out of a downturn such as this one, its Government must play a proactive role. That means front-loading investment to aid the construction and other industries, as Scotland's

Government is doing. That is why the £293 million of capital spending accelerated into 2009-10, on top of the £30 million in 2008-09, will support an estimated 8,500 jobs.

I could go on, but suffice it to say that I hope that there is now consensus, among at least a large part of this Parliament, that no Government can cut its way out of a recession. Constrained as we are in the Scottish Parliament without borrowing powers, I believe that Scotland is nonetheless showing a clear understanding of that point.

To those who call on the Scottish Government to make still further investment in specific areas, I can conclude only by saying this: their enthusiasm is commendable but, as I hardly need remind them, the size of Scotland's budget is not, bizarre as it may seem to most of us now, determined in this place. They should take their argument to the London Government that is seemingly hellbent on cutting £1 billion from Scotland's budget in the teeth of a recession.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Before I call Margaret Curran, I remind members that speeches should be limited to six minutes. We are tight for time.

15:48

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will not take that request personally, although it might have been an indication that I overrun from time to time. Yes, I think it was.

I begin with an apology, as I may have to leave the chamber at some point. I hope that I will not miss the closing speeches but, in case I do, I apologise in advance.

It can be tempting for members to resort to business as usual in the chamber: we speak in debates; we represent our constituents; and we pursue our issues. We have heard some of that this afternoon, but we must remind ourselves of the scale of the challenge and the environment in which we currently live. As Johann Lamont said, we live in unprecedented times. The scale of the financial crisis has been breathtaking. It has a particular resonance in Scotland, and it must lead to some profound rethinking. It must not lead just to a regurgitation of our normal party-political debates.

The standing of the Scottish banks was inextricably linked to the reputation of Scotland. We all took great pride in the Scottish banks because we knew that they enabled us to punch well above our weight internationally. As a result, the depth of the financial crisis has particular meaning for us and will, I hope, encourage us to think again about certain issues that matter to us.

So much for the masters of the universe. We on the Labour benches well understand why anger at the bankers is sweeping the country. Of course, none of us would indulge in or endorse personal attacks, but we need to register our anger at those who behaved more like casino operators than sound financiers, arrogantly failing to think through the implications of their actions for jobs, families and communities throughout Scotland. At a recent event that I attended, Will Hutton said that we needed a Marshall plan for recovery and a Nuremberg trial for the bankers. The sentiment might have been a bit strong, but it certainly drew a lot of support from the people who were there. It is clear that it cannot be business as usual and that the Parliament must rise to the challenge.

Party politics is important, and we cannot simply pretend that it does not matter. It plays a vital role in such times because we need to hold the Government to account, to test it properly and to demand that it acts in a way that benefits the country. Given some of the speeches that we have heard this afternoon, it is legitimate for Labour members to ask John Swinney in particular to explain what his Council of Economic Advisers says about the current economic crisis. Do the individual members hold any responsibility for their contribution to it? The background of George Mathewson, the chief economic adviser to the First Minister, is interesting in that respect. Has his advice changed? Has he reflected on the analysis that he has given in the past? What is his current analysis of the situation? I presume from what other members have said that we are all committed to a fiscal stimulus plan, but I want to know what the Council of Economic Advisers has advised.

We must galvanise our resources in the Parliament and work together to protect Scottish industries and jobs. As I have said before, I remember too well what happened in the early 1980s and its impact on the east end of Glasgow, and I argue fervently that the area paid too heavy a price. Those people had to pay not only an enormous social cost but an economic cost as potential was smashed, skills were lost and opportunities were missed. We must ensure that we do not make the same mistakes again and that we do all that we can to make the protection of jobs our highest priority. As we know, people who are unemployed in their teens will, when they reach their early 40s, earn 12 to 15 per cent less than they might otherwise have done, and this recession is taking a particular swipe at young people.

Last week, we had a members' business debate on the Vion factory in Cambuslang, where many of my constituents work. I have to say with the greatest respect that, when we pressed Jim Mather on whether Vion could get some of the £75

million that the Government has committed to support the food and drink industry, we did not really understand his response. I think that it was a no, but let me ask the cabinet secretary directly whether it is possible to use some of the £75 million that the Government has committed to support and protect jobs at Vion. Given that some of that money has gone to the constituencies that John Swinney and Alex Salmond represent, some of it should, in fairness, come to the west of Scotland. It is exactly the kind of intervention that is required.

At this time of economic downturn, we in Scotland need to seize economic opportunities to deal with that other great looming global crisis: climate change. As the cabinet secretary has made clear, Governments throughout the world from Korea and China to the United States are meeting that challenge by integrating plans for green jobs into their approaches, but the climate change targets in the current Scottish bill will not kick in for another decade, which is simply not good enough. An important part of Labour's 15-point plan is a commitment to growing the energy efficiency and microgeneration industries, and we need much more specific commitments from the Government on that. I hope that the cabinet secretary will comment on that in his summing up.

On a recent visit to Allied Vehicles, a company in the north of Glasgow that I believe has also been visited by a Government minister, we saw great evidence of a business that is on the brink of major developments and could in future produce electric cars in Scotland. That company is waiting for announcements about sustainable transport and hoping that the Government will intervene directly with measures that will provide jobs in Scotland, help us to tackle climate change and allow us to lead the way in this technology. I hope that the minister will answer that point directly.

In conclusion, we need a step change—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must finish there, Ms Curran.

15:55

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): It has always been my view—I have expressed it before and will probably do so again—that politics and macroeconomics are characterised by long periods of stability, in which nothing much exciting happens, followed by periods of frantic and sometimes catastrophic change. Sadly, a long period of stability has now ended and one of catastrophic change seems to have begun.

In today's debate on how we support economic recovery in Scotland, it is not my job to attribute blame, but I must say that the much of the speech

that preceded mine could be characterised as, “It wisnae me.”

Margaret Curran: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: Not at the moment.

The Labour Government and Gordon Brown rode a wave of economic stability and success with continued growth over a long period, but the impression that the Prime Minister gives today, as the tsunami washes over him, is more like that of the rabbit in the headlights than anything else.

Given that we are here to debate how we support Scotland’s economic recovery, let me pick up on some figures that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth mentioned in his opening speech. Scotland might appear to be doing rather better than the rest of the United Kingdom at this stage in the economic downturn because our unemployment is not so high, our growth remains slightly higher, and our descent into recession seems to be on a much slower trajectory. However, I have a concern that the reason for those figures is that Scotland’s economy is more dependent on the public sector than the economy in the rest of the UK is. That underpinning by public resource might slow our rate of progress into recession, but future projections must take into account the fact—as many of us now admit—that less public money than we would like will be available to us in the recovery phase. The danger is that, having descended more slowly into recession, we will have a significantly slower ascent out of it.

For that reason, in looking at how Scotland’s economy can best recover, the Government has a clear duty to consider how best to invest the limited resources that are available to ensure that we are not late recoverers from the recession. I have heard much to encourage me today, given that both John Swinney and John Park talked about how we might use money from the public purse to underpin the development of private enterprise in the recovery phase when, once its confidence is restored, private enterprise will willingly go ahead with borrowing and investing to create genuine jobs for that recovery.

What do we need to do? As several others have said, infrastructure is key. The limited resources that are available at this difficult stage must go towards infrastructure, which will then be present to underpin the recovery when it comes. Yes, that means roads and bridge, but it also means schools and other public buildings. The opportunity should be taken—and taken urgently—to use our resources to ensure that those who would otherwise have no job are kept in work preparing our infrastructure for recovery. I need not repeat that the failure of the Scottish Futures Trust to deliver the resources necessary

to push forward those projects will be written as an epitaph across this Government if it falls.

We have also heard about green jobs. I am very interested in them, and I genuinely believe that a massive number could be created. A number of such opportunities exist, but let me take this opportunity to highlight one problem that we could see recur in future.

This week, I met Mr Alistair Kerr of the Wood Panel Industries Federation. He was concerned about the increasing use of wood-fired biomass in Scotland. We all know—and I agree—that such use is a good thing. Last year I joined the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth at Macphie of Glenbervie, where he formally opened a large woodchip boiler that is being fired by wood from local timber. That is exactly the type of thing that we want to encourage.

The problem is that, if we also want sustainable construction of highly energy-efficient houses in Scotland, we will need those raw materials. Mr Kerr told me that, since the advent of biofuel-fired or woodchip boilers, the cost of his industry’s raw material has gone up by a factor of three or more. If our industry cannot compete in that environment, the raw materials that the people whom we put to work use to build energy-efficient houses might come in from abroad.

Such problems, which involve a situation in which one industry is supported and succeeds while another is damaged by the same action, will have to be addressed by the Government at every stage of the development with which we are going ahead. We need to progress a return to stability for Scotland’s economy, but the private sector is essential to that recovery.

16:01

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): I, like Margaret Curran, apologise to members; due to commitments in my constituency, I will not be able to stay until the end of the debate.

I welcome the Government’s decision to bring to the chamber, in its own time, a debate on the economy. However, it is disappointing that ministers have not put forward a proposition to set out clearly the measures that they plan to take to tackle the most challenging economic circumstances of the post-war period and to seek Parliament’s backing for that approach.

Current ministers lectured us when they were in opposition on the need for motions to be laced with vision and aspiration. The Minister for Parliamentary Business, Bruce Crawford, was particularly critical of what he called “wishy-washy” motions, but now he does not even want a wishy-washy motion lest it contaminates the debate with

party politics. However, I will enter into the spirit of the debate that it is clear Mr Crawford wants us to have.

I agree with much of what the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth said about the role of clean green jobs in supporting economic recovery. Amid all the understandable gloom around the current state of the economy, there are pockets of optimism. For example, as we face up to the responsibilities of tackling climate change, real opportunities exist for creating new jobs and new wealth. The secretary-general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, recently told the Davos economic forum that although the obvious temptation is to focus on short-term economic problems, it is important to remember that climate change remains the "one true existential threat" to the planet.

I am not sure whether Derek Brownlee was distancing himself from that view and suggesting that economic growth should take priority over other worthy causes—I hope not. Decarbonising our economy is not optional, but how we choose to do so, where Government makes its investment and what incentives it puts in place will determine whether we emerge from the current economic trough taking full advantage of the green-collar job opportunities.

The cabinet secretary has announced a target of creating 16,000 green jobs in Scotland by 2020. That target strikes me as somewhat modest, which is not an accusation that is levelled at the Government too often. Modesty is not the real worry, however: in response to the questions that I have raised in recent weeks, ministers admit that they have little idea where those jobs will be created or of what constitutes a green job. In effect, the Government is setting targets for what Donald Rumsfeld would class as "known unknowns".

The RSPB points out in its briefing that those jobs need to be properly defined and measurable. The Government must cast aside its new-found modesty and recognise that opportunities are broad ranging, including the

"development of green infrastructure, environmental management and wildlife tourism".

I look forward to reading Mr Swinney's winding-up speech tomorrow to find out whether any further light has been shed on the issue.

It is right that ministers continue to emphasise the potential of renewable energy to create jobs and wealth. I add my welcome to the cabinet secretary's announcement about the turbine facility at Machrihanish. The benefit of that, as Mr Swinney suggests, will extend beyond the Kintyre economy.

The potential that can be found across a mix of technologies should not be underestimated, although it is obvious that I have a particular interest in the marine energy sector. I was pleased to see, from responses to parliamentary questions that I lodged recently, that the Government is now committed to undertaking a detailed supply chain analysis of the sector. The absence of such an analysis at this stage is viewed by the marine energy industry as a barrier to forward planning, and ultimately to job creation.

Concerns have been raised with me by, for example, those who are involved in vessel supply. Increasingly, bespoke supply vessels will be needed to support the marine energy industry through installation and generation. The scope exists for designing, building and crewing those vessels in Scotland. I would be interested to hear ministers' views on how the development of the sector could be supported, either directly or through incentivising collaboration between technology developers.

To date, there has been a pipeline of Government support for renewables research and development. However, although I welcome the plans for tiered renewables obligation certificates for wave and tidal energy, I remain deeply concerned about what one developer told me was

"a lack of any open source of R and D funding for marine renewables."

For all that the First Minister loves to wrap and rewrap himself in his saltire prize, as Lewis Macdonald said, it will not pay out until 2015 and represents a winner-takes-all approach. Government needs to recognise the need for on-going support for those who are looking to scale up their projects as well as bringing on other, earlier-stage devices.

A further threat to the creation of a renewables revolution is the limitations of the grid. Although more attention must be paid to decentralising generation and taking seriously issues of storage, the demand for grid infrastructure remains and is growing. I am told that there is no shortage of potential investors but that the regulatory regime needs to be sorted out. Ministers have been part of the broad coalition that has been arguing for change, but that pressure must now be intensified. In my constituency, Fairwind Statkraft last week announced that its onshore wind projects were on hold due to a lack of progress in reducing charges for access to the transmission system.

The potential for job creation in energy efficiency as well as in energy generation is significant. There is also the added benefit of achieving quick wins in reducing both emissions and fuel poverty. Building up skills and capacity will be crucial to securing that win-win situation. Dave Watson of

Unison has called for the Government to build up a carbon army to be sent into battle against poor insulation, energy inefficiency and waste. That certainly has a ring to it. It needs to be a nationwide effort, however. At present, carbon emissions reduction target and community energy saving programme funding discriminates against my constituents and others who live in island areas, as do the insulation initiatives that are being promoted by various retailers. That is unacceptable and a nonsense, given the prevalence of fuel poverty in my constituency.

A nonsense, too, is the fact that, under the Government's insulation and central heating schemes, no local installers are used for jobs in Orkney. Economically, socially and environmentally, that makes no sense. In the future, more attention must be paid to the local recruitment of Mr Watson's carbon army.

In the area of waste, the potential for job creation is substantial but, unfortunately, time does not permit me to go into that.

I welcome the debate and look forward to further opportunities to debate the issues more fully. I apologise again for having to absent myself before the winding-up speeches.

16:07

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I find something that I can agree with in the first sentence of the Government's progress report on economic recovery. It states that, from day one in office, the Government has been clear about its central purpose being to create success on the basis of sustainable economic growth. I agree that the Government has been clear in setting that objective, but it has been unclear in explaining what that means. It is the latest in a series of verbal tricks. First, we had economic growth, then economic development, then sustainable economic development and now sustainable economic growth. Each of those verbal tricks has attempted, over the years, to distract us from the fundamental question in the modern economy: can everlasting growth be sustained on a planet of finite resources? Every other political party in the chamber, so far, remains at least formally committed to arguing that it can be.

The aim is growth everlasting and, despite the linguistic gymnastics that are used to imply otherwise, growth that is to be pursued regardless of the social and environmental impacts. For decades, a vision of everlasting growth based on conspicuous consumerism has been pursued by Governments of all mainstream political persuasions around the world. That has led to a society in which people are encouraged by a torrent of advertising to judge their worth as

human beings on the basis of how much stuff they consume.

The recession should be taken as a hard lesson about the meaning of unsustainable economics. We have seen debt piled upon debt, with transactions spiralling out of all proportion to the value of the goods and services that are produced in the real world. We have seen patterns of production and consumption that have been hideously mismatched to people's actual needs and a handful of individuals growing obscenely wealthy playing at masters of the universe. Some of us have been arguing for years that the prevailing economic model, which has left half the world too thin, half the world too fat and vital natural resources plundered and squandered, is doomed to failure. The question is this: does economic recovery mean resurrecting that failed model or finding something new?

Mr Swinney described a transition to a clean, green economy. That is, indeed, an important part of our response. Many Governments see that as part of a stimulus approach and are spending on infrastructure that we will need in the 21st century instead of more of the same. China and South Korea are perhaps the most ambitious examples of that approach, and the United States of America is doing something similar. However, the UK's green investment package is not even halfway up the table of the green investment packages of European countries.

What of the Scottish Government's response? I am bound to point out that the remarks on energy efficiency in the Government's progress report are the mere remnants of a failed attempt by my colleagues and me to persuade the Government to do the whole job for the whole of Scotland, which would have cost something like £100 million a year for 10 years, which is less than the price of one mile of the M74. Instead of that, we have £15 million. At that rate, we will barely finish half the task by 2050.

Should we welcome even that small amount as at least the beginning of a transformation? I am afraid not. It is a supplement. Alongside that investment in the green alternative—in what should be transition or transformation—we see more of the same: unnecessary roads and bridges, more coal-fired power stations and airport expansion. Every country is guilty of the same thing—I do not lay this entirely at Mr Swinney's door. However, even if green investment is being seen as part of a green stimulus, it is an attempt to stimulate the corpse of what went before, resurrecting a failed economic model; it is like Dr Frankenstein applying a few volts to the severed frogs' legs on the bench in front of him, seeing them twitch and crying out in triumph, "It's alive!"

Well, it is not. The animal remains, in any real sense, a lifeless form.

Is that metaphor intended to represent the Scottish economy? Am I saying that our economy is dead? No, of course not. However, the notion of abolishing bust and having boom for ever—the notion of everlasting growth—is dead. The era of treating energy as a cheap commodity is over. The persistent habit of human beings living beyond our means, financially and ecologically, must be killed off too.

What does economic recovery mean? Recovery does not mean keeping a dying patient alive for one more day, still in pain, still dependent on a life-support system provided, in this case, by the Treasury. It means treating the underlying sickness.

An economic recovery plan for Scotland that understood recovery as healing rather than reanimation would have at its heart three key aspects. First, it would have new ways of defining economic progress, including all its impact on human life and our environment, not just growth, and would understand that the word “economy” shares its roots with “ecology” and is about more than just money. Secondly, it would have clear definitions of the social and ecological limits within which the economy must exist and a sense of how the private, public and third sectors can work together to achieve them. Thirdly, it would involve an all-out attack on the shallow and selfish values of consumerism. The age of me me me, more more more, greed and overconsumption must die if something more sustainable and human is to be allowed to live. That would be recovery, and it would mean ending the futile attempt to resurrect the corpse of the 20th century.

16:13

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): Last November, when the Parliament debated the state of Scotland’s economy, many members, including me, were able to reflect on the fact that what was then being euphemistically referred to as the credit crunch had come to dominate the news headlines across the various media forms and had eclipsed practically every other issue of note. Nearly six months on from that debate, we can all agree that that remains the case, even if the terminology has changed from credit crunch to recession. The state of the global economy and the latest indicators and announcements from Government and industry continue to be the dominant stories of the day. In the intervening period, we have witnessed too many businesses closing their doors for the last time and too many people losing their livelihoods. That reflects the real and immediate impact that the recession is having on the everyday lives of individuals and families.

Public concern is widespread and real. Although we hope that that does not manifest itself solely in the form of grievances against private citizens—the results of which we have seen in recent days—we ignore that concern at our peril. That is why it is right for Parliament to have this debate today.

There is now no question but that we are in this for the long haul. Figures that were released this week might have contained conflicting evidence about inflation, but other indicators show that unemployment in Scotland is up and economic output is down.

The many and varied solutions and steps to recovery have been occupying some of the greatest economic minds throughout the world. Answers are sought to questions about how we got here in the first place. We are right to assess the role that bank bosses played and to be concerned that they can draw pensions of hundreds of thousands of pounds even as their methods of running the banks are discredited, but we must also assess the role that was played by those who allowed the framework to be put in place that let the bankers operate in such a fashion. All those who quietly assumed that limited regulation of financial markets was an appropriate driver of economic growth must critically assess their role and consider more appropriate models for sustainable economic recovery.

Andy Kerr: On that point, I ask the member to put in context the statement in the SNP’s manifesto that says

“we will minimise the burden of bureaucracy by ensuring Scottish regulations do not have British gold-plating.”

Jamie Hepburn: That intervention comes very much from the he-said-she-said school of political debate, in which Mr Kerr seems to be engaged. I am not particularly interested in engaging in that. If I was, however, I suppose I could turn to the speech that Gordon Brown made at the CBI conference in 2005, in which he called for limited regulation and even questioned the need for regulation at all. He said:

“we should not only apply the concept of risk to the enforcement of regulation, but also to the design and indeed to the decision as to whether to regulate at all.”

As I said, however, I am not interested in the he-said-she-said school of political debate.

At present, the various roles that were played is largely a matter for the United Kingdom Government. I turn to the Scottish Government’s efforts to help to put Scotland’s economy on the road to recovery. Because the Scottish Government has been committed to the sustainable development of Scotland’s economy since the election, it has been well placed to react quickly and mobilise resources to counteract the

effects of a general economic slowdown. Bringing forward capital investment has helped to create a positive spiral, ensuring not only that jobs are created but that we gain all the benefits that flow from those jobs, such as the wider demand that is created in the economy.

I warmly welcome, for example, the extra money that was announced on Monday for Scotland's colleges, including a funding increase of £132,000 for Cumbernauld College in the Central Scotland region, which I represent. Staff and students will feel the benefits of that immediately, but so will the workers who are employed to improve the college's infrastructure, and, in turn, so will their families and wider communities.

The Scottish Government is accelerating £120 million of investment in affordable housing. That is helping the construction industry and is delivering affordable homes for people, such as the 76 new homes that will be built at Carbrain in Cumbernauld and the 32 that will be built in Grangemouth. When we also consider the widening of entitlement to free school meals, the freezing of the council tax, the reduction in business rates, the scrapping of tuition fees in the form of the graduate endowment, and the phasing out of prescription charges, we can see that the thread of working for economic recovery runs throughout the Scottish Government's work. Those measures put back into the pockets of the Scottish people money that they can then spend to aid economic recovery.

Of course, I wish that the Scottish Government could do more. In recent times, Norway has established two funds that are worth £10 billion to help to improve access to loans for companies and households and to stabilise the financial market. That is not borrowed money. Rather, it flows directly from Norway's decision to establish a sovereign oil fund in 1990—the kind of fund that Scotland has never been given a chance to establish.

When we discuss economic recovery, it is important to consider what kind of economy we want to be recovered. Sometimes, it seems that we are seeking a reset switch, or that we want to wave a magic wand that will make the problems disappear and put everything back to the way it was. I do not think that that is the way that things can be. We need to consider how we can measure quality of life and economic success with a range of measures and not simply through gross domestic product. When I spoke in our debate in November last year, I quoted the late Robert Kennedy, who spoke of how we measure material gain. I quote again from his words of 18 March 1968. He said:

“Gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their

play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

Those words should stay with us all as we concentrate our efforts on rebuilding our economy so that it truly meets the needs of the years and generations to come. GDP is an important measure of our economic performance, but, more fundamentally, so is our people's general wellbeing. That is another lesson that we can all learn from the current economic situation.

16:19

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I welcome today's announcement from Kintyre about the jobs that will be secured there. Those jobs were brought by a previous Government, but the news in an otherwise quite gloomy picture is welcome.

I want to reflect on my experiences in recent months of being approached by a good number of construction and engineering firms in the Highlands and Islands that are facing real difficulties as a result of the economic prospects that surround them and are fighting day by day to avoid more redundancies. Indeed, some of those firms are fighting to save the firm as an entity.

Some of the problems undoubtedly stem from the banking crisis and the housing market collapse, but it has been striking about the approaches that have been made to me that most of the concerns have been about our domestic policy and how Government policy is impacting on the things that those people are concerned about. Ministers in Scotland can have an impact on those issues; indeed, Scottish Government policy may be the biggest factor at work. I want to contrast, as the people from those firms have done for me, what they see as the rhetoric about recovery and the reality for them on the ground. I want to make serious points and suggest actions that the Government could take. I regret in some ways that my remarks may be necessary.

The Scottish Building Federation has reported that confidence in the building sector is low. Some 82 per cent of companies are less confident about the prospects for the next 12 months compared with the previous period. The federation has said that there is a danger that there will be 32 per cent fewer apprentices in the coming year and that

“Firms are crying out for new projects to bolster their business”.

The Civil Engineering Contractors Association has estimated that there has been around 10 to 20 per cent downsizing since October. In some firms, 50

per cent of the workforce has gone. Firms have gone into administration or are on the verge of doing so and are trying to avoid it. Civil engineers and builders need to see the public investment programme that we have heard talk about turning into projects on the ground. That is the big challenge for the Government.

I want to speak about three public policy areas: housing; civil engineering, as it relates to water and roads; and public buildings.

On housing, around two weeks ago, I was in the office of the managing director of a significant contractor in the Highlands and Islands. That meeting followed discussions with other contracting companies in the area. The managing director was seriously concerned about his business and about the expertise that he had built up, which allowed him to compete successfully for work. The business does a lot of housing association work. The managing director said that he despairs at the gap between the rhetoric that he reads in the papers and the reality. The rhetoric would have him believe that £100 million is being released and is coming through the system, but the reality is that his order book is collapsing. Little money is going through to where he operates. He and I know that some money has gone into land banking, but he pointed out that that does not create any jobs. If the same amount of money was put into construction, jobs could be created, and that is essential at the moment. Ministers could act on that matter today and sort it out.

The managing director also reported slow decision making inside Government for approvals for projects. When cash flow is extraordinarily tight and the next project is desperately needed to keep jobs and people in business, decision making in Government becomes critical.

The housing association grant problem has a particular rural dimension. The HAG has been reduced. Housing associations can apply for more grant; an assumed rentals calculation then takes place. The assumed rentals are higher than the achievable rentals, which means that housing associations cannot make the figures add up, which in turn means that they cannot get work out to contractors. Again, it is within the power of ministers to deal with that.

Scottish Water and Transport Scotland support represents a huge part of the support for all the contractors in the civil engineering sector. Those civil engineering contractors believe—and I believe—that Scottish Water and Transport Scotland have banks of approved work in the top drawer waiting to be done. That work could be mobilised quickly. Some budget flexibility at the margins may be needed and cash may need to be spread out over longer periods of time than we previously expected, but I hope that ministers will

urgently consider such things and find out whether further action can be taken.

Scottish Water contractors in the north have told me about a collapse in work as we enter the final year of the quality and standards III period. Exactly the same happened in the final year of the Q and S II period. There is a peak in the early years of the period and then a following trough. I know that Scottish Water has been trying to break that cycle, but that does not seem to be happening, which has profound implications for firms. I hope that ministers will reflect on that and that they will take action to smooth the peaks and troughs in spending. They should look to the longer term and take longer Q and S periods to allow that to happen.

Recently I lodged a series of parliamentary questions about any reserve that is held by Scottish Water. I look forward to the answers. If contractors are laying people off despite there being work that needs to be done, it would be absurd not to use any reserve that might exist. I urge ministers to examine that question and to act on it.

I hope that ministers will act to tweak expenditure programmes, to the extent that I know ministers can do, to support the sort of quick action that gets jobs on the ground speedily. Road surfacing provides an example of that, and Derek Brownlee pointed to other things.

Finally, the Scottish Futures Trust is a massive failure in public policy. Contractors tell me that the contracts that we set in place will end this summer. Then, there could be a collapse in the Scottish construction industry. I hope that the minister will set aside the ideological baggage that I am afraid he and his colleagues carry on the issue, and that he will take some decisions to get the work flowing quickly.

16:26

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on economic recovery. The speeches that have been made so far have been interesting—and some of them have been helpful. I would like to be excused from the final speeches, Presiding Officer, as I have a constituency event that I wish to get to punctually if I can.

It is almost unbelievable how we got into this mess, which has turned into a global disaster. Three things spring to mind: seduction, self-indulgence and self-delusion. Those terms can be attributed to UK Government ministers as well as to City bankers. We see the unedifying spectacle of Gordon Brown gallivanting round the globe, trying to find out what other countries are doing to

help their economies. At home, the predictions just go from bad to worse.

No one knows how long the economic downturn will last, but it is certain that the pain from it will be felt for a very long time and that many things will never be the same again—nor indeed should they be. To say that this Government is not doing all that it can is just plain wrong, and the fact that some Opposition speakers have just had a moan, offering few constructive suggestions, is galling, to say the least, when the issue is so important. The public are suffering more and more. In a time of crisis, they expect their politicians to pull together rather than to be at one another's throats.

The Government is already doing much of what John Park asked for in his speech. The suggestion that we go back to past methods of finance, such as public-private partnerships and the private finance initiative, is breathtaking. Infrastructure investment is going ahead with capital spend and traditional borrowing. Just in the past few days, the UK Government had to spend £2 billion of taxpayers' money to prop up PFI projects. That is a humiliating bailout. During this time of economic crisis, that £2 billion could be well spent on other things, and the bailout just shows—if anything were needed to show it—how little financial credibility is left in the Exchequer. PFI is a millstone round the UK's neck, and it is set to add more weight to the existing millstone of debt.

Andy Kerr: Why did Allyson Pollock of the University of Edinburgh, for instance, and her assistant describe the SNP's proposals for the Scottish Futures Trust as simply another form of PPP? Indeed, why did the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth tell the Finance Committee that the Scottish Futures Trust is in the PPP family? The Scottish Futures Trust is the same model as the one that the member has criticised so much today.

Maureen Watt: Andy Kerr knows that we are trying to ensure that the huge amounts of capital spending on PFI and PPP—on things that were not properly bargained and negotiated—will not happen again.

Johann Lamont referred to the poorer people in our society. That made me think about projects in many third-world countries—as the western world catches the cold, they get the flu. We will see that effect worldwide.

Many social enterprises are excited about their prospects under this Government. For many decades, people such as Rob Gibson and me have championed social enterprises, which are now seeing that there are many opportunities in Scotland. The voluntary sector, too, is upbeat, as it knows that where it really makes a difference to people's lives, it is secure and growing.

As others have said, this Government has taken measures to protect business and individuals, as far as its competence will allow, and to provide a fiscal stimulus where possible. The finances of Scotland are well protected and wisely spent by John Swinney. He never forgets that he is entrusted to spend people's hard-earned taxes wisely and for their benefit, rather than to squander the money because it is only taxpayers' money and there is more where it came from. We all know that it is not true any more that there is more where that money came from, because receipts from income tax and corporation tax are falling dramatically. We do not know whether quantitative easing will work, but early indications show that it is not that popular.

I press the cabinet secretary to do all he can to protect the hands that feed from the tax and grab of the Treasury. I am talking, of course, about the oil and gas sector. It is still relatively buoyant, but a long-term low oil price might lead some businesses to pull their operations from the North Sea. Successive Westminster Governments have looked on Scotland's oil as a cash cow rather than as a long-term security, as Norway has done. Norway's sovereign oil fund places its Government in a strong position to enact economic stimulus without increases in Government net debt.

I plead with the cabinet secretary not to let the vital infrastructure projects in the north-east slip. The oil and gas sector and the north-east agricultural base, which provides 14 per cent of the UK's food, need easier access to markets.

Our citizens will also want to know that part of the recovery will be about having a financial sector that is regulated so that the current situation never happens again. Gordon Brown talks about only limited regulation.

16:32

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): In order to be helpful, I give you an undertaking, Presiding Officer, that I will remain for decision time, so that we are quorate when that moment comes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): So will I, Mr Finnie.

Ross Finnie: I am pleased to wind up this important debate on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. We are all facing quite a difficult time. We recognise of course that the current situation was much precipitated by a credit crunch and banking problems. Given that the banking sector is so important to us in Scotland, as Derek Brownlee said, we in the Parliament have to make it clear that we are prepared to support our banking sector and ensure that it recovers and, we hope, recovers the reputation that it once enjoyed. In making that point, let us be in no doubt that, as far

as Liberal Democrats are concerned, as long as the banks, which have been hugely funded by the public purse, singularly fail to support many businesses in our constituencies with perfectly solid-based accounts and projects that are properly financeable, they will rightly draw criticism.

Although we have a desire to support the banking and financial sector going forward, we must not forget—I would not put this in quite such stark terms as Margaret Curran—that the executive and non-executive directors, advisers, auditors and all those involved in the banks that demonstrably had some responsibility for producing the £280 billion loss will still have to account for it. We should recognise the distinction there and separate those two points.

The question what we do to come out of a recession arises. Liberal Democrats always like to look back briefly at history and see, for example, what this country did in the 1920s. We find it encouraging that the major call to try to assist the recovery of the economy by making strategic infrastructural investment was first proposed by the well-known Liberal, John Maynard Keynes. We are prepared to support that call.

We are right about borrowing powers, but let us not forget that we in Scotland have borrowed and that as part of the United Kingdom we have borrowed, and that the recovery of the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Bank of Scotland has not happened by accident—it has happened as a result of UK Government borrowing. We must all recognise that—whether we are in Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland or England. We must also recognise that, if we want to advance public expenditure to stabilise the economy today, there will come a time of reckoning when we will all—each and every one of us—have to contribute to the recovery process. We should not pretend that we are insulated from that process; I believe that to do that is to be profoundly dishonest to those who elect us.

I also happen to think that the important point in respect of stabilising the economy is the point that Johann Lamont made much of, which is that we must recognise, from a Liberal Democrat perspective—the view is shared by many—that experience shows that such a downturn always hits the segments of and individuals in our economy that are least able to cope. Those are therefore the segments of the population and the sectors of the economy that the measures introduced by the Scottish Government and others must assist, so that we give succour and support to those individuals who were in difficulty even before the recession and who are now hit hardest. The voluntary sector will play a large part in that process. Unlike Maureen Watt, I did not detect

great buoyancy in the voluntary sector—far from it. I have found that it sees its task and the way forward to be incredibly difficult.

There is no question but that we all support the measures that the cabinet secretary mentioned in relation to transport and housing, but we also make it clear, as many members have done in the debate, that we are not trying to go back to the way we were yesterday. That is particularly true in respect of housing. We regarded a house not as something that we lived in but as a gambling chip on which we would make a profit. There requires to be fundamental and structural change in how we do housing and we must question the necessity for us always to own a house. From a Liberal Democrat perspective, we must place much more emphasis on creating a viable and long-term rental sector, for the benefit of the economy and individuals.

I agree that we also need to get back to the basics in respect of the kind of industries that we must look to in the short and medium term and when we look forward to how we will be prepared and able to cope economically as we emerge from the current problems. Both my colleagues who have spoken in the debate have made much of green energy. Scotland has an advantage in that sector, which I hope the cabinet secretary recognises. The previous Government gave it considerable recognition. We have life sciences, power transmission, information technologies and medical imaging. All of that is crucial and we believe that those are the sectors into which we should be putting our efforts. I also agree—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but the member's time is up.

16:38

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I will pick up on some comments that have been made in the debate before I reflect on some of the ideas that could help to move our economy forward in the coming months and the next couple of years.

One member—I forget who it was—said that there have been conflicting messages about inflation over the past couple of weeks. It is important to note that the consumer prices index, which is the primary way in which the Government measures inflation, is up; it is up to 3.2 per cent according to the figures that were released yesterday. That presents difficulties to many people in Scotland. Every major food group has gone up in price over the past couple of months, the price of gas is up, the price of electricity is up and the price of clothing is up, so to say that there are conflicting messages is not strictly correct. The main measure has most certainly gone up. Those prices are going up at the same time as salaries

effectively flatline and jobs are lost, which creates an enormous squeeze on families throughout Scotland.

The second point that I will pick up on is about VAT, which a couple of members have mentioned. There is now almost universal acceptance among commentators that the £12 billion temporary VAT cut was not an effective measure and that it was, effectively, a waste of £12 billion. Similar comments were made in Germany, France and most other European economies. Some declared instantly that the measure was poor—and have continued to say so since—whereas others took a few weeks or months to decide that that was the case.

I want to make two points about the VAT cut. First, John Park tried to compare the benefits of the VAT cut to families and individuals with those of the council tax freeze, but the fundamental difference is that whereas every family in Scotland gets the council tax freeze as a matter of right, an individual must spend money to get any benefit from the VAT cut. It has been suggested that the cut will save families £250 a year; the problem is that to get that saving a family must spend £10,000.

Johann Lamont: We can argue about the benefits of the council tax freeze, but does the member agree that it does not benefit those on the lowest incomes? About 30 per cent of people do not pay any council tax. Those people, who are among the most vulnerable groups, do not get one coin in benefit from the measure.

Gavin Brown: I do not want to point out the obvious to Johann Lamont, but people who do not pay council tax do not have a council tax problem. Of course they do not benefit from the council tax freeze.

My second point about VAT is intended to rebut comments that the First Minister has made many times and that the cabinet secretary repeated today. The SNP group at Westminster, which does not include Mr Swinney, voted in favour of the VAT cut. An amendment was lodged that would have allowed the stimulus package without the VAT cut, but SNP members did not vote for it—they thought that the cut was a good idea. The cost of the measure is £12 billion that will not go to the Exchequer. If Scotland's share of that cost is 10 per cent, the figure is £1.2 billion. The SNP must accept some responsibility for any budget cut that may happen in the future.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I am sorry, but I cannot do so at the moment.

Mr Kerr made the point that the IMF does not think that the UK's national debt is particularly bad.

A year ago, our national debt was 42 per cent of GDP. It is now 47.5 per cent of GDP, and by 2012 it will be 57 per cent—a staggering figure that terrifies me and should terrify everyone in the country. Mr Kerr might like to know that the IMF has also said that the United Kingdom will suffer the largest contraction and have the longest recession of any major economy. Sadly, the markets have made up their minds about that: the pound is at its weakest against the dollar for 20 years and it is at its weakest ever against the euro—only €1.07 to the pound.

We have spoken many times about the small business bonus scheme, which will happen. Ross Finnie, Peter Peacock and others made the point that what matters is not announcements but when measures are implemented on the ground. The small business bonus scheme will be implemented on the ground on 1 April this year. Ultimately, I would like the bonus to be applied automatically, instead of companies having to apply for it. I hope that that may be possible in the future.

The Government was right to set up the regulatory review group; let us see it put business impact assessments into practice, as the group recommended. On tourism, let us not just promote a cheaper Scotland, as I read recently, but think about the longer-term implications of such an approach. On green energy, let us look clearly at the infrastructure and prototypes that need to be developed.

16:44

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in today's debate. I echo the cabinet secretary's sentiments about the effect of the recession on real people. I remind the chamber of the 800 real people who are suffering as a result of job losses at Freescale in East Kilbride. We can compare and contrast ministers' activity in that context with the activity that we witnessed after the announcement by NCR. I make no value judgment in that regard, but I hope that, in future, ministers will make more effort to reflect on people's needs throughout the country.

The cabinet secretary talked about the clean, green economy. I welcome work to secure jobs at Vestas and I hope that the 400 additional jobs that he mentioned will be secured. Lewis Macdonald reminded us of the challenges when he quoted the Institute of Mechanical Engineers.

As John Park said, if it is right for the SNP to cut the so-called burden of council tax on the Scottish people, it is also right to cut VAT. Indeed, Gavin Brown reminded us that the SNP supported the VAT cut.

It was a bit rich of the cabinet secretary to talk about assisting the construction industry. Almost

every member has reflected on the dire consequences of the Government's inability to deliver the Scottish Futures Trust. The cabinet secretary mentioned only one nation in the arc of prosperity, which is no surprise when we consider the challenges that countries are facing.

John Park was right to remind us of issues to do with the SFT and the skills agenda. We are interested in hearing from the cabinet secretary on public procurement, manufacturing support and apprenticeships. Ross Finnie talked about industries in Scotland on which we should focus, which can grow and give us cause for optimism. Margaret Curran reminded us of the impact of our banks' standing on the nation. In that context, she mentioned the links to our banks of many members of the Council of Economic Advisers.

I thought that it was hilarious when Alasdair Allan and Rob Gibson talked about a light touch. They had no response to what their leader the First Minister has said and what the SNP manifesto said about reducing the amount of gold plating that the UK Government does.

Rob Gibson: We are back to the he-said-she-said approach to debating. A light touch is better than no touch at all.

Andy Kerr: With respect, the member raised the issue when he criticised the UK Government for its light-touch approach, although his First Minister has said that there should be less of the gold plating that is the UK Government's approach. The cabinet secretary has said the same thing and the SNP manifesto said so, too. It is quite important to know what he said or she said, given that the member is trying to lay the responsibility for the economic crisis at the UK Government's door. What he said was wrong and what I said was right.

Johann Lamont was right to talk about the needs of particular groups and to remind us all that the recession is having a disproportionate impact on certain groups in society. She talked about the effect on black and minority ethnic groups, women and disabled people and she asked what the Government is doing to develop an employment strategy that includes intermediate labour market initiatives.

Peter Peacock was right to remind us of the situation in the Highlands and Islands, where companies are struggling. At the heart of that struggle is the failure of Scottish Government policy to respond to the economic crisis.

Maureen Watt is no longer in the chamber, but I am sure that she will read the closing speeches in the *Official Report*. I remind her that, from what we can gather from the experts that SNP members used to quote when they were in opposition, the SNP's proposals are for PPP by another name. Unison says so, the Cuthberts say so, Allyson

Pollock says so and Mark Hellowell says so. Indeed, Mark Hellowell says that the non-profit-distributing model of delivery that is being forced on everyone in Scotland is more expensive for the taxpayer. We look forward to seeing more detail on the SFT, but I suggest that the SFT will not in any way, shape or form live up to the SNP manifesto commitment to not-for-profit trusts.

The Tories talked about the IMF. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the IMF's managing director, said:

"If there has ever been a time in modern economic history when fiscal policy and a fiscal stimulus should be used, it's now."

I could supply many other quotations that support the UK Government's approach.

Gavin Brown: I wonder whether Dominique Strauss-Kahn said that six months ago or more recently.

Andy Kerr: He said that on 15 November 2008. I could supply the member with a quotation from Barack Obama on 2 February and with many others.

Let us get back to the Tories' fond phrases. I am sure that they get a bonus from their leader every time they talk about Brown's recession, but let us get the facts out, because that is a blinkered and partisan view that talks down the UK. Of course we in Britain are feeling the effects of the recession, but, when I last checked, Gordon Brown was not in charge of Germany, Italy or any other nation. Germany's GDP contracted by 2.1 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2008 and Italy's GDP contracted by 1.8 per cent. The economic performance of other nations shows that they, too, have problems trying to come out of the global economic recession.

Despite what the Tories have said about debt, we are the second best placed nation in the G7 in relation to debt—better placed than the United States, France and Germany and second only to Canada. The UK's ability to have resources available has allowed the UK to invest in key measures that will see us through this difficult recession. It is not the Tories' little Britain isolationism but the UK's approach of working in concert with other nations around the globe that will allow us to deal with the challenges of the recession.

We would have liked to take up many more issues during the debate, but let us get back to the Scottish Futures Trust, which I understand has met twice. It is blamed by every building and construction company in the country for the loss of jobs—25,000 so far—and we have not seen it act yet. The Scottish Government has a real power there that it refuses to use.

There is a mass market in Scotland for microgeneration involving micro wind turbines and heat pumps in particular and there are industries in the sector, but the planning regulations that come into force today do not go far enough to support those industries. A combination of bureaucracy and SNP complacency therefore threatens the embryonic micro wind industry in Scotland. I hope that the cabinet secretary will give a lifeline to that industry by ensuring that the regulations that he produces will encourage the production and use of its methods.

As Peter Peacock said, the SNP's downfall is the difference between its rhetoric and reality. There is a lack of delivery on its big commitments, such as the local income tax, the Scottish Futures Trust, the six-point plan for economic recovery, the strategic transport projects review, the skills strategy and the national planning framework. The Government has all those tools at its disposal, but it is not using them in the interests of the Scottish economy.

16:52

John Swinney: There have been many and varied contributions to the debate, some of which have made helpful suggestions for the formulation of the Government's economic recovery programme, which is precisely the point of our engaging as parliamentarians in the debate.

John Park asked for further details about the manufacturing summit that will take place on 25 April. It has been organised jointly by the Government and the Scottish manufacturing advisory service and it is designed to draw together a range of voices to ensure that we reflect the challenges in the manufacturing sector and further the Government's economic recovery programme.

Mr Park also asked about the approach to public procurement. The Government has put in place a series of effective measures to structure procurement arrangements in order to deliver better value and greater access to procurement for companies around the country. Public contracts Scotland is a new and helpful website on which contracts can be placed and local companies can register for and have access to contracts. In addition, an important part of the procurement agenda that the Government has developed is the wider utilisation of community benefit clauses, which have significant value for individual companies.

There was discussion in the debate about the involvement of the voluntary sector—the third sector—in the Government's wider agenda. I am pleased to tell Parliament that Mr Mather, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, and I,

who share responsibility for third-sector policy, will have the next of our discussions with a range of third-sector providers in April to assess the effect of the recession on those organisations. Their position is obviously enhanced, though, by the Government's funding support for the third sector's development. In particular, as my colleague Maureen Watt said, we have encouraged the development of a wider range of social enterprises, for which there is significant potential in Scotland. We will take that forward with a range of third-sector organisations.

Johann Lamont: We can debate the reality of voluntary sector funding at another time, but does the cabinet secretary recognise that some voluntary sector organisations are concerned that they are being encouraged inappropriately to become social enterprises and to find funding in that way, which makes them unable to deliver services to the groups that they seek to serve?

John Swinney: That point depends entirely on the organisation's profile and outlook. Nobody has been forced to become a social enterprise but, if we can create a wider social economy with a broader range of social enterprises, I would have thought that Labour members would welcome that and the Government's desire to move into social equity and to change the models of economic activity, which several Labour members asked us to do today.

Mr Purvis suggested that university funding was being cut. I am pleased to tell him that we are spending a greater share of the Scottish Government's budget on universities than the previous Administration did. Of course, we would all love to have more money for everything—everybody in the Parliament demands more money for everything—but I must balance the books.

A central question in the speeches by Johann Lamont and Margaret Curran was on what the Government is doing for some of the more disadvantaged in our society and what we are doing to support people who are on low incomes. The Deputy First Minister launched the Government's anti-poverty framework, "Achieving Our Potential", in which we set out a range of measures to assist individuals who are on low incomes through income maximisation, the uptake of benefits and the expansion of opportunities. We have deployed disproportionately high levels of resources from the European social fund budgets to focus on encouraging employability, supporting those who are in hard-to-reach groups and ensuring that individuals who find it difficult to enter employment are supported into employment. The devolution of responsibility to community planning partnerships to address local labour market issues through the fairer Scotland fund is

designed to support people—particularly women—who will find dealing with some of the employment challenges at this time more difficult.

Johann Lamont's argument had a mismatch. She said that, essentially, we were deciding which employment opportunities were more or less relevant for women in our society, but she criticised us for expanding modern apprenticeship programmes in some sectors, although they present opportunities for women to access employment. Moreover, the Labour Party demanded that expansion of modern apprenticeship opportunities. We need a little recognition that the Government is doing all that it can to support such activity.

John Park: Johann Lamont's point was that the Scottish Government refocused adult apprenticeships on engineering and construction last year without having a policy to support more women to enter those sectors.

John Swinney: I just said that the Government has undertaken a range of measures through its work under European social fund programmes and wider skills investment to encourage those who find it difficult to enter the labour market to succeed in doing so.

A number of statistics have been bandied about. Mr Kerr mounted perhaps his most spirited defence of the United Kingdom's financial position, but I will put some facts on the record. The annual deficit for the United Kingdom is forecast to be 9.5 per cent in 2009 and to rise to 11 per cent in 2010. Those are the highest figures in the G20 countries, whose averages are to be 5.9 per cent and 6.3 per cent, so we should be slightly cautious about some of the estimates that have been put around.

On the subject of estimates, Mr Purvis said that Scotland will be the worst-affected part of the UK in the downturn. That is not the case. The average Scottish forecast for 2009 is -1.4 per cent, which is less than half the United Kingdom's average forecast of -3.2 per cent. Let us not talk ourselves any further down into the difficulties that we have.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the cabinet secretary confirm that he has just read out the latest set of official GDP figures? If not, what is Parliament to go on? I quoted the official GDP figures from the Scottish Government.

John Swinney: The figures were exactly what I said they were—the average forecasts for 2009 and 2010. [*Interruption.*] They are forecasts. Mr Purvis would have us in a recession before we are in the depth of position—

Jeremy Purvis: Will the cabinet secretary give way again?

John Swinney: No, I am just bringing my remarks to a close.

We must be careful about the issues that we put on the agenda.

I was greatly cheered by the thought that there would be a change in the fiscal position when I heard some words uttered in the House of Commons the other day by one of the principal figures of the Labour Government. The Prime Minister said:

"No country in the world is choosing to cut public spending at a time when people are in need of ... help".— [*Official Report, House of Commons, 11 March 2009; Vol 489, c 292.*]

I hope that he is thinking about that when he subjects this country to £500 million of cuts in public spending, which we certainly do not need.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3808, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a timetable for stage 2 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be extended to 24 April 2009.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. Members should note that, if amendment S3M-3796.3, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the national health service and the independent sector, is agreed to, amendment S3M-3796.1, in the name of Dr Richard Simpson, will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-3796.3, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3796, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the NHS and the independent sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 45, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3796.1, in the name of Dr Richard Simpson, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-3796, in the name of Mary Scanlon, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahan, 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 84, Against 16, Abstentions 12.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-3796.2, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3796, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the NHS and the independent sector, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-3796, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the NHS and the independent sector, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahan, 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 96, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the success of the Scottish Regional Treatment Centre at Stracathro with its high level of patient approval and welcomes the Scottish Regional Treatment Centre's contribution to maintaining Stracathro Hospital as both a local and regional resource; notes the success of the nationalisation of the HCI hospital in Clydebank, now the Golden Jubilee National Hospital, and recognises the contribution of both these units and their staff in achieving the continuing reduction in waiting times, while ensuring that the use of the private sector does not destabilise local NHS provision or undermine the recruitment and retention of NHS staff.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is,

that amendment S3M-3778.2, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3778, in the name of Bill Aitken, on alcohol strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahan, 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 82, Against 17, Abstentions 12.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S3M-3778.1, in the name of Robert Brown, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3778, in the name of Bill Aitken, on alcohol strategy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahan, 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 84, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-3778, in the name of Bill Aitken, on alcohol strategy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahan, 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 3, Abstentions 28.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the decision of the Scottish Government to incorporate its proposals for reform of the law relating to the sale of alcohol into a new health Bill, which will facilitate democratic accountability and greater parliamentary and public scrutiny of its proposals; calls on the Scottish Government to place greater emphasis on a much more rigorous application of the existing licensing laws and to recognise that any changes can be introduced only on the basis of a wider and meaningful consultation with the licensed trade and Scotland's communities, and believes that any measures taken to tackle harmful drinking and underage drinking must be workable and properly targeted so that, while the responsible, sensible majority of moderate drinkers are not unnecessarily penalised, wider issues of excess consumption contributing to huge costs to Scottish society are effectively addressed.

Earth Hour 2009

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3349, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on earth hour 2009. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament supports WWF's Earth Hour 2009, which aims to encourage millions of people worldwide and across Scotland to switch off their lights for an hour at 8.30 pm on Saturday 28 March 2009, to send a powerful global message that we care enough about climate change to take action and demonstrate widespread public support for an equitable, binding and scientifically credible global deal on climate change and, in Scotland, strong Scottish climate change legislation; considers that 2009 is a critical year for action on climate change with a new global deal to be agreed in Copenhagen in December; acknowledges the opportunity for Scotland to take a global lead with the most progressive legislation in the world through a strong Climate Change (Scotland) Bill; recognises that the global deal must address the historical responsibility of the United Kingdom and other developed countries as major contributors to climate change; commends local government in Edinburgh alongside the many individuals who are early signatories to support WWF's Earth Hour in Scotland, and further considers that the Scottish and UK governments are in an ideal position to take a proactive, progressive and leading role throughout the 2009 negotiations.

17:09

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): WWF's earth hour 2009 promises to be the most spectacular non-light show that the world has ever seen. At 8.30 local time on Saturday, in more than 80 countries, there will be a massive switch-off in support of determined global action on climate change. Some of the world's most famous landmarks will symbolically be shrouded in darkness, including the Eiffel tower, the Colosseum, the pyramids and Table Mountain. Earth hour 2009 will travel across global time zones, with events starting in New Zealand at a quarter to 7 on Saturday morning and finishing around Las Vegas at half past 3 on Sunday morning our time. Between those times, it will cross countries and continents and reach all corners of the globe, including Scotland. I am very pleased that the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament, many local authorities and hundreds of individuals, businesses, schools and organisations are supporting the event.

Given the size of this year's event, it is hard to believe that earth hour began in Sydney only two years ago when 2.2 million homes and businesses switched off their lights. This year, it is on track to be the biggest ever global sustainability demonstration, with hundreds of millions of people in more than 1,800 cities expected to participate.

That figure far exceeds the organisers' target of 1,000 cities. A movement with this much energy can achieve results.

The event is also proving to be a fantastic demonstration of the power of the web and social networking sites. Apparently, a new mention of earth hour appears on the web every seven seconds; earth hour social profiles have more than 200,000 friends and followers; and an earth hour video is viewed online every 20 seconds. Indeed, it has been estimated that the global online community could be the catalyst in ensuring that earth hour 2009 reaches 1 billion people.

Critics might say that participation in earth hour is simply a gesture. If so, it can be a very influential one. At an individual level, it reminds us of the relevance of our own actions to international events and the need to think globally and act locally; the interdependence of people across the globe; and the strength that is gained from working together on an issue of common interest.

The emphasis on city-level participation is also important. Cities and urban areas consume 75 per cent of the world's energy and produce almost 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. A powering down of iconic city lights signals recognition of our global responsibility and the need to move to a less excessive society in future. Most important of all, however, earth hour sends an inescapable message to Governments all over the world that there is widespread support for determined international action on climate change.

There is a clear but closing window of opportunity for human-induced climate change to be tackled and the decisions that will be taken at December's global climate change conference in Copenhagen in December will be critical to our success. Both the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments can be influential in the negotiations on ensuring that the Kyoto protocol's successor is the deal that we need it to be. There is reason to be hopeful that a credible agreement can be reached, not least with the change in Administration in the United States, which has brought with it clear signs of a change in direction on environmental issues. However, as we all know, we cannot take anything for granted in international negotiations.

In Scotland, the Government has already recognised the need for strong legislation to drive forward change. The Climate Change (Scotland) Bill sets tough statutory targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creates the framework for ensuring delivery. This progressive piece of legislation will help to set the pace internationally, but I am sure that, as the bill passes through Parliament, members of all parties will look to improve on the Government's original proposal.

I am also delighted that 16 Scottish councils have signed up to earth hour's aims. As a Lothians MSP, I welcome the action taken by the City of Edinburgh Council, which was one of the first local authorities to endorse the event. Council buildings and a number of iconic landmarks in the capital such as Edinburgh castle, the Scott monument and Calton hill will be switched off. Across the capital, private businesses, schools and organisations ranging from Edinburgh zoo to Heart of Midlothian Football Club have all pledged their support for the event, and landmark buildings such as the Bank of Scotland headquarters on the Mound, St John's church and the Balmoral hotel will also turn off their lights. I am also pleased that Network Rail has signed up to switching off one of Scotland's most recognisable landmarks: the Forth rail bridge. Watching a floodlit structure of that size fall into darkness will be one of the night's most powerful symbols.

I expect that, in addition to the big iconic events, thousands of people across Scotland will join Saturday's global gesture of support for action on climate change and I offer my personal commitment to be one of them. I add a special thanks to Radio Forth for playing a fantastic role in publicising and supporting the event throughout Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife over the past few weeks.

However, there is one snag. Over the past few days, I have been made aware by quite a few colleagues that earth hour falls right in the middle of a Scotland world cup qualifying match. I guess that many people will turn off their lights in support of earth hour but keep on the television in support of their national team. If things are going particularly badly, some might use earth hour as an excuse to turn the TV off as well.

The unfortunate timing of the Scotland match aside, the enthusiasm for earth hour throughout the country has been inspiring. I congratulate WWF on its successful efforts in raising awareness of climate change and in keeping the need for action at the top of the political agenda.

Hundreds of millions of people will turn off their lights for an hour on Saturday night. By participating in this international event, we demonstrate the power of collective action. Faced with an overwhelming issue such as climate change, it is easy for an individual to say, "What can I do?" Earth hour offers people one simple solution to start making a difference and some progress.

17:15

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing this important debate. She

and I are co-conveners of the cross-party group on climate change. Like her, I warmly endorse this Saturday's important initiative.

As an Edinburgh MSP, I am pleased that so many buildings in this city will be shrouded in darkness at 8.30 on Saturday evening. I congratulate City of Edinburgh Council and the many businesses and schools in my constituency that have signed up for earth hour. I will not restate all the buildings that Shirley-Anne Somerville mentioned, but I will mention that three schools in my constituency—Broughton primary school, Leith primary school and Stockbridge primary school—are taking part in the initiative in a slightly different way by spending an hour for the earth this week in learning about climate change. The schools are also encouraging pupils to take part at home during the event itself.

In this crucial year for climate change, earth hour will be an important symbolic moment but it could also have a significant effect. We all know that the radical action that is required on climate change needs commitment both by Government and by individuals and local communities. Earth hour will not only indicate the commitment of thousands of people to action on climate change, but encourage others who are not so committed to think about the issue. The fact of the matter is that we still have a great deal to do to get the climate change message across. The Scottish Government, like the Government in London, is showing leadership on that, but we clearly need individuals to respond in their own lives as well. I hope and believe that this Saturday's initiative will help to galvanise people to take action this year and in the years that follow.

Clearly, this is a crucial year for climate change both in Scotland, given the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill that has been introduced, and internationally, given the Copenhagen meeting that will take place towards the end of the year. We need to ensure that this year is an important turning point for this country and for the world in recognising the scale of the action that is required.

This evening is not the time for a detailed discussion of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, which we all look forward to considering in the months ahead. Like other members, I have followed the bill's committee process, which has been very good and has involved a lot of evidence taking. In reading the oral evidence that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change gave to the committee, I was encouraged to see that he is open-minded about strengthening the bill. I believe—I will make this one point—that it is particularly important that the bill is strengthened in terms that provide for more ambitious targets over the next 10 years. We all know that the cumulative amount of emissions is

what matters. If we do not begin to take radical action now, total emissions will obviously be far worse come 2020 and the following decades. We have all committed ourselves over the next few months to considering the bill, which is possibly the most important piece of legislation that we will deal with in the current parliamentary session.

I hope that this Saturday's initiative will not only help to galvanise us MSPs but encourage the population to take action to support the measures that the Government is taking and, indeed, to demand stronger action from the Scottish and UK Governments. I congratulate the organisers of earth hour, which I am sure will be of great international significance. I hope that we can all build on the event to make 2009 a critical and defining year in the battle against climate change.

17:19

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I offer my congratulations to Shirley-Anne Somerville on a very instructive speech. Switching off the lights is not a bold action in itself. It is more of a sign and a mass signal to businesses and Governments, which have the power and money to be bold, that millions of people—at least, I hope, a billion—around the world are urging them on. Rather than switching attention and blame to individuals who are using energy, we should focus on decarbonising electricity generation.

Politicians need to encourage and focus on giving people greater public transport choices. Earth hour, as has already been said, is about ordinary people giving leaders the mandate to switch off our carbon economy and switch on to a green and sustainable one.

In the debate that we have just had on the economy, we heard the message from Patrick Harvie that reducing our impact, and moving away from gross consumerism to a conserver economy will—far from being an obstruction—benefit the world economy. Reducing consumption—turning down the lights—could bring huge individual benefits, health, wellbeing and prosperity and, through increased localisation in the long run, provide the benefits that will save the world's economy in the long term.

Only by turning round the world economy to achieve environmental sustainability and fiscal security instead of pursuing the chimera of ever-increasing material wealth—which can only trash the entire planet if it is not controlled and redirected—will we achieve the proper end of any economy: health and happiness for all within environmental limits.

We waste a third of the food; 80 per cent of the energy; and 70 per cent of the materials that we produce, most of which end up in holes in the

ground. Turning off that switch is a symbolic move in the right direction. Is it that simple? Basically—yes.

17:22

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on bringing the debate to the chamber. I fully support the protest of switching off the lights for earth hour in 2009, and every year until we make it happen for real by turning the economy round to become a carbon-saving economy.

I do not want to make too many extra comments, because the issues are huge, and we will debate in relation to the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill many of the fundamentals of how we can help to turn Scotland round. As the motion suggests, we must recognise that a global deal needs to be struck. We in the developed world have an historic responsibility, and the developing countries look to us to take a moral lead. The developed countries are major contributors to climate change, so we must ensure that as many people as possible in this country take part in earth hour and in all the processes that follow.

Earth hour will be difficult to illustrate—we will really only be able to tell that there is a shroud of darkness by looking at the earth from outer space. The famous photographs that show where the earth is lit up at night ought to show far less of that if earth hour succeeds. I hope that we can get some images to show how successful it is as we go along.

Earth hour, on Saturday night at 8.30 pm, will bring other opportunities. Some people will not necessarily be watching the football—indeed, there might be some surprise candlelit dinners for two, or for many more. That would be a good thing to do—and I did not mention the idea of candlelight for nothing. In the past, candles were made from beeswax, and part of the biodiversity of the planet involves ensuring that there are bees left to make that wax in the future.

In celebrating our earth hour, it might be a good idea for us to ensure that we remember how those things are all connected—perhaps a candlelit dinner would be a good celebration for earth hour this year.

17:24

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Like other members, I begin by congratulating Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing the debate. It is interesting that it takes place in a week when two sites in Scotland have been identified as world dark skies locations, where people can focus on the stars undisrupted by surrounding light. Maybe that is an additional

aesthetic benefit that we will get on Saturday night, depending on the success of this initiative.

It is interesting that, over the past few years, the process of turning lights off and switching lights on has come to be associated with new year—as Shirley-Anne Somerville said, starting in New Zealand and working its way across to the west coast of the United States. The firework parties at new year progress from one side of the world to the other and it would be interesting to see how a darkness party moved from one area of the world to another. Of course, Scotland has a terrific reputation for celebrating new year, especially in Edinburgh. I hope that we can build an equally excellent reputation for our participation in this initiative.

People are sometimes a bit cynical about an initiative of this kind. They say that it is just symbolic, just a demonstration effort. However, we have seen how events such as Live Aid and, more recently, the make poverty history demonstration in Edinburgh can change people's minds. The fact that so many people participate in an event of this kind, the fact that it is associated with an educational message and the fact that people will discuss and gather information about a problem that the world faces and do something—however limited—about it make it a valuable thing to do and something that can have a long-term impact. The make poverty history demonstration put debt relief, development aid and trade matters on the international agenda. Perhaps earth hour will help us to put climate change issues on the agenda.

The most obvious issue is that simply turning lights off will reduce energy use but, as Robin Harper said, there are many other things that we need to do. We must not just pass climate change legislation; we must get people to talk about climate change and react by reconsidering what they do. It is vital that, as part of the process that the Parliament is engaging in to tackle climate change, we produce an effective engagement strategy that builds on what already exists. I am thinking of things such as eco-schools, eco-congregations and the kind of effort that we are discussing tonight. We must take the issue beyond symbolic gestures and discussions to changes in people's practices.

I am keen to point out that adapting to climate change will involve changes that, to some extent, people will see as sacrifices. We should recognise that. However, we must also highlight the positive aspects of what people would otherwise see as sacrifices in the changes that they might have to make if we are to tackle climate change. We need to move from getting people to switch the lights off on Saturday night to getting their active engagement in recognising that they, too, have a responsibility to make changes. It does not all fall

to Government, although that is not to let Stewart Stevenson and his colleagues off the hook.

17:29

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I thank Shirley-Anne Somerville for lodging the motion for debate. I learned a great deal simply by reading the motion. From television coverage, I was aware of the first earth hour, which was held in Sydney in 2007. I thought that it was an interesting idea, but I did not realise that that would be the start of something that would become so big so quickly.

The gesture—is it just a gesture?—of switching the lights off at 8.30 on Saturday evening is something in which I will participate happily. It will teach us many lessons, the most important of which is the one that I will concentrate on. Although we can argue that the Government and businesses can do more, the truth is that the great achievement in the fight against climate change will be what we do as individuals—and every one of us, however tight our means, can achieve something.

I think that it was Margaret Thatcher who first made the remark about society that cast doubt on whether it exists. I assure members that even those of us who are in the Conservative party have whiled away many a wee small hour debating what she actually meant. However, I believe that she meant that what we call society is simply the sum of what we contribute as individuals towards it. I believe that, during earth hour, we will prove that what we achieve together is the sum of our individual acts of accountability. That is what earth hour is for me.

If earth hour teaches other people that they, too, should be accountable, that is a good thing. It will also be good if it teaches bigger organisations in the public and private sectors the same thing. I am delighted to hear that local authorities all over Scotland, including Aberdeenshire Council, which covers the area that I live in, will be participating in some way in earth hour. However, I often wonder, when I am passing council buildings on a Saturday evening in the dark, why they require to be so well lit up. Might it not save the hard-pressed council tax payer a little money if the council just switched the lights out more often? I also wonder why our motorway system is lit up through rural Scotland on some of the dark mornings on which I have driven on it. The reality is that there is much more that we could do, but public opinion needs to be worked on if we are to achieve those aims.

I thank Shirley-Anne Somerville once again for bringing this matter to my attention and giving me the opportunity to commit publicly to supporting it.

I hope that we can all learn a little from doing a little together.

17:32

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I thank Shirley-Anne Somerville for bringing this matter to Parliament. This is an important debate, and I am disappointed that there are so few members in the chamber. Perhaps those who are not here will take on board the importance of turning off their lights on Saturday night at 8.30 pm.

People were speaking about dark nights. In Grangemouth, where I come from, there are few dark nights. Maybe that should be a lesson to us all in terms of climate change.

Earth hour is about sending messages all over the world and recognising what is happening. It calls on politicians, Governments and people across the world to do something about climate change. The time has passed when people can sit and say, “Well, something needs to happen about climate change. Somebody needs to do something.” Climate change is not something that is going to happen in the future; it is happening now. From floods in Scotland and America to droughts and poverty in developing countries, issues need to be dealt with now.

Others who watched “The Age of Stupid” the other night might agree with me that it will be too late to take action in 10 years, and they might be as concerned as I am about what might happen if we do absolutely nothing.

WWF has done tremendous work, but it is not only organisations such as WWF, politicians and Government that must address climate change; everyone must do so. People need to encourage others to take on board ideas such as saving power, changing habits, using public transport and so on. We need to think about what we do every day. How do we use power? How do we shop? Do we need to buy things with loads of packaging? Do we need to look seriously at what we eat? How do we recycle? How do we grow food?

Before I came to the Scottish Parliament, I worked in community development. I once organised a visit by community organisers in Bulgaria to a fairly deprived area that I worked in. The folk from Bulgaria said, “My goodness, people must be very rich here.” When we asked why, they said, “Well, they don’t grow anything in their gardens.” That was true: the gardens were empty—indeed, some were concreted over. Our visitors were rightly shocked to learn that people in Scotland would let their gardens become overgrown and would do nothing about growing their own produce. We should use our allotments, front gardens and back gardens. We should not concrete them over.

We need to think about how we wash our clothes, whether we encourage our bairns to switch off lights, how we insulate our homes, and how we educate our children. The Climate Change (Scotland) Bill is important, and I am proud that Scotland is taking it forward but, as Shirley-Anne Somerville said, we all have a responsibility to make the bill as strong as possible. We must all work towards real change and take ownership of what we do. We must consider how we can win hearts and minds and deal with people who dismiss climate change as a daft idea or say that it is nonsense because things will happen anyway due to evolution.

I am a granny: I have four grandchildren under four. I want their lives to be better, and I want their children to have a future. If we do nothing, they will not have that future, because they will not have an opportunity to change things in 30 or 40 years' time. I do not want them to look back when it is far too late and say, "My grandmother, people in the Scottish Parliament, people in government throughout the world and people on the streets should have done something."

Earth day is a worldwide initiative, but it will work only if everyone in every community takes on the responsibility of changing the world and being serious about climate change. I thank Shirley-Anne Somerville. I will be putting my lights out—I have got a nice bottle of wine handy, and lots of candles.

17:36

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I, too, thank Shirley-Anne Somerville for bringing the matter to the Parliament for debate.

On behalf of the Government, I am pleased to support WWF's earth hour 2009, as countries throughout the world will do. On 28 March, we will turn off non-essential lights in all 44 of our core buildings, as indeed will the Parliament. Earth hour raises awareness of sustainability and climate change globally and throughout Scotland.

It is clear from the speeches that we heard in tonight's debate that the Parliament supports earth hour, cares about climate change and recognises the need for action. As Alex Johnstone said, earth hour is more than a gesture—we can see that from what happened in previous years. It is thought that some 36 million people participated in 2008. We are told that Bangkok saved 4.16 tonnes of carbon in the single hour, Toronto saved 900MWh of electricity, and Ireland made a significant reduction of 150MWh and saved 6 tonnes of carbon. The best result is said to have been in Christchurch in New Zealand, which

reported a pleasing reduction in electricity demand of some 13 per cent.

Members highlighted the need to work in partnership. Tackling climate change is an area in which partnership has been working effectively. We have good relations with colleagues at Westminster through their passage of the Climate Change Act 2008; with colleagues in local authorities, which unanimously supported Scotland's climate change declaration; and with the partnership that clearly exists throughout Scotland in supporting earth hour. Many members made the point that earth hour is about individual action as well as corporate action.

We must do our bit now to reduce emissions, prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour while supporting new technologies and innovations to take advantage of the future low-carbon economy. Our climate challenge fund has so far helped 56 communities to reduce their carbon emissions and build a sustainable future. The go greener campaign gives advice on energy efficiency and reducing waste. The Energy Saving Trust supports consumers on sustainable energy issues, and the Carbon Trust is working with organisations to reduce emissions. The European Union emission trading scheme and the forthcoming carbon reduction commitment are encouraging low-carbon technologies. We will work closely with industry and further develop Scotland's massive renewable energy potential to deliver on target the generation of 20 per cent of energy consumption from renewable resources by 2020.

I want to pick up on specific points that members have made. Malcolm Chisholm referred to the need to act in the next 10 years. The Government has indicated to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee that it will lodge an amendment to the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 to set a target for 2020 rather than 2030, which is the year referred to in the current draft of the bill. That will align the bill with what is happening elsewhere and will be a spur to action.

Robin Harper said:

"Is it that simple? Basically—yes."

It is simple to say that everyone should turn off their lights, but a little bit more difficult to persuade everyone to do so. However, he was, of course, right.

I am delighted that Rob Gibson's partner, Eleanor, is in for a surprise dinner on Saturday night. I, too, think that protecting bees is important if only because I have a rather sticky complaint in the back of my throat. Some royal jelly—which was, of course, the Queen mum's favourite remedy for many problems—is probably called for.

Des McNulty called on us to have a darkness party. I do not think that he was talking politics but about a celebration, and there is certainly something in what he said. He pointed to actions such as earth hour moving climate change issues on to an even broader agenda.

It is good to know that Alex Johnstone learns something some of the time. He told us that the motion is informative and that he learned much from it.

We in Scotland have huge opportunities but also huge responsibilities to make a contribution to the world climate change agenda. The First Minister has said that we can punch well above our weight. We have a bill that the WWF has described as the most ambitious in the world, and we must live up to that and continue to improve the bill. The Government and I are certainly up for that.

Of course, we have negotiations in Copenhagen to secure an agreement to succeed the Kyoto protocol. It is important that good progress is made on that.

The Government has encouraged its staff to act. An article has appeared on its intranet showing how staff can make their practical contributions. Members have referred to similar actions across the web that encourage people to act.

Given the size of the country in question and its consumption of resources, one of the most exciting changes that we have seen was indicated in President Obama's inaugural speech. In a clear change of direction, he said:

"We will harness the sun and the winds"

and the land. That indicated an engagement with the climate change agenda that is perhaps greater than we have seen before.

People have talked about the value of dark nights at home. One of the great pleasures of living in the country is going out on dark, clear nights and seeing the whole panoply of stars from horizon to horizon. Light pollution prevents that elsewhere. Many years ago, in the 1960s, my brother and I saw the Pleiades meteor shower at 3 in the morning. One would not be able to see that if there was light pollution.

It is unusual for the Parliament to call on the Government to turn out the lights, but we will do so on this occasion, even though some of us may watch the match before doing that. I support the motion in my colleague's name.

Meeting closed at 17:43.

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