

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 10 December 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 10 December 2009

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

Concessionary Travel Scheme

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-5378, in the name of Charlie Gordon, on concessionary travel.

09:15

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to open the first parliamentary debate for five years devoted to concessionary travel.

On 1 April 2006, the national concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people, the product of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 and secondary legislation prepared by transport ministers, came into operation. Although the scheme replaced 16 local schemes, it is still possible to enhance it at a local level. For example, in the Strathclyde partnership for transport area—a topical subject this morning—it is possible to get discounted fares on rail services and the Glasgow subway, and around Scotland there are other examples of what one might call a local non-bus dimension to concessionary travel. The national scheme also includes two free ferry journeys a year for island residents. However, it is principally and overwhelmingly a free bus travel scheme.

I have been gleaning a number of facts and figures from parliamentary questions. Given that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, has described himself in the chamber as a “geek”, I will not seek to give figures that are accurate to the n^{th} degree, because I am sure that, punctilious as he is, the minister will if necessary correct me at the margins. At the moment, 1.1 million people hold national entitlement cards, the document that is key to concessionary travel and, in particular, free bus travel; 164,000 cards are held by people with disabilities and there are 104,000 companion cards in circulation to enable people with certain disabilities to be escorted.

The scheme is built around an agreement negotiated by Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government with the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK, which represents bus operators. It is a seven-year deal that, from its vesting day, takes us up to 2013. The principle for

bus operators is that they should be no better and no worse off by participating in the scheme. However, thereby hangs a rather complicated tale and, as a former convener of a local concessionary travel scheme in Strathclyde, I know that the financing and financial administration of such schemes can be extremely complex.

At the moment, the system reimburses to CPT members what is, in my view, a rather generous 73.6 per cent of the average fare in Scotland. It is fair to say that there is some tension between Transport Scotland and CPT on the matter but, in my experience, tension can be a creative thing. The operators are interested in being paid average costs, whereas Transport Scotland has rightly proposed the establishment of a scheme in which increased patronage could be borne at marginal cost to operators. Other tensions have emerged; CPT has demanded that a cost escalator be built into future years, while the Scottish Government has understandably sought a cap, so that it knows the amount of finite resources it can plan to make available for future concessionary travel schemes.

One of the greatest complexities in the financial administration of concessionary travel is the generation factor—not, I stress, the generation game, although it can sometimes turn into a bit of an elaborate game. By that, I mean the difficult-to-capture information about the people travelling under the concessionary travel scheme who would not have done so if the scheme had not been in place. That kind of information bedevils a budget that is essentially a projection rather than a precise amount. Who will travel next year? How many journeys will they make? Will there in some years be a lack of financial provision for concessionary travel or will there, as has been more usual and as the minister has made clear on the record, be surpluses at the end of the year?

At the moment, the number of journeys per year is running north of 158 million and, when the scheme began in 2006, each journey was costing the taxpayer 78p. The cost is now substantially more than £1 per journey. Of course, one of the drivers of that increase has been the increase in commercial bus fares. The scheme's current real-term annual costs are in excess of £180 million and, according to a parliamentary answer, since it started operators have claimed £510 million and have been paid back £506 million. In other words, Transport Scotland has repudiated £4 million of gross claims.

It seems to me that as we try to move away from the average-cost approach to the marginal-cost approach, even more provision will be required, and I am heartened by the way in which the roll-out of smart card technology, which captures

precise data about all bus journeys, is gathering momentum.

Even before the scheme started, people were saying that some of its aspects should be enhanced. In January 2006, the then MSP for Banff and Buchan took up the cudgels on behalf of the local community transport organisation, one of the best in the country, arguing that in rural areas community transport organisations account for a significant part of bus usage and should therefore be considered as part of the bus network and as operators for the purpose of the scheme. At that time, quite a number of MSPs signed a motion to that effect in the name of Stewart Stevenson.

In 2007, a number of members became concerned by approaches they were receiving from constituents who were, in the main, on the lower level of disability living allowance. They had received free bus travel in 2006; however, when on vesting day they had tried to claim their national entitlement card with their local concessionary travel card, which had been recognised as a valid document for free bus travel, they were told that they were not eligible for it. Essentially, from 2007 onwards, thousands of people who had been able to travel free in local authority schemes in Strathclyde, the Lothians, the Highlands and Fife were stripped of that benefit.

What went wrong? With a view to standardising eligibility and validation processes, the then Scottish Government undertook a public consultation exercise between October and December 2005. Following that, the national scheme eligibility criteria and validation processes were standardised with the agreement of transport authorities, operators, and the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland. Subsequently, the arrangements were approved by secondary legislation. To ensure a smooth transition, people who were on the lower DLA rate in local schemes were simply ported across to free bus travel on vesting day in April 2006.

In the meantime, Transport Scotland expected that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities would be involved in ensuring that all cardholders would be reassessed on the expiry of their existing cards. I am not at all clear why it was felt to be necessary to reassess people who had been through rigorous United Kingdom Government agency checks, but we are where we are.

So it could be said that there was a bit of a cock-up. There was considerable pressure in Parliament and on the minister to reflect the views of affected constituents, and he founded on a review of concessionary travel that would commence in 2008. However, just before that review started, the Halcrow Group reported to Transport Scotland that 42 per cent or more of car owners with entitlement cards were now using the

car less, so we were starting to see benefits in terms of modal split. Halcrow concluded that the schemes in Scotland were contributing positively to reducing social exclusion and encouraging active lifestyles and modal shift from private car to public transport and, in particular, the bus.

Then came the review, and it was rather a closed review that mainly involved the civil service and Transport Scotland, and only accepted written submissions from other stakeholders. Yes, we welcomed and still welcome the recommendation to include disabled war veterans in the scheme, but we are particularly disappointed that people who are on the lower rate of DLA are still excluded. The review includes a back-of-a-fag-packet calculation that claims that it would cost £18 million for people who are in that category to be included once additional companion cards are factored in. Those calculations do not bear much scrutiny, as members will have seen from the e-mail that we received from Leonard Cheshire Disability. I have received a number of quotes from Leonard Cheshire and other voluntary organisations that reflect the views of those vulnerable people, and it is fair to say that in many parts of Scotland, the cry is still for people who are on the lower rate of DLA to be given free bus travel. I will have the opportunity to highlight those points when I sum up.

We should not be looking backwards at the cock-up, nor should we be constructing conspiracy theories. Across the parties in the Parliament, we should be doing the right thing by some very vulnerable people.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the recommendation of the *Review of the Scotland Wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People* to include seriously injured armed forces veterans to the scheme but notes with disappointment and concern the review's recommendation to disenfranchise disabled people who receive the lower rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from the scheme; further notes that the review paints a worst-case scenario of the costs of including disabled people who receive the lower rate of DLA and that these costs are open to scrutiny and debate and that the review also played down the positive social impact that the scheme has on people's lives; acknowledges that denying disabled people on the lower rate of DLA access to the scheme will damage the main aims and ethos of the scheme, namely to allow disabled people improved access to services, facilities and social networks by free scheduled bus services and so promote social inclusion and improve health by promoting a more active lifestyle for disabled people; notes that previous local schemes operated in West Lothian and Strathclyde provided people on the lower rate of DLA access to concessionary travel schemes and that they supported the national scheme mirroring their eligibility criteria instead of the stringent criteria that are now adopted; welcomes disability organisations Leonard Cheshire Disability, Learning Disability Alliance Scotland (LDAS), Inclusion Scotland and many more in challenging the review's negative recommendation, and considers that disabled people's views, that the national concessionary

travel scheme should include people who receive the lower rate of DLA instead of backing the unfair recommendation on eligibility from the review, should be listened to.

09:28

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): For the avoidance of doubt, I report to Parliament my interest in the scheme by displaying my old person's bus pass, which I have used on ministerial business some 200 times so far, thus saving the public purse some money. *[Interruption.]* It is a bit incestuous, as Mr Johnstone has just pointed out, since my budget is paying 73.6 per cent of the cost, but I can at least claim to have saved 26.4 per cent that would otherwise have been paid.

I start by congratulating Charlie Gordon on a well-informed and well-researched contribution to today's debate. I welcome the opportunity to lock horns with him on a subject of significant interest for the first time since his appointment. I also encourage him to greater efforts. Had he added a mere 30 further words to his lengthy motion, he would have filled the entire page of the *Business Bulletin* instead of leaving me just a little space.

Charlie Gordon: Is the minister aware that I took a leaf out of the book of his colleague, Angela Constance?

Stewart Stevenson: Indeed, but I think that Leonard Cheshire probably also had something to do with the drafting of the motion.

This is a serious matter, and it is good that we are having this discussion. Charlie Gordon quite properly delineated much of the history of how we got here. At the time, I commended the previous Administration on the introduction of the national scheme, and I continue to support it as a minister. One of the good things that we have been able to do in the review that we have just completed is to say unambiguously that we will continue to support the scheme in the form in which it has been introduced. The scheme has clearly delivered an enormous number of benefits to people across Scotland. It is a national scheme with absolute certainty of provision. That helps the bus companies with planning because, right across Scotland, they know the rate that they will be getting. In that respect, the scheme is much better than the one south of the border, which is off-peak only, has different rates of reward across England, and is difficult to administer.

We note that in yesterday's pre-budget report, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the English scheme will be amended by aligning eligibility with the forthcoming changes in the state pension age. So, in the future in England, people who are aged 60 will not be entitled to enter the

scheme. For the avoidance of doubt, that is on page 110 of the pre-budget report. So the gap between the excellent scheme that we have in Scotland, which we are committed to sustaining and maintaining, and what is going on south of the border will widen.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Will the minister reflect on yesterday's debate, during which members of his party were trumpeting on about other parties and the Parliament doing things better? Instead of looking at what others are doing, will he look at how we are failing to support people who are on low-component disability living allowance?

Stewart Stevenson: The member makes a perfectly reasonable point, but I point out that I congratulated her party and, indeed, the Liberal Democrats when they introduced the scheme, which we continue to promote and which we have extended to cover disabled ex-servicemen. The scheme has always been better than the one south of the border and our focus should be on establishing how we can sustain and maintain that scheme. I am happy that we have been able to do that.

Our scheme enables older and disabled people to continue to travel for free throughout Scotland, at any time, on any scheduled bus route, for any number of journeys. In these difficult economic times, in particular, the scheme delivers huge benefit to many families and pensioners. It also maintains social cohesion. Charlie Gordon talked about the 158 million journeys that were made. By the way, I will not pick at the numbers; Mr Gordon basically got them right. He made only one mistake and I cannot resist the temptation to correct it. Reimbursement is made on the standard fare, not the average fare. There is something quite important in that, however, because the bus companies have, not unreasonably, tended to raise standard fares at a slightly greater rate than other fares, which has ensured that they protect the revenue from the concessionary bus scheme. That is part of the on-going discussion that we are having with the CPT about reimbursement rates.

Our 73.6 per cent reimbursement rate is substantially more generous than the rate in England and Wales. It still incorporates an allowance for the start-up costs of the scheme, which is why we have commissioned consultants to examine whether the rate properly meets the test that companies should be no better off and no worse off. Charlie Gordon discussed the marginal cost of carrying extra passengers and pointed out that the present scheme, in essence, takes into account the full cost. There is a proper debate to be had on that. The CPT says that its members have put on extra capacity and used the opportunity to invest in new buses. There is merit

in that, but we have to consider getting the balance right. In establishing the right reimbursement rate for the future, we need to reflect the fact that the start-up costs are out of the way. We will have discussions on that.

Three years on, with the review completed, we can see how successful the scheme has been, but we can also see the nature of the challenge that we face. The previous Government and the present one should be proud of the scheme, which delivers much for the people of Scotland.

Reference was made to ferry and rail discounts that are provided locally. It is still open for local authorities to provide support to holders of the card, or otherwise, as they see fit. Before the national scheme, six of the 16 schemes throughout Scotland provided support to people who were on the lower rate of disability living allowance. We do not know what the future of DLA will be, as it is one of the benefits that are being considered for reform or abolition. I hope that whatever follows provides appropriate support for people with disabilities, as that is important.

The current scheme comes in two parts: a care component and a mobility component. The mobility component, which is paid by Westminster, is important. Some people have suggested that we might more readily be able to structure support for people who are on the lower level of DLA by transferring the funding for the mobility component to Scotland. That could allow us to fund different ways of supporting people who are on DLA. However, the Government is not yet engaged on that matter, although the issue has been raised.

Our population continues to be an ageing one. I hope that many of those older people remain, as I do, relatively fit and in possession of a bus pass, and therefore able to travel to meet friends and family. Charlie Gordon possibly stretched the use of parliamentary terms when he used the word "geek". Thankfully, the Presiding Officer did not rule that that is unparliamentary language—I wear the badge of geekdom with pride and will continue to do so. Charlie Gordon created something of a hostage to fortune by suggesting that there might have been a cock-up in the establishment of the scheme. I would be more gentle and say that some long-term effects of the scheme have emerged over time. He made the good point that 42 per cent of car owners use the scheme to reduce their driving. I include myself in that, albeit that I probably do too much driving, even now.

When we debated community transport and demand-responsive transport in March 2006, my motion welcomed the formation of Transport Scotland as a way to promote new ideas. That continues to be the case. We have considered the options for including community transport in the existing scheme. One or two providers that run

scheduled services can qualify. However, the issue is complex. If we made such services free, I am sure that they would be well used, but that would require a significant increase in capability and capacity in the community transport world.

If Mr Gordon in his closing remarks indicates that, at this stage, he is not asking for additional money to be spent, I will consider my position in relation to the amendment in my name. However, for the moment, I will move it.

I move amendment S3M-5378.2, to insert at end:

“, and considers that if the Labour Party wishes this to be the case, it should bring forward a costed proposal to the Budget to show where the resources will be taken from to pay for this.”

09:40

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

We all agree that the national concessionary travel scheme, which was introduced by the previous Executive, has been a resounding success. We also agree that the objectives of promoting social inclusion by allowing older and disabled people—especially those who are on low incomes—improved access to services, facilities and social networks through free use of scheduled bus services, and of improving health by promoting a more active lifestyle for the elderly and disabled are, largely, being met. However, they are not totally being met, as the scheme is not completely fair and equitable.

I will pre-empt interventions by saying that it could not have been easy to set up such an ambitious scheme from scratch, so I do not criticise the previous Executive for the omissions. After all, the Executive had the foresight to say that the scheme would have to be reviewed after three years to see what needed to be amended. However, that review, under the direction of the current Government, was ultimately a wasted opportunity. Although ministers had an opportunity to build on the groundbreaking travel schemes that the previous Administration introduced, little progress has been made. The only change that is recommended by the review is to extend free bus travel to seriously injured veterans. Although I support that and know that it will be welcome news to our war heroes, it just does not go far enough.

There are two areas in which a change in the scheme would redress some of the unfairness in the current system. First, I support Charlie Gordon's call for those on the lower level of disability living allowance to be eligible. Secondly, as set out in my amendment, proper consideration must be given to bringing rural community transport into the scheme. Addressing those two

issues would make an immense difference to people who are trying to lead independent lives.

Extending the national concessionary travel scheme eligibility to include recipients of the lower rate of DLA has been advocated by several charities that represent people with disabilities. For example, Leonard Cheshire Disability has called for the scheme to be extended through its action for access campaign and the report "Mind the Gap: The Next Step". Although the inclusion of people on lower level DLA would undoubtedly increase the cost of the scheme, it would bring significant benefits by increasing social inclusion and promoting a more active and independent lifestyle for people with disabilities.

As WRVS points out in its briefing, research shows that, by keeping older and disabled people independent, active and connected in their communities, community transport makes people's lives better and improves their health, which is well in keeping with the aims of the national concessionary travel scheme. By helping to keep such people out of expensive acute and residential care, the public purse saves far more money than community transport costs to run. Community transport meets social need like no other transport service can. It is a cost-effective way of supporting some of society's most vulnerable people, and we must maintain it.

The Government must consider in an holistic way the costs and benefits of the two proposed changes. The cost of extending the scheme to all current community transport services has been estimated as no more than 3 per cent of the total budget for the scheme. The Scottish Liberal Democrats have long supported community and demand-responsive transport initiatives, as they provide a vital lifeline for communities who are served poorly or not at all by traditional bus services. In remote or rural locales, such schemes might be the only available viable public transport option. It is therefore crucial that the providers are supported in their operation and not discouraged.

It is worth noting that March 2008 marked the end of specific Scottish Government funding for community transport. The demise of the rural transport fund and demand-responsive transport grants as discrete funding pots has increased the pressure on those organisations. As local authority funding becomes tighter, lifeline services could well be put at risk, which would be a retrograde step. Recent research that was commissioned by WRVS shows that one in three older people cannot always get to where they want to go. That is certainly true in rural areas and it is why I am so keen for community transport to be brought into the equation.

My region contains the two great cities of Aberdeen and Dundee but, for the most part, it is a

rural region taking in Aberdeenshire and Angus and with a widely dispersed population. For example, Aberdeenshire is, geographically, one of the larger councils in Scotland. It has a population of slightly more than a quarter of a million, yet it has only six major towns with a population of more than 10,000 and not one of them reaches the 20,000 mark. The area has another 68 settlements and villages and, beyond that, about 68,500 people live outwith the towns and villages.

The majority of people have to travel to access health services, to study, work, or meet their social and leisure needs. Good commercial bus services are provided on the main routes into and out of Aberdeen, but there are much poorer links across country. Many rural residents rely on a range of community transport and demand-responsive transport services. I am sure that my colleague Jamie Stone could tell a similar story.

My point is that elderly and disabled rural residents get a poor deal. They might well have a concessionary card—at least those on full DLA—but they will not be able to get the benefit of it as mainstream bus services can be few and far between, if not completely non-existent. Elderly residents with relatives in a nursing home, or disabled people getting to work, rely utterly on those transport services.

The north-east has built up a strong tradition of social enterprises providing employment for disabled people. That kind of independent living must surely be encouraged. Why should not those on lower level disability living allowance be able to access free bus travel and take up those employment opportunities?

The minister will be familiar with those issues, representing as he does the Banff and Buchan constituency. I know that as a local MSP he has long supported community transport. Indeed, anyone who has experienced at first hand the rise and rise of Buchan dial-a-bus could not fail to be a convert to community transport. Buchan dial-a-bus, operating out of Maud, is a local transport charity providing a fully accessible transport service for people who have problems accessing public transport due to age, infirmity or rural exclusion. Last year it provided over 1,000 individuals with transport to hospitals.

When we debated the topic last year, the minister, Stewart Stevenson, responded directly to me in the chamber:

"The member may recall that I secured a members' business debate on that subject in the previous session of Parliament, so she will know of my interest in it. I take the opportunity to assure her that we will include the matter in our consideration of the scheme."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 2008; c 9624.]

I am therefore disappointed that the minister has not been able to propose changes to the scheme in support of that interest and I call on him to consider the matter further. As he said to a previous transport minister on 15 March 2006:

"The minister can correct that oversight. It would take merely a bit of time, a bit of money and a willingness to respond flexibly."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2006; c 24035.]

He continued:

"A nationwide bus scheme means little if the disabled or older rural dweller cannot gain any benefit from it."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2006; c 24036.]

I move amendment S3M-5378.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises that rural areas suffer disproportionately from bus fare increases or reduced bus services, and calls on the Scottish Government to consider extending eligibility for the national concessionary travel scheme to include older and disabled people using community transport in rural areas.”

09:47

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

When engaged in the political process, I meet a lot of people who believe that politicians just argue with one another all the time and that we do it for the sport because we enjoy it. Unfortunately, the truth is that, although the media tend to report the arguments, they tend not to report the things on which we all agree. The things that I am most proud of being involved with in my time in this Parliament are the things on which we agreed. Free personal care for the elderly is an example, and the national concessionary travel scheme is another; I am proud of those and I am keen to protect them.

The problem with those two schemes—and many others on which we agreed—is that, once they have been put in place, the problems begin to appear. If one has made long-term funding commitments, funding problems begin to arise over time. That is why I welcome the opportunity to debate the subject that Charlie Gordon has given us today by lodging his motion—or perhaps I should say Angela Constance’s motion. There is nothing in the motion with which I can disagree and, as we have heard from previous speakers, several aspects of it are entirely worthy.

The review threw up the decision that it was appropriate to extend the service to disabled ex-servicemen, which is an extremely valuable proposal. We have heard discussed at great length this morning the fact that lower-rate disability living allowance recipients have been excluded from the scheme. I see no reason why they should not be covered other than that there is a cost implication that we must take into account. Other problems are associated with the scheme.

As has already been pointed out, the introduction of the scheme brought about the removal of many localised schemes and took away opportunities for people to take advantage of other concessionary schemes, including concessionary rail travel. We know that many local authorities had the opportunity to put forward or continue with such schemes, which has thrown up numerous problems. The issue in Fife is one that my colleague Ted Brocklebank will address in some detail in his speech later in the debate.

It is implicit that any proposal to extend the range of the scheme at this time must address cost. The Conservatives intend to support the Government amendment as an addendum to the motion. However, we are in the same position as the minister and will consider not voting for the amendment if we get a proper explanation of where the money to deliver the proposed changes will come from.

As we go through the debate, I expect to hear many people call for the scheme to be extended into other areas.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I hope that the member will agree that the key point here is that we should look to the Government to say precisely where the money will come from. It is the Opposition’s job to say what the issues are; it is the Government’s job to find the resources.

Alex Johnstone: The member has missed the point entirely.

I spent part of yesterday afternoon listening to Alistair Darling’s pre-budget statement. I heard a chancellor talking about what he would like to spend, yet being reluctant to talk about what will require to be cut. Government finances are in a worse state now than at any time in the past. It is not appropriate for a Labour member to demand additional resources from the Government without first accepting that resources are under pressure because of what has been done by a Labour Government south of the border. However, more significant than hearing a chancellor refuse to be accountable for what will have to be cut is hearing a Labour Opposition member in the Scottish Parliament take the same irresponsible attitude, as it threatens the scheme of which we are all so proud and which we wish to protect.

I would like to hear an explanation from Labour and the Liberal Democrats of where the money should come from. There are two basic choices. First, should it come from the broader budget—should money be taken away from other priorities to support expansion of the scheme? Alternatively, should we look to reprioritise within the scheme to achieve our objectives?

Alison McInnes: Does Alex Johnstone accept that I said in my speech that the Government

ought to look at this in an holistic way, for example by looking at the health benefits, and consider making contributions from several different pots to enable the scheme to be extended?

Alex Johnstone: Indeed, I fully accept that. However, since the election in 2007, I have listened to many Liberal Democrat spokesmen in the Parliament make what appear to be on-the-hoof spending commitments. It will come as no surprise because we have said it before that the Conservatives are counting those commitments. The Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Parliament are now approaching a figure of £10 billion in implicit spending commitments.

We must have responsible realism in the debate. That is why I agree with everything in the Liberal Democrat amendment. I believe that there are problems with rural transport. What is the point of having a concessionary travel scheme if there are no buses? That problem exists all over Scotland, but especially in the north-east, as Alison McInnes pointed out.

We must know where the money is coming from.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I am just about to finish.

We have always said that money does not grow on trees, and that has never been more true than today. We must prioritise. If we are to maintain and protect the scheme, we must know where the money is coming from and, if it does not come from within the scheme, we need to know which budget area will lose out as a result.

09:54

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this morning's debate and support fully the sentiment and details of the motion.

Like many MSPs, I have received a significant amount of correspondence from groups expressing their concern about the exclusion from the concessionary travel scheme of disabled people who receive the lower level of disability living allowance. Charlie Gordon outlined some of the background to that and made a coherent and compelling case for the issue to be addressed. For me, this is about social inclusion. Reinstating the key benefit of concessionary travel to people on the lower rate of DLA would help a range of people who already have to overcome a great number of barriers in their day-to-day lives.

Enable Scotland has highlighted some of the key issues that disabled people face, the importance of accessible and affordable transport and the difference that that could make to their

lives. Many people with learning disabilities do not drive a car and would find it almost impossible to do so. That, combined with the fact that many of them are likely to rely on welfare or the benefits system, means that a concessionary bus pass would make a huge difference to their ability to go about their lives in a normal way, perhaps to get into employment and to undertake the activities that many of us both inside and outside the Parliament take for granted.

However, the motion is not just about doing the right thing; it is about helping disabled people to achieve their full potential. The motion raises awareness of that important issue, but this Parliament is not just about raising awareness; it is about effecting change. That is why I am pleased that Charlie Gordon is looking to make specific changes through his proposed regulation of bus services (Scotland) bill, which focuses on this issue, which I think is very worth while.

Of course, Charlie Gordon's proposals go a lot further than just reinstating this benefit. As I have said before, bus regulation affects all parts of Scotland. Given that I have the privilege to represent such a diverse region as Mid Scotland and Fife, I am often struck by the similarities in the public transport issues that people face in urban Dunfermline, for example, and in rural parts of Fife and Perthshire. I hope that Charlie Gordon is successful in taking his proposed bill through Parliament.

Stewart Stevenson: Does John Park welcome, as I do, the work that Glasgow City Council is undertaking to develop a statutory bus partnership, that will deliver almost all the benefits that might come from reregulation? At the very least, by doing that, we can see whether that statement turns out to be true.

John Park: I think that there will be an awful lot of support for what Charlie Gordon is trying to achieve through his bill. There is support not just in the Scottish Parliament but among passenger groups and the Scottish Trades Union Council. The union Unite, whose representatives are in the gallery this morning, supports the proposal, because it knows that it will make a difference to people who work in the industry. Although initiatives at local government level are welcome, we need to have a national debate about the services that we have to provide in Scotland and about how public money is spent most effectively in order to make a difference for the people who use those services.

Given the past enthusiasm, particularly among members of the Government, for bus regulation, I am sure that Charlie Gordon can look forward to receiving support for his bill from a number of SNP members.

Last week, I attended a meeting of the Kirkcaldy and district trades council—it was the first time in a few years that I had been to a trades council meeting—at which I was reminded of the key issues that we face in the current economic climate. The meeting was well attended and the debate was wide ranging. What struck me was that people understand the reality: it is about making the right choices.

Alex Johnstone said that we have to say where we would find the money. The Conservatives went into budget negotiations in the past two years with the Scottish Government. I am not sure to what extent Mr Johnstone is privy to this, but the Conservatives made no alternative recommendations about where the money would come from for the acceleration of the small business bonus scheme and the town centre regeneration fund in this year's budget. That was done through discussion and negotiation with the Scottish Government at the time. That is an important point to put on the record.

I am proud of the role that Fife played in developing the first concessionary travel scheme in the UK. The then convener of Fife Regional Council, Bert Gough, a Labour councillor who sadly died in 1998, must take all the credit for driving that policy through at the time. He pioneered the policy in very difficult times throughout Fife. The kingdom was witnessing the decline of the long-standing mining industry and there were a considerable number of job losses in the defence sector, but he recognised the importance of ensuring that many of our people, particularly our older people, had the opportunity to move around Fife and the contribution that that made to their health and wellbeing.

In recent years, Fife has expanded its concessionary travel scheme to cover rail travel, too. The current scheme entitles card holders to discounted journeys for a fare of 50p. Around 90,000 Fifers are entitled to that rail concession scheme, under which it is estimated that just under 0.5 million journeys will have been undertaken in the past year.

However, there is a worrying development regarding the concessionary rail travel scheme. According to the council, the current cost of the scheme is around £700,000. That is easy to quantify when we are looking at budget constraints, but it is much more difficult to measure the positive impact that the scheme has had on the health and wellbeing of the thousands of people who use it.

Fifers are realistic. I recently received an e-mail from a constituent who is concerned about the council's plans to perhaps remove the scheme. The constituent said of the scheme:

"I realise that money is tight. There are many ways of maintaining it for ALL pensioners, like increasing the fare from 50p to £1."

I think that that would still leave a worthwhile saving on the standard fare for pensioners. We need to have a wider debate on what spending money on individuals now means for their wider health and wellbeing and for future accessibility. The key issue is that a proposal has been made that is creating concern in Fife, but £1 spent on a concessionary scheme now will have a far greater impact and will save money further down the line, although that is very difficult to quantify.

The Labour group in Fife Council has made the good suggestion, which echoes the views of constituents, that we increase the fare from 50p to £1, which would be worth while. It is important to highlight that in the debate.

A petition is being taken forward by local people in Fife and by the Scottish Pensioners Forum—Margaret Murdoch, who is here this morning, is taking the petition forward. I have signed the petition and I urge other Fife members to support it, too.

If a scheme such as this is going to make a difference, we have to ensure that it is supported now in these difficult times. I look forward to working closely with Charlie Gordon as his bill progresses.

10:02

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I understand that Ian McKee and Chris Harvie, who will be speaking later, and the minister have already collected their bus passes and that Charlie Gordon might not have collected his yet but might be eligible soon. My direct interest in the debate is slightly less than that of some of the members who are speaking in the debate this morning but, nevertheless, I take it very seriously

I am sure that everyone in the chamber has sympathy with the idea of increasing the scope of the concessionary travel scheme, but matters are not that straightforward. I want to touch on two aspects of the approach of Labour and the Liberal Democrats to the travel scheme—an opportunity missed followed by much political opportunism. The opportunity missed was when the order for the scheme was introduced in the Parliament back in early 2006. The then Local Government and Transport Committee examined the proposed scheme. It received written evidence from the Mobility Access Committee for Scotland, which complained about the lack of time for consultation, which followed calls from a number of respondents to include people on lower levels of DLA and those using community transport. That did not spring up as a surprise in 2007, as some members claim; it

was there in the initial responses to the consultation.

In his response, the then Minister for Transport—one Tavish Scott—said that it was already too late to change the order or to consult on further extensions. Instead, we saw the Liberal Democrat Minister for Transport and the Labour First Minister sign off on a consultation document that specifically ruled out those on the lower rate of DLA and those using community transport. With that, a golden opportunity was missed. There was an opportunity for Labour and the Liberal Democrats, together in grand coalition, to bring forward a scheme that would have done exactly what they are calling for today and yet they did nothing. Having missed that opportunity while in government, both parties have since embarked on a course of opportunism in opposition.

Karen Gillon: Will the member give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: For more than a year after the scheme was established, not a word came from the parties on the unfairness of the criteria that they introduced, unless I missed something from the member who is about to intervene.

Karen Gillon: I fully appreciate and understand that we got it wrong in the previous parliamentary session. No Labour member will say anything different from that. However, the fact is that, 111 days ago, Shirley-Anne Somerville's party lodged exactly the same motion that we have lodged. None of the SNP members who signed that motion has had the courage to come to the chamber and say why they will not support the motion at decision time.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have heard from no Labour members how they would pay for their motion—I will come on to that in due course.

Within weeks of becoming the Opposition, members saw extending the scheme as a matter of great urgency. Opposition members suddenly found it easy to call for the extra spending.

Karen Gillon: So did Angela Constance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Ms Gillon.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: General demands to spend money are one thing; detailed and costed proposals are another. Opposition members must face up to the reality.

Alison McInnes: Ms Somerville accuses us of opportunism, but that is not the case. The Liberal Democrats raised the issue as we headed into a review, which Tavish Scott built into the system—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please face your microphone—we cannot hear you.

Alison McInnes: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer.

When that review began, we rightly suggested amendments to the scheme.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Many people have proposed amendments to the scheme, but Opposition members have not addressed how to pay for those amendments. I will return to that.

When we last debated the issue, I proposed financing an extension to the scheme by scrapping my personal favourite transport project: the Edinburgh trams. The other political parties did not make such a proposal. In that debate, other members commented on the fact that no relevant budget amendment was lodged by those who called for change. Here we are almost two years later—same debate, identical rhetoric—yet still no budget amendment has been lodged.

If Labour and the Liberal Democrats are serious about increasing the scheme's scope in the manner that the motion envisages, difficult issues must be addressed and questions must be answered. If the figures that the review group produced have problems, Labour and the Liberal Democrats need to produce their own detailed figures for Parliament to scrutinise properly. Do they simply want us to sign another blank cheque?

Even if Labour and the Lib Dems know the cost of the extensions, how would that be paid for? Would they—as the Conservatives suggested—remove the rights of some who currently benefit from the scheme? Would they simply add to the scheme's overall cost and cut another project?

I can provide two alternative courses of action that could be pursued in the meantime. Some people who receive the lower rate of DLA qualify for concessionary travel on other grounds, but it is clear that problems exist with making applications and with proving and assessing eligibility. That needs to improve.

Another way to resolve the financial obstacles that those who receive the lower rate of DLA face is for Labour Party members to take up an issue with their colleagues in London. The simple way to resolve the financial problems that recipients of DLA face is to ensure that the DLA rate is appropriate in the first place. Unless I have missed it, Labour members have made no calls to tackle the problem at source, at Westminster. Instead, they once again ask the Scottish Government to top up inadequate benefit levels that their Westminster colleagues pay.

I am all for aiding access to public transport, but I am not for aiding the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats to score political points. That is why I will support the Government's amendment if Labour and the Liberal Democrats make no further

suggestions about how they would pay for amending the scheme.

10:08

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I was a bit disappointed by Shirley-Anne Somerville's speech. The SNP cannot continue to have party-political rants against Westminster yet accuse other parties of making political points. That does not wash in here or with constituents. I have listened carefully to the speeches and I thought that we were building consensus this morning. In the first part of the debate, Charlie Gordon and the minister appeared to do that.

There is no doubt that the concessionary travel scheme is popular—we all know that from our constituents. I see Alex Johnstone nodding—I hope that he will agree with some of my other points.

Alex Johnstone: That is unlikely.

Cathy Jamieson: I hope not.

We all know of elderly constituents who have been able to keep in touch with their families and friends because of the scheme. We know of people who have taken up educational opportunities by using the scheme to access colleges. We know of people with disabilities who have had the opportunity through the scheme to be involved in their communities in a different way. We all know of people—the minister is an example—who have switched back to buses, although that is not always from the ministerial Mondeo or whatever the current mode of ministerial transport is. That must be good.

However, as I represent a rural area, I, like Alison McInnes and others, recognise that if a bus service is unavailable, there is no point in having the free pass. That is why it is important that we consider the opportunity for community transport to be part of the solution. If the minister wants somewhere to pilot such an initiative, I recommend the Coalfield Community Transport area, which covers my constituency. The yellow buses, which are well known throughout the area, have proved invaluable in ensuring that people in some of the more disadvantaged rural communities can access transport in a way that makes sense for them.

I return to the substance of the debate. Whatever happened—whether it was an unintended consequence or whether the previous Executive took its eye off the ball, for which I would be happy to take my share of the responsibility—the reality is that a number of people who had entitlement lost out. That is not fair or reasonable and it is incumbent on the

Parliament to try to put that right. We have the opportunity to do that by building a consensus today to find a way forward.

I will consider some of the evidence that is around. We have all seen the briefing from Leonard Cheshire Disability, which has examined the position and made suggestions. The organisation suggests that the assumptions on which the costings were based were not entirely accurate and that those figures could be reconsidered. It also makes a serious point, about which my constituents are concerned and on which I have written to ministers, about fraudulent claims that are being made. In my constituency, some people were issued with tickets for journeys that were twice as long as the journeys that they took. I know that work has been done to resolve those issues and the minister must take some credit for that, but the perception is still that more could be done in the system to ensure fairness and to spend the money wisely.

Labour members present a motion that we know a significant number of SNP back benchers support. I did not have the chance to sign Angela Constance's motion—I would have done so had it been lodged for long enough.

Stewart Stevenson: Our interpretation is that the motion does not call on the Government to spend money, so I intend to recommend to my colleagues that we support it.

Cathy Jamieson: I can at least thank the minister for considering that and I hope that the whole Parliament will support the motion. If the will of Parliament is to support the principle of extending eligibility, the Government has the resources to look into the costings, do the sums and produce a scheme that ensures that eligibility is extended. Like everyone else, I hope that that can be done within existing resources but, if a wrong must be righted, we must find a way of doing that. Parliament has the opportunity today to do the right thing. I urge everyone to follow the minister's example and to support the motion in the clear understanding that we want to restore eligibility to those who have lost out and to ensure that transport schemes are available for people to use.

10:14

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): I have had my cover blown by Shirley-Anne Somerville, so I suppose that I must join the minister in declaring an interest as the holder of a concessionary bus pass—

Members: No!

Ian McKee: I know. It is unbelievable, but there it is.

I have used the facility to travel many hundreds of miles throughout Scotland by bus and I have never failed to be impressed by the large number of very elderly citizens who accompanied me. The scheme is undoubtedly a huge success and allows many people free access to parts of their country that otherwise would be forever denied to them. They can visit relatives, go shopping and keep up social ties, which boosts morale and helps to ward off physical and mental illness.

I regret that the Labour motion plumbs depths of hypocrisy that are astonishing even for Labour. Labour says that it welcomes the recommendation that seriously injured armed forces veterans be included in the scheme. Good for Labour. However, the party failed to include injured veterans in the scheme when it had the opportunity to do so. It must be said that the dubious wars on which Labour has embarked have caused a huge increase in the number of seriously injured war veterans since the scheme was introduced, so I agree with Labour that action is more urgently needed now. The extension of the scheme is welcome.

The motion also calls on the Parliament to note

"with disappointment and concern the review's recommendation to disenfranchise disabled people who receive the lower rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from the scheme".

Shirley-Anne Somerville has pointed out that the previous Administration rejected precisely the proposition that the scheme should include people in receipt of lower-rate DLA when it responded to the public consultation in 2006, and Cathy Jamieson has acknowledged responsibility for that. The grounds that the Administration put forward at the time were, first, that receipt of lower-rate DLA was not an automatic qualification for eligibility in the majority of local schemes and, secondly, that people in receipt of lower-rate DLA do not necessarily receive a mobility component.

Cathy Jamieson: I am surprised by the member's criticism of the Labour motion. Does he disagree with his colleague Angela Constance, who some months ago lodged a motion that used exactly the same words?

Ian McKee: Cathy Jamieson has misunderstood what I was saying, perhaps because I did not put it clearly enough. I was not disagreeing with the motion but pointing out the hypocrisy of a party lodging a motion when it is in opposition on a subject about which it did nothing when it was in government.

What has changed to alter Labour's perception? Nothing at all, except that the public finances are more strained than they have been in the history of the Parliament and that the party behind the motion is in opposition. However, the Labour

group in committee has suggested no amendments to the draft budget to allocate more money for the purpose of extending the scheme. Is that because it knows that it would then have to identify corresponding savings from elsewhere? That is why the motion reeks of hypocrisy.

Let us consider how the concessionary fares scheme operates in a country where Labour still holds the reins of power: England. With all due respect to Karen Gillon, it is perfectly reasonable to consider the issue, because the Labour Party in Scotland still considers itself to be a branch of the wider UK movement and Labour is in power in England.

Karen Gillon: Has Ian McKee forgotten yesterday's debate, when his party wanted to focus on what the Parliament can do and what it can do more of? Stop moaning about everybody else and get on with using the powers that we have!

Ian McKee: It is always a pleasure to receive a measured intervention from Karen Gillon.

I merely point out that it is not unfair to judge the people who suggest a wonderful scheme for Scotland by their actions where they are not in opposition but in government. Is England a Nirvana that Labour asks us to emulate? It is not. There, people who are entitled to concessionary travel are guaranteed only off-peak travel, whereas no such restriction applies in Scotland. Schemes are centred on local authority areas, so in practice it is impossible for a person to travel easily outside their local area, whereas in Scotland it is possible to travel freely from one end of the country to the other.

What about the extension of the concession to people who receive the lower rate of DLA? It is difficult to get confirmation of the position south of the border, because of the large number of local authorities, but by no means do all local authorities in England embrace the policy. Members might say that that is because some authorities are run by the less socially conscious Tories or Liberal Democrats, but I checked with the Labour-run Lambeth Council, Manchester City Council and Greenwich Council and I found that none of those councils automatically offers the free travel concession to people who are in receipt of the lower rate of DLA. The scheme in Scotland is by far the most comprehensive, which is accounted for by the fact that we spend more than twice as much per head on concessionary travel as our English counterparts do. Where Labour has had unrestricted power to run concessionary schemes, it has produced second-rate products.

Members will have received the communication from Leonard Cheshire Disability that cogently makes the case for extension. From time to time,

other organisations make similar arguments on behalf of the people whom they represent. Of course they make valid points, which in an ideal world would immediately be acted on. However, there are competing claims on a limited pot of money. Mr Gordon wants to reinstate the Glasgow airport rail link, for example. It might be nearly Christmas, but it is no good writing a Christmas list for Santa and hoping that everything on it will be delivered without having to be paid for. In troubled financial times, ensuring the financial viability of the current scheme is a more urgent priority than extending the scheme. I presume that that was why Labour refused to extend the scheme in 2006, but times are even more troubled now, in part because Labour has made such a mess of running the UK economy.

A party that takes no action when it has the power to do so but urges that action be taken when it is out of power, without suggesting how the costs can be met, does so for only one reason: to pretend a concern that it perhaps does not possess. I will support the motion if the Opposition identifies the funding that would pay for its suggestion.

10:21

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): Scottish Conservatives have always supported the concept of concessionary fares and remain committed to it. However, as Alison McInnes said, in vast swathes of rural Scotland the national scheme is fairly meaningless because there are so few buses for people to use in the first place. There are also serious issues to do with the long-term affordability of concessionary fares. That important point was made clear in the Government's review.

As an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, I point out that there is also the separate case for concessionary rail travel schemes such as the one that Fife Council operates. As members know, the national concessionary travel scheme relates only to buses. Although local authorities such as Fife Council are free to offer discounts to elderly or disabled rail users, they are under no duty to do so. In my view, which is possibly partisan, the introduction of the concessionary rail scheme by Fife Council is perhaps the only memorable policy that the then Labour-led Administration introduced.

No one doubts the value of the national concessionary travel scheme, whereby people aged 60 and over and people who have certain disabilities can travel free on local buses and long-distance coaches anywhere in Scotland, at any time of day; nor do people doubt the value of the additional scheme, whereby young people are entitled to a third off bus fares. However, it cannot be denied that the cost of the schemes has been

extremely high. According to the Scottish Government's draft budget for 2010-11—I am sure that the minister will correct me if I get the figures wrong—the cost of concessionary travel is predicted to rise to nearly £192 million per annum, which represents an increase of some £30 million on the previous Administration's costings.

As we heard, the Government undertook a comprehensive review of the scheme in July 2008. Its recommendations were published in March and included extending the scheme to include service personnel and veterans under the age of 60. In May, the minister announced that the concessionary scheme would be extended to include injured forces veterans. In principle, that is an admirable approach, but the review was right to point out that issues to do with the scheme's financial sustainability would have to be kept under review.

It is fair to say that the minister made it clear that existing benefits for the elderly would continue:

"Older and disabled people will continue to be able to travel for free throughout Scotland—at any time, on any bus routes, for any number of journeys."

There were no ifs and no buts. Concessionary fares for the elderly were—and I hope are—sacrosanct.

I say to Helen Eadie and Cathy Jamieson that it is a bit rich of Labour to lambast the SNP for reviewing concessionary fares, given that Labour's woeful handling of the national economy means that budgets at national and council level must be savagely cut back. We should demand from Labour detailed costings and an indication of what it thinks should be cut from the budget if concessionary travel is to be retained at the present level or extended.

However, the SNP is equally guilty of massaging the figures and should explain how the apparent positive effects of the Barnett consequential that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced yesterday might allow it more financial wriggle room than it or the local councils previously anticipated.

That brings me, as an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, back to the concessionary rail fares that Fife Council operates. Those fares are available only on off-peak rail journeys and have been extremely popular, particularly among the elderly who wish to travel between Fife stations and the capital, as well as to Perth and Dundee. They have also benefited the rail companies by directing those passengers away from busy times and filling seats that might otherwise have lain empty.

As John Park spelled out to us, Fife Council contributes £700,000 per annum to that highly popular scheme. Conservatives, and I include our Fife Council colleagues, are nothing if not realistic

when it comes to financial prudence—would that we could say the same about recent Fife Council administrations. In office, Fife's last Labour administration behaved with all the financial probity of inebriated mariners on shore leave, while its current councillors have clearly learned little from their time in opposition and continue to shriek, "Spend, spend!" Even normally sensible Labour MSPs such as John Park issue press releases like confetti to demand assurances that the full concessionary scheme will remain in place. In an unedifying game of tit for tat, the SNP's deputy leader on Fife Council, Douglas Chapman, has publicly accused John Park of

"grubbing around in the dirt."

A plague on both their houses, say I. It is vital that elderly people be allowed the independence and quality of life that concessionary travel provides, particularly as the elderly are among the most vulnerable of Fifers when it comes to finding ways within their budgets to pay extra for home care services and community alarms, for example. However, the elderly are also among the most responsible members in society, and I believe that most would accept that, as Gordon Brown's recession has landed the UK economy in its worst crisis in living memory, they, too, might have to contribute a little more.

Any variable pricing scheme would disproportionately penalise residents in north-east Fife—a not unusual situation, partly brought about by west Fife politicians who seem to forget that the county extends beyond Levenmouth—but, to help reduce the scheme's overall cost, the flat-rate return journey between Fife stations and Dundee, Perth and Edinburgh could be tripled to £3. Most concessionaires who have approached me would find that 200 per cent increase a reasonable sum, especially if they were still expected to make their journeys outwith peak times. I commend a review along those lines to SNP-Liberal Democrat-led Fife Council.

As Alex Johnstone indicated, we will support the Labour motion, which, as the minister pointed out, does not commit us to spending any more money.

10:28

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I will pick up on a couple of points from Ian McKee's speech. I do not think that some SNP members understand the concept of devolution. It allows devolved Administrations to do what they think best with the resources that are available to them. I am not responsible for the UK Government's decisions on England and Wales, where it has responsibility. We have responsibility for decisions on travel in Scotland so, rather than worry about what is

happening south of the border, let us worry about what we have responsibility for.

Ian McKee also talked about Labour making up a Christmas wish list and sending it to Santa. The SNP members are the masters of making up Christmas wish lists and sending them to Santa; they call them manifestos. They promised class sizes of 18, local income tax, £2,000 for first-time home buyers and to scrap the student debt. Will I go on? That is what I call a Christmas wish list for sending to Santa.

Stewart Stevenson: Did I hear that the Labour Party is now supporting local income tax and joining the campaign for a fair tax system?

Karen Gillon: Unlike the SNP, I did not go to the electorate in 2007 on a false prospectus; I went saying what we could deliver within the Parliament's powers and within the budgets that we had. The SNP did not and the people of Scotland will find it out.

I had to deal with those two points that Ian McKee made, but the concessionary fares scheme is an important subject. On the Parliament's mace, four words are inscribed, which I point out to visitors whenever they arrive. They are: justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity. This debate is about those four principles, which we should be governed by in this Parliament.

The first principle is justice. The concessionary fares scheme is clearly an issue of social and economic justice. My constituency is a rural constituency with pockets of real and long-term deprivation that was caused by the run-down of the steel and coal industries. Mr Johnstone's Government was responsible for that, and the minister's party was responsible for ushering that Government into power in 1979.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): They want to do it again.

Karen Gillon: Indeed, as Duncan McNeil says, the SNP wants to do the same again.

Many people in my constituency rely on public transport, especially the bus, to get about. Members should not be under any illusions: the bus is not a cheap mode of transport. Many people think that it is, but it is not.

The free bus pass has revitalised the lives of many older people and people with disabilities, as well as many of the communities in my constituency. Cathy Jamieson gave several examples of how people have used the pass. People in some of the more rural communities in my constituency use the bus to access services in Lanark, Carlisle or Biggar—the larger settlements where those services are contained. However, like Cathy Jamieson's constituents, they have complained that they are sometimes given tickets

for longer journeys. I have raised that issue with the minister and welcome the steps that have been taken to address the problem. However, my constituents know when they are being ripped off and they want it to stop. They want the pass to continue and to be used fairly and properly. For them, it is an issue of justice.

The concessionary fares scheme is also about compassion, because the people who are most affected by low-rate DLA—the people who lose out—are people with learning disabilities. They are most easily sidelined and are often the most voiceless people in our communities. They are marginalised and isolated.

I will tell members about an organisation in my constituency: the Clydesdale Befriending Group For Adults With Learning Disabilities, which supports adults with learning disabilities to gain confidence and new skills. I have watched over the past few years as people's lives have been transformed by being able to take up voluntary opportunities, take up employment opportunities, and petition the Parliament because of the work that the befriending group does. However, it is based in Lanark in a rural constituency, and people need to get to it to access its services. They have been able to use their bus passes but, by and large, they are not able to do that any more, so they may again be isolated and lose out on the opportunities that are available to them.

The third word on the mace is wisdom. I commend Angela Constance for her wisdom in lodging her motion on 21 August, 101 days ago. I also commend the other SNP members who signed it: Bill Wilson, Stuart McMillan, Bill Kidd, Anne McLaughlin, Gil Paterson, Christina McKelvie and Aileen Campbell. Like Cathy Jamieson, I would have signed that motion, but none of the eight members whose names I have just read out has had the courtesy to come to the chamber and say why they have now changed their position or still support it.

Stewart Stevenson *rose—*

Karen Gillon: The minister did not sign the motion, so I would not want him to speak for anybody else.

Members who know me know that, when we were in government, if my party had done something with which I disagreed and I had had the courage to sign a motion, I would have come to the chamber, said what I thought and voted against my party if I believed that it was the right thing to do.

We have to make wise decisions. Yes, we made a mistake or took our eye off the ball—I have whips sitting behind me—but we have the opportunity to get it right and make a wise decision.

That brings us to the final word on the mace, which is integrity. I think that integrity is the underlying principle of this debate. We know that we got the policy wrong, but we know that we can do something to put it right—that is just, compassionate and wise. At decision time tonight, let us act with the integrity that Donald Dewar expected us to act with. Let us vote for the motion, do the right thing by people in Scotland and by the people who put us here, and stop playing party politics with people's lives.

10:35

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I have to declare what has become the obligatory declaration of interest for people in my phase of life, which is that I am the recipient of a concessionary travel pass. I am also the president of the Scottish Association for Public Transport and a member of the Waverley Route Trust, which has to an extent benefited from my concessionary pass—I will go into that in a moment.

Let us get the facts in perspective. We spend £180 million in Scotland on concessionary fares every year. Our total household spend on transport comes to about £12 billion a year, of which more than 85 per cent is spent on motoring. We have perhaps another 20 years of motoring ahead of us before peak oil comes in—although, if we fumble things badly at the Copenhagen climate change meeting, we might find something a lot worse than peak oil.

The concessionary pass has been a boon and blessing to this elderly man because it enables me to save about £12 a day coming to Holyrood by free travel from Melrose to Edinburgh, although the circulation just got back into my feet at about 10 o'clock, after my suffering in a freezing X95 bus from Galashiels. To some extent, I have kept the system in being by payments to the Scottish public transport bodies, particularly in order to see the last of the X95 bus and have it replaced as soon as possible by the Waverley railway, a cause for which I think Charlie Gordon has only qualified sympathy. In the Borders, we are also digesting the impact of a drastic cut in off-peak services.

I see some problematic areas in the concession system. The first is technical, in that there is a problem with the registration and claiming of fares, to which Karen Gillon alluded. Fares can be registered in many different ways, varying from just a blanket concession ticket being issued by FirstBus, to the full registration of fares by Stagecoach, Munro or Perryman. That means that there is no transparency when it comes to assessing income from fares and disbursements from the scheme. There seems to be a problem with certain bus services of various forms of dubious accounting being carried through. I talked

about that to a very senior police officer, who said that his force was concerned about developments in that area.

What we have in Scotland, in fact, is a paradox in the collection of fares. We have a very high-technology ticket checking system, which one sees particularly in our railway stations, where one is apt to be sort of grabbed by one of the machines. I once asked why so many people in dayglo outfits were at the checkouts and was told "They're there to keep an eye on the machines," which I find slightly chilling.

On the continent, something like 80 per cent of passengers now travel by season ticket. They are not even inspected; that is, they do not even have to show the season tickets when they enter a bus but are inspected by crash-squads of inspectors, who are quite robust people. Someone without a ticket can end up €50 poorer by the end of that process. There is a natural inclination to use such methods to regulate the system.

That brings me to a social equality point that I feel quite acutely. If an old-age pensioner from Galashiels were making the trip to Edinburgh and back once a day for five days a week without our system of concessions, the cost would consume half their weekly pension—it would take more than £50 from their weekly £97. I therefore have a certain doubt about my own role in the scheme as a relatively well-off professional who benefits from it. I will come back to that point at the end.

I believe that Scottish bus services could be managed much more competently. We have had five different changes of timetables in the Borders in the past year, which often only get through to the consumer of the services a fortnight later. In fact, we see old timetables in some areas that might be anything up to one and a half years old.

Karen Gillon: The member makes a very good point. Does he share the concerns about the changes at the bus station in Edinburgh whereby certain bus services have been removed from the bus station, which is disfranchising and sometimes causes real difficulties for older people from my constituency and from the Borders?

Christopher Harvie: I totally agree with the member about that. It is bad enough to be in the wilds of Waterloo Place, but we can see that something is going on at St Andrew Square bus station, which they are not telling us about, behind what used to be very good public facilities and stances that have simply disappeared. I used to think that the old St Andrew Square bus station was possibly the most squalid public transport utility in the whole of western Europe, but then we got the splendid new one. However, we now have something of a reversion to the older one.

One of the great advantages of the concession system to all passengers is the speed of going through the system—getting on the bus and showing a card. Why is that not also available to people such as schoolchildren and apprentices? When travelling by bus, we can often find that we are held up for anything up to four minutes on a quarter of an hour journey by people simply having to find change for their fare to put into the machine on the bus. That procedure does not fit well in a modern transportation system. A stationary bus is just an automatic cash loser. With a bit of ingenuity and smart management, we could wipe the car school run off the map and drastically speed up our transport.

Charges should be retained in the transport system and used to improve facilities that are important to the elderly and disabled. There should certainly be completely free transport for people on the state pension and several levels above that. However, people of my age and earnings should be prepared to pay a flat rate of about a third or a half of what the cost of the full use of public transport would be averaged out at—so perhaps about £250 a year could be paid. That would enable much more efficient management of the services.

I was very impressed, when I was travelling in northern England, by the Northern Rail franchise, which has a community officer who deals with integrating the railway system with the structures of the community that it services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be finishing now, Mr Harvie.

Christopher Harvie: Some money going from the better-off transport users into the system would produce a transport system that is far more attractive to the mass of the community.

10:43

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I declare an interest, not as somebody who is of an age to hold a concessionary card but as someone who is married to somebody who is disabled and avails herself of that excellent service. I note that Rhoda Grant and I are the only two Highland members in the chamber, so I hope that I speak about the issue on behalf of members in other parties, including Rhoda Grant, who may well be going to address us anyway.

Before I address the motion and the amendment in my colleague Alison McInnes's name, I will sweep up one or two related issues that are important when we consider this kind of transport in the round. First, I cannot let the debate go by without reminding members yet again of the most unfortunate decision by Royal Mail to eliminate

some of the post buses in my and John Farquhar Munro's constituencies. We must take an holistic view of how needy people get moved about by public transport, and we must be imaginative about how that is done. The post bus service is an imaginative move, and I regret what has been done in that respect.

Secondly, as all Highland members will know from having dealt with this at various times, disabled access is an issue on some buses that run on our main routes. Let me pay tribute where it is due, as I believe that Stagecoach has addressed that issue on its buses that run on the A9 and A99 from Caithness to further south, but disabled access was an issue a year ago. A related issue was the availability of toilets on buses, the lack of which was a real problem for disabled people and those who are not so well who need to travel to hospital in Inverness. However, that has also been addressed, and I thank ministers for their assistance in getting that issue put right.

Another related issue, which Christopher Harvie touched on in response to an intervention, is the facilities that are available at the bus station or bus shelter—unfortunately, there is often no bus shelter at all in the Highlands—and how buses are routed. For example, the village of Lybster in Caithness is shaped like a T, and people used to have to catch the bus at the top of the T whereas most lived at the bottom of the T. It is a long village and, for the disabled, the elderly and even the young, the walk from their house to the bus stop was not easy. Quite a lot of writing backwards and forward was required before the bus company could be persuaded that the bus should come off the A99 and go down the village. Such little bits of detail make a difference to the people who use the service.

On the lack of services that Ted Brocklebank and Alison McInnes mentioned, we certainly need more buses in the vast and very remote area that I represent—the furthest mainland constituency from Edinburgh and one of the least densely populated. I know that it is not possible to wave a magic wand, but we could do with more bus services.

Let me turn to the substantive point of the debate thus far. When my constituents look out the window—or when they are driving or just happen to be standing by the road or the railway—and see the bus or train go past, they see that the bus is never full unless it is a school bus, and the train is certainly never full. Somehow, the argument about who will pay for concessionary travel seems rather sterile when people see those vehicles moving with spare capacity. That point has perhaps been lost sight of in the argument about money. Of course a charge will be involved

in identifying who is eligible, perhaps by giving them the necessary card or identification, but we should just bear it in mind that—in my constituency anyway and, I think, all over the Highlands—public transport vehicles always have masses of extra space that could easily be used. For that reason, I support the Labour motion to extend the scheme so that those seats, which would otherwise be empty, can be taken by the many people who could use them. Those people include those on the lower rate of DLA. As I said, for personal reasons, I absolutely understand what that issue is all about.

Mention was made of school runs. The more that we can get people out of cars and into public transport, the better. Let me say, for the third and last time, that the space is there so we should avail ourselves of it.

Thinking laterally—as is perhaps my wont in such debates—I want to introduce a completely new issue, which will be familiar to members of the Public Petitions Committee and to those who were good enough to attend my members' business debate on it. Young athletes and competitors from Caithness currently face difficulties with access to the sporting facilities that we do not have in the far north. It strikes me that our public transport vehicles that move up and down from the north of Scotland could offer those young competitors and athletes some form of concessionary transport. I am somewhat surprised that the bus companies, which are aware of the issue, have not thought to offer groups of young competitors the chance to get on board and use up those free seats. That would give my constituents, who have as much right as others elsewhere to leisure and sports facilities, the equality of access that they do not at present enjoy. We need to be imaginative with what we already have and the way that we use vehicles moving from A to B.

Let me close on a slightly more humorous note. When I faced huge transport difficulties some years ago and was unable to get a bus or train back to my constituency, my constituency office got in touch with Bannerman Transport Ltd, a haulage company in my home town of Tain, to ask whether it had a lorry returning home that had a spare seat. When I got in the lorry and found that the driver was a constituent from Invergordon, I talked—as I do, brightly and intelligently—about the events of the week that I had just completed. My driver was very interested. As we coasted down the brae into Inverness, however, he rather deflated me by asking what my job was. I said, "I am your MSP." He said, "What is an MSP?" To cap it all—this is an absolutely true quotation—he then said, "Oh, I am sorry, but I thought by the way you spoke that you sold cars."

I conclude.

10:50

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): How on earth does one follow that?

I assure members of all parties that they can keep their gloves on for just one more speech, as I want to address an issue to which Charlie Gordon and Ted Brocklebank have alluded: the potential for concessionary fares on our railways. I think that such fares could be provided in a way that would not cost the Government one cent.

As we heard during Margaret Mitchell's members' business debate on 19 November, those in our community who are deafblind, who suffer dual sensory impairment, are people who struggle with life. If members care to consider the prospect of walking around our world with the ability to hear very little, they will appreciate that that would be difficult; walking around our world with the ability to see very little would also be very difficult. If those two things are put together, one's world is very restricted. Obviously, one's mobility—the ability to get from anywhere to anywhere else, regardless of how well one's legs work—is seriously impaired.

We do not even know how many deafblind folk there are in Scotland. The most recent total for registered deafblind folk is 2,863, but it is generally believed that that number should probably be multiplied by two. In addition, of course, there are degrees of impairment, so the number will always be fairly rough anyway.

Not all our trains are the same, but the train that I hope to get back to Aberdeen this evening should have a public address system that will tell me the stations on the way, which I will be able to hear. I am not old enough to have a bus pass, but I am certainly old enough to remember when the announcements on the railways seemed to be in a foreign language. The announcements have improved, but those who cannot hear at all have a problem. My train tonight will also likely have that overhead moving-text message that says where the train is and where it is going, which is enormously valuable. However, we need to put ourselves in the position of those who cannot read such messages. This may seem strange, but such an impairment is not particularly uncommon. If we put those two impairments together, we can appreciate why those unfortunate folk who suffer from significant dual sensory impairment need a companion to move around the country.

I have explained that at some length in order to enable members to understand the problem. Mercifully, we do not suffer from that problem, but several thousands of our compatriots do. Those folk will be eligible for free fares—that is not the issue—but their companion, by and large, will not be eligible. That is the issue. It should be pretty

obvious from what I have said that deafblind folk need a companion to travel.

It should be equally clear that, like the rest of us, deafblind folk would choose to travel off peak. Travelling during peak time is not much fun anyway, and anyone with such problems who had to take a companion with them would, I think, choose to travel off peak. Therefore, it should not be terribly difficult for us to find a way of persuading train companies to use the spaces that, as Jamie Stone pointed out, are usually available during off-peak times to allow such folk to travel for free along with a companion, who ought to be able to travel, I suggest, for not very much.

I argue that the train companies should make such travel free. That would not cost them a huge amount of money at all. I would be reluctant for us to tell them to make it free, but I have written to the managing directors of First ScotRail, East Coast, Virgin Trains and CrossCountry Trains to make precisely that argument. I also put to them the point that they currently accept a £15 marginal fare even from the likes of me, because everyone over 55 can get a return fare to anywhere for £15. I understand that that offer is not supported by the Government in any way. The train companies have already established that that is an acceptable marginal cost for an extra passenger.

The challenge for the train companies—as I said, this is nothing to do with the Government—is to explain why it would not be acceptable for the companions of people who have dual sensory impairment to be charged that marginal fare. I would like such travel to be free, but surely the rail companies could provide it for £15, which is a number that they came up with. I hope that that idea receives cross-party support; we will generate a motion to that effect very soon, I think.

There are a few other issues that need to be considered. The first concerns access to the bus station for people who have to get there by taxi or in a car because they are disabled, which I am aware is an issue in my home city of Aberdeen. Such access has apparently not been thought about. That must have been a simple oversight; sadly, it is a rather obvious one, and I hope that the people concerned will address it quickly. I am sure that those of us who have a local interest will ensure that that point is impressed on the appropriate people.

Secondly, I add my name to the list of those who are aware of the fact that bus companies seem to issue tickets for journeys that are longer than the journey for which the concessionary fare has been charged. I understand that the Government is working on that issue, which has arisen as a result of reasonably recent anecdotal information from the cities of Aberdeen and Dundee.

10:56

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I, too, declare an interest, not just because I have a bus pass, but because I have two replacement hips. Thankfully, I am able to get around reasonably well, but I have some mobility constraints.

I am especially pleased to welcome to the gallery some friends of many years and some good, hard campaigners, who are among the best campaigners in Fife: Marie McRae, Kate Findlay, Margaret Murdoch and Susan Archibald. Susan Archibald from Kelty is an ambassador for the independent living movement and has said that access to free bus travel will open up the world to our people and give them more opportunities to get involved in events in their communities. She feels that the social exclusion of disabled people is a vital issue, and she supports the campaign spearheaded by Charlie Gordon MSP. I passionately support him in that campaign.

I pay tribute to and compliment for their speeches Jamie Stone, Nigel Don and the minister, who was quite conciliatory. I also pay tribute to Bob Doris, who is the only SNP member who signed Angela Constance's original motion to come to the chamber this morning. You have done well, Bob—congratulations on coming to the chamber.

I am extremely glad to have the opportunity to put on record publicly my enthusiastic support for Charlie Gordon's proposed member's bill on bus services, which will give us the chance to address, among other things, rural community transport issues. Rural community transport will become all the more important should it become obvious that there is no chance of a blanket inclusion for community transport in the national concessionary travel scheme.

Ted Brocklebank should consider signing Charlie Gordon's proposal, given that he cares about rural transport. Hearing his speech made me remember the time when I got into terrible trouble from my colleagues last year, when I did not vote with the whip—I did not vote to go on the Equal Opportunities Committee and said something dreadful about Margaret Mitchell. The situation this morning is worse—Ted Brocklebank has reminded me of the worst of the 19 wasted years of Tory rule. After I said what I said in the chamber last year, Henry McLeish said, "Helen, you got that all wrong. If we had the Tories in power, it would be like putting Robert Mugabe in charge of the United Nations." That is what Ted Brocklebank's speech reminded me of; that is how strongly I feel about it. That is what life would be like under the Tories—no values, no care and none of the things that Karen Gillon mentioned. That is what those of us who can remember back to the miserable years when the Tories were in

power think about when we think about those times. God forbid that that should ever happen again.

I had the privilege and honour of serving on Fife Council, which Ted Brocklebank denigrated. I tell you this: Fife Council had all the right values. While I worked for Fife Council and before I did so, it had pioneers—people who had the vision to make it the only local authority in Scotland to have a concessionary travel scheme. At the time, London and Liverpool were the only other parts of the UK that had such a scheme. Pioneers such as Bert Gough and other former members of Fife Council deserve our praise. We remember them with genuine affection.

Today's debate is the result of an unintended consequence. None of us wanted to have to discuss the issue. As others have said, we have a chance to put right a wrong.

The Leonard Cheshire Disability report "Mind the Gap: The Next Step" includes ideas on how to pay for free bus travel for all disabled people, which Ian McKee is not here to hear. Leonard Cheshire Disability said that a number of issues needed to be looked at, including the fact that the assumptions that had been made about some of the figures were wrong. It identified the issues around fraud that were reported in *The Herald*. The loss of income from the scheme in which that fraud has resulted needs to be looked into. Only last night, a company called Ecebs was in the Parliament—I was extremely sorry to miss the event—and said that the necessary cash could be released from efficiency savings and that there were all sorts of new technology solutions that could be considered. I am certain that if people really have the political will—that is what is required—we can take steps to address the issues. If the minister wants answers on where the money will come from, he should look at what Leonard Cheshire Disability said in its report, which provides a lot of extremely good information. He should not just pick the bits that he wants to pick.

We know that Leonard Cheshire Disability speaks for disabled people right across Scotland when it says that the decision by the SNP Government to deny all disabled people the same access to concessionary travel is wrong, that the figures that were used in the Government's review of the concessionary travel scheme are wrong and that if the Parliament fails to end the situation, disabled people in Scotland will see the SNP as the wrong choice of party to represent their needs in the Parliament. The present situation is wrong, wrong, wrong.

As Cathy Jamieson said, we have a chance to right that wrong. Decision time tonight will sort out the political giants from the pygmies—those who,

having signed Angela Constance's motion, have the courage to stand by their convictions. The motion before us, Charlie Gordon's motion, is the same, word for word, as that lodged by Angela Constance. I will support Labour's motion. Will Angela Constance and the 15 SNP MSPs who signed her motion do so, too?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes.

Helen Eadie: The fact that Angela Constance withdrew her motion only hours after she lodged it suggests that she might have had her wrists slapped by her leadership.

However, if the minister is giving us a cast-iron guarantee that Charlie Gordon's motion will be supported by the SNP, I am delighted. I am so pleased that colleagues such as Bob Doris have joined us and that the minister supports our position.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up, please.

Helen Eadie: I hope that the issue will be sorted out on the minister's watch.

11:03

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The flowers are on their way to Helen Eadie's office as we speak. I'll see you for dinner and a bottle o' wine tonight, eh?

Members: Oh!

Bob Doris: Back to reality. I found Charlie Gordon's speech, the tone of which was measured and appropriate, very informative, and Mr Stevenson's reply constructive and thoughtful.

I feel that it is reasonable, in the context of the debate, to contrast the concessionary scheme in Scotland with what is available south of the border. In that respect, I differ quite strongly from Karen Gillon, who believes that it is wrong to draw that comparison. I disagree with you on that, Karen. Surely it is narrow minded and inward looking not to look at social provision in other countries. Of course we should look at that; we should also adopt progressive and helpful ideas, when appropriate. Of course we should be outward looking—I am an internationalist.

Karen Gillon: I am proud to say that I am an international socialist. The only difficulty with your argument is that you look south only when there is something negative to carp about rather than something positive to celebrate. I am more than happy to look for international comparisons. I hope that you will look with me at what is happening in Denmark. That example tells us that we should deliver on our physical education commitment, although our Government continues to fail to do that.

Bob Doris: I could do with two hours of PE every week. You know, Karen, it is important that we consider every—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Will members use full names?

Bob Doris: Absolutely.

It is important that we consider what all countries are doing without restriction. I do not have a hang-up about England, although Karen Gillon seems to. She should be more outward looking.

The minister drew a favourable comparison with our neighbours in England not to provide a feather in the Scottish Government's cap, but to show that a job has been well done by the Scottish Parliament. After all, when the national concessionary travel scheme was introduced by the former Scottish Executive in 2004, it was warmly welcomed by the SNP, which was then in opposition. Indeed, such a scheme has been included in SNP manifestos since 1999.

I return to Mr Gordon's constructive tone. I genuinely hope that his approach signals a change in Labour's approach. When the scheme was reviewed in 2008, floods of Labour propaganda appeared. There was scaremongering that the SNP was going to throw wir grannies aff the bus, but the scheme was, in fact, amended to extend provision. Labour's approach was unbecoming of an Opposition, and I hope that it has learned its lesson. It knew that the scheme was not under threat, but it sought to raise unfounded and spurious concerns. However, Labour has stepped up to the plate today—I pay tribute to Mr Gordon for that—and is being a responsible Opposition, particularly if it accepts the Government's amendment.

Helen Eadie: Perhaps we will not throw our grannies off the bus, but SNP and Lib Dem representatives are going to throw their grannies off the trains in Fife.

Bob Doris: I will speak from my knowledge. I know that Glasgow Labour went to Fife to condemn care charges there, despite the fact that the charges under Labour Glasgow City Council were four times higher.

I agree that extending the scheme to include all our citizens on the lower rate of disability living allowance would be a progressive step that would certainly assist in reducing barriers and promoting social inclusion. A number of policy initiatives that would extend provision to all our citizens would be beneficial and progressive. For example, in order to tackle child poverty, improve people's health and reduce stigma in society, I would like the provision of free school meals to be extended beyond the primary 1 to primary 3 pilot so that every year in our primary schools was covered.

However, that would have to be paid for; it would have to be funded. Similarly, extending the concessionary bus scheme to our citizens who are on the lower rate of disability living allowance must be paid for.

Mr Gordon made suggestions about how to drive a better deal with our bus companies and others, which, I am sure, the minister listened to. However, if Labour members are serious about the motion—they may be; I certainly believe that Charlie Gordon is—I assume that the Labour front-bench team has already had detailed discussions with the Scottish Government to agree a way forward during the budget process. The Government has, of course, published a draft budget, and I assume that Labour members suggested an amendment during the parliamentary committees' budget scrutiny to include the proposal that has been made. Of course they would have done that if they were genuine about the matter. If they did not do so, that raises serious concerns about how genuine some Labour members are about the motion. I listened to Helen Eadie's comments—I hope that our dinner is still on—about Parliament's job being to decide what it wants and the Scottish Government's job being to find money to pay for that. That is, in effect, what she said. I like Helen Eadie, but I say to her as gently as possible that such an approach would mean a car crash of a balanced budget strategy for Parliament.

It is fair to point out that increased DLA levels would help to remove mobility barriers. Perhaps a solution could be UK Government tax breaks on fuel costs for bus companies that decided to sign up to an extended provision scheme so that any additional costs would not be passed on to the Scottish Government and the Scottish taxpayer. There are always solutions, and we must look outward for them.

Jamie Stone: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member will not do so. He is winding up.

Bob Doris: If Labour wishes to take the matter seriously, it has the opportunity to do so, but simply demanding cash is not the way forward, given that we have a Scottish budget that is shrinking due to UK Government cuts. Let us see whether we can find a way forward.

11:10

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): This has been an excellent debate about an excellent scheme that was introduced by the previous Labour-Lib Dem Administration. Many elderly and disabled Scots have had a new lease of life as a result of that scheme. It has improved social cohesion, resulted in better access to health

facilities, and helped people such as the minister who travel to work with their concessionary travel passes. I am sure that the minister makes good use of his pass. However, he has scored an own goal by not backing in his current post the suggestion that he made in the previous parliamentary session to include in the scheme those who receive the lower rate of disability living allowance. I hope that he will seriously reconsider his position after the debate and in his subsequent discussions with Mr Swinney. My colleague Alison McInnes highlighted the great need for the scheme to include those who receive the lower rate of DLA and to cover community transport, which is a particular help to residents in rural areas.

Before Alex Johnstone gets back on his hind legs to try to quote Lib Dem costs, he should remember that Alison McInnes asked, quite fairly, that costs should be reviewed holistically. She is not asking the Government to consider budgets over which it does not have control; rather, she is asking it to consider budgets over which it has control.

Last year, the Government was forced to make a U-turn after it revealed a real-terms cut in the national concessionary travel scheme's budget. I would be happy to accept Mr Johnstone's claims about Lib Dem commitments reaching extortionate figures if he or his Conservative colleagues made costed suggestions, as Alison McInnes has done. Merely following the Government at every turn and not making any constructive suggestions of its own gives his party no credibility.

Mr Brocklebank and Mr Park sought to lambast the efforts on concessionary rail fares of the Lib Dem-SNP council in Fife. As Mr Park rightly said, it was previous Fife councillors who led the Scottish march to provide concessionary bus passes, which the previous Labour-Lib Dem Administration introduced nationally. However, he falsely stated that the current Lib Dem-SNP Fife Council is planning to remove the concessionary rail fares scheme in Fife. In fact, an officer-led paper has gone before Fife Council, and it is being considered. What Mr Park said is simply not the case.

Labour has suggested increasing concessionary fares in Fife from 50p to £1. I understand its motives for that, but that would be a blanket approach that would not take into account people's needs or give more help to those who are most in need. I believe that the rail travel review in Fife will result in a much fairer scheme. Mr Park is talking about changes; the Lib Dems in Fife are acting.

The Scottish Liberal Democrat party is the only party that is truly committed to progress on public transport provision in Fife. Let me give examples

of that. We were instrumental in bringing the current concessionary scheme to Scotland; we are making positive and—I say to Mr Johnstone—costed suggestions to improve access for disabled Scots; and we are leading the way in Fife to ensure that elderly, disabled and young people have greater access to concessionary travel.

My colleague Jamie Stone made serious points about the loss of post buses. I have been made familiar with how such losses affect rural communities such as Glen Lyon, where my wife's sister and her family live and work. The removal of post buses represents the loss of a vital life-link for people in rural communities.

Nigel Don highlighted an important point about deafblind people and their carers. Like Mr Don, I met people from Deafblind Scotland recently in the Parliament and took part in the members' business debate. I fully agree with him not only that deafblind people should have access to free travel, but that, given their greater need for an assistant because of their dual impairment, the current system whereby a deafblind person must pay part of their helper's fare is unjust and should be reviewed.

I recently contacted the minister on the subject of concerns about abuses of the national concessionary travel scheme. If we are to get value for money, we should look not only at where we can spend money, but where we can save money in the current scheme. I am concerned that there is strong evidence of abuse in some areas, and I am glad that the minister has suggested that he will look seriously at the issue and work with National Express, Stagecoach and other bus operators as well as First ScotRail.

I am pleased to support both the Labour motion and the Lib Dem amendment. I hope that the minister will be able to persuade his boss, Mr Swinney, of the real social improvements that can be gained for the people of Scotland by widening the scope of the concessionary travel scheme.

11:16

Alex Johnstone: I remember chamber debates for different reasons at different times. I am tempted to suggest that I may for a long time remember this as the day when Bob Doris told us that ye cannae shove yer granny aff the bus—something from the depths of Scottish culture that has now been mentioned in the Scottish Parliament for the first time.

The debate has been a good deal more constructive than it appeared at times it was going to be. With an election not far away, it was inevitable that party politics would creep in. Nevertheless, we have had, in principle at least, broad agreement that the scheme for

concessionary travel in Scotland is not perfect and that improvements and adjustments are necessary. There were times during the debate when we heard the beginnings of accusations about who had got it wrong and who needs to get it right in the future. I would like to avoid that, if possible.

As I said in my opening speech, I do not believe that we could have had any hope of getting the scheme right in the first instance. The priorities were to get the scheme in place, to find out what the problems were and then to make changes when we knew what changes would be required. The debate is timely because it has given us the opportunity to examine the list of changes that many of us would like, and to begin to think about how we can prioritise them.

Earlier in the debate, I asked how we might pay for the changes, which has been raised on several occasions by a number of members. John Park produced an argument that I have heard before, when he asked why the Labour Party should say where the changes in expenditure should be, given that the Conservatives did not say where the cuts in the budget should be to allow our great achievements: the small business rates relief scheme—for which I am delighted to claim credit, at least in part—and the town centre regeneration scheme. However, those were negotiated in advance of the passing of a budget and they were new proposals that had to come from other budgets. There was no option. I suggest that there are two options for the concessionary travel scheme, and I would like Labour and the Liberal Democrats to explain which of the options they would choose—although I believe that the Liberal Democrats have done that, and I will come to them in a minute.

I would like Labour members to tell us whether they believe that the money to extend the range of the concessionary fares scheme should come from other budgets—by cutting hospitals, schools or social work—or whether we should look at the concessionary fares scheme in the round and decide which parts of it are lower priorities, and who should lose entitlement in order that we can extend entitlement to others. I believe that Christopher Harvie began to deal with that. He grasped the nettle and suggested that some people who are entitled to concessionary travel, such as he, could pay. In fact, in evidence to the committee—I do not have it in front of me, so I cannot quote it directly—it was suggested that city bankers and businessmen in Edinburgh travel to work using concessionary fares cards and pay nothing to use buses. Some of those people might now be claiming bonuses that could be heavily taxed by the Government.

We need to reach agreement on entitlement. Ultimately, we must decide whether the age limit of 60, which we currently apply universally, is appropriate if the cost of keeping all 60-year-olds within the scheme prevents us from extending it to more deserving groups. I want to promote that discussion. If nothing else comes from the debate today, that will be valuable.

Other suggestions have been made as to how we could pay for the scheme. Jamie Stone talked about the empty seats on many buses, and found some support for the idea that those seats could be used by passengers who would not pay for them. I am sure that it would be possible for arrangements to be entered into that would allow bus companies to allocate empty space on their buses in such a way; however, the idea that we should rely on the charity of bus companies to achieve our aims is a non-starter.

We must find some way of paying the costs that are associated with the concessionary fares scheme. Ultimately, if the bus companies chose to allow some people to travel free of charge, it will not be free—there would still be a cost, which would be moved to other areas of those businesses. Although I am sure that something could be achieved in that area, it is best to keep everything above board and on the balance sheet. In that way, we will know exactly what the costs are.

Helen Eadie probably did the most to address the issue of cost, which she covered well during her speech. However, I believe that the question that I asked the Labour Party has been answered by the Liberal Democrats. Although I do not believe that their proposals have been costed, as Jim Tolson suggested, the argument that Alison McInnes made for an holistic approach to the cost of the scheme is an implicit indication that she believes that the extra funding should come from outside the scheme itself. That is why I ask the Liberal Democrats again: What, in the future, would they cut to pay for that?

11:22

Stewart Stevenson: Alex Johnstone referred to bankers arriving at work in Edinburgh on the bus, having used their concession cards. Thank goodness I left banking to join politics in order to improve my reputation. It has proved to be a wise move under the current circumstances, although I will not get a bonus to pay any tax on.

I am grateful to the Labour Party—to Charlie Gordon, in particular—for raising the issue. It is a timely debate, as Scottish Government officials will shortly meet the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK to discuss concessionary travel and a range of bus-related issues that concern the

scheme. Those discussions will cover the rate at which we reimburse—currently 73.6p in the pound—and how we can maintain the scheme with its current access parameters, which are widely valued.

No one who has spoken in the debate has failed to make a point of some interest and engagement. The motion has been drafted badly and is gratuitous in some of its language, but I am not going to be petty about its wording because I wholeheartedly support the point that underlies it. It is on that basis that I will recommend to my colleagues that we support it.

Similarly, I recommend to my colleagues that we support the Liberal Democrat amendment. In both cases, I do so on the basis that I am not, at this stage, being asked to spend any more money: I am being asked to consider things, and that is what I wish to do.

John Park rightly highlighted the achievements of Bert Gough, of Fife Council, on producing the first ever concessionary travel scheme. I welcome the efforts that were made by a previous generation of politicians, albeit that they were of a different political flavour. He followed a similar track to that which was taken by Jimmy McGinley, the SNP leader of West Lothian Council in 1980, when the first Christmas bonuses were introduced. No party has a monopoly on good ideas.

John Park suggested that one way in which Fife Council should consider the officers' proposal that is currently before it in relation to its rail service scheme would be to increase fares from 50p to £1, and Ted Brocklebank suggested that there could be a return fare of £3. That is quite interesting. I will merely note that the SNP and Liberal Democrats made no similar suggestions during this debate, and that the SNP and Liberal Democrats are in power in Fife. It is interesting that the parties that make up the opposition in Fife Council are taking the position that they have taken. We will see how that debate plays out.

Cathy Jamieson pointed to some effective activities in her constituency, such as those that have been undertaken by Coalfield Community Transport, which is one of a wide range of bodies that are engaged in such activities. Alison McInnes mentioned one of the two community bus services in my constituency, so I must make up the deficit by highlighting the achievements of Banffshire Partnership Ltd, which supports people in the north of my constituency to a good degree.

Cathy Jamieson and others referred to fraud in the system, and we acknowledge that there has been some. I think I am correct in saying that there have so far been four references to the procurator fiscal, but I will check that figure after the debate—there may well be more to come. I should say that

many people think that fraud is going on because they see a ticket being issued for the whole journey, but in many cases that is simply just a result of the agreement that exists between Transport Scotland and the bus company about how things will be done. As we complete the introduction of the machines that will read cards, we will move to a position of greater certainty, in which fraud will be much more difficult. We will also be able to gather more data about how people travel, which will enable the bus companies and Government to fine-tune the way in which things work.

Ted Brocklebank made the point that Fife extends beyond Levenmouth. I was brought up in Cupar, so I can acknowledge the veracity of that statement. Indeed, at the weekend, I had the happy experience of visiting Crail to attend my best man's ruby wedding anniversary celebrations. I know Fife well from personal experience. Ted Brocklebank also talked about Barnett consequentials. At the moment, we believe that they will amount to about £20 million, which will be welcome, if modest.

Karen Gillon took the opportunity to suggest that we do not look to the south much. I say to her that I will copy good ideas from wherever they come. On road safety, for example, I have rejected some proposals from my officials because I know of work that is being done in England. We have now joined a number of pieces of research that are happening south of the border, which represents efficient partnership working. We now expect that the UK Administration will join an initiative that we have taken in that regard. This is some of the non-glamorous stuff that people do not usually hear about: officials and ministers take every opportunity to work together, and they do so extremely well.

On bus stations, the situation in Edinburgh is quite complex. A number of bus companies have chosen not to use the bus station. I have raised the matter with the City of Edinburgh Council and I will examine the Aberdeen situation, as well.

Nigel Don rightly took us back to a previous debate on deafblind companions, which is certainly a subject that bears further consideration. Without naming it, he referred to the club 55 promotion that ScotRail has been running since, I think, the beginning of September and which ends this week. That scheme is, of course, funded by the rail companies, but it suggests what the marginal rate of carrying a passenger might be.

Another scheme is operated by the Association of Train Operating Companies, under which those of us who are over 60 can purchase a card. I paid £60 for my card, which gets me a third off fares for three years. I point out that that personal expenditure benefits the public purse—when I

make my ministerial rail journeys, the public gets the benefit of the £60 that I spent on my own initiative. Again, that shows that there is an inclination on the part of the rail companies to do the right thing.

Grannies are safe on buses, and I think that they are probably safe on trains in Fife. Let us see whether that is the case.

This has been a good debate. The only people who have earned my sympathy during this debate are, of course, the drivers of Bannerman's lorries.

11:31

Charlie Gordon: This has been a mainly positive debate. The minister repeatedly criticised the length of the Labour motion, but it is a straight lift from Angela Constance, whom I have always found to be a very conscientious adversary.

The minister claimed that I got it wrong on the issue of reimbursement to bus operators vis-à-vis standard fares or average fares. I see that the minister is engaged in a discussion, but if I can have the minister's attention, I will quote a paper from the Scottish Parliament information centre, which says that

"The Scottish Executive agreed to reimburse bus operators at 73.6% of the average adult single fare for each journey."

I might have misinterpreted that, but the minister can read it in the *Official Report*.

Alex Johnstone said that money does not grow on trees. How many members thought, "I wish I'd said that"? Across the chasm that separates us, I say to Alex Johnstone that we should not leave vulnerable people at the back of the queue because of a recession; we should put them at the front of the queue because of a recession.

Alex Johnstone: Does Charlie Gordon acknowledge that I fully accept that, and that my concern is to ensure that we know where the money is coming from to achieve it?

Charlie Gordon: I was addressing what Alex Johnstone said in his opening remarks, as Mr Hyde, before he became Dr Jekyll in his summing up.

I am thinking of taking Shirley-Anne Somerville off my Christmas card list. That is not because she implied that I—a youthful-looking 58-year-old—was about to get my bus pass, but because although she is a capable MSP, as I know from having served with her on the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, she let herself down once again by reading out a hack's brief from her party's resource centre.

I want to draw a veil over the contributions of Dr McKee and Mr Brocklebank. Suffice it to say that

they set very low standards for themselves, which they failed to live up to.

I say to Professor Harvie that—watch my lips—Labour supports the Borders rail line.

Jamie Stone made a valid point about spare capacity in existing commercial bus services. I do not think that he was suggesting that the people about whom we are concerned should be carried in those spaces free of charge, although they should, perhaps, be carried at marginal cost. I should also say that I would certainly buy a used car from Jamie Stone.

Nigel Don made an important speech and, rightly, did not apologise for repeating points that were made in the debate that we had in November about the travel needs of deafblind people and their companions. He made an interesting suggestion about how the issue could be resolved at marginal cost to some transport operators.

Apparently, Bob Doris harbours some ambitions. His contribution was no bad for him, as they say in Glesga. I should explain that in Glasgow, “no bad” is high praise indeed. He suggested that I should enter a dialogue with the Scottish Government about what I am proposing today. If that is an offer, we are up for accepting it.

The funding for the concessionary travel scheme is pretty much a projection. We cannot know how many journeys will be made the following year, which is what potentially makes smart cards so valuable. We can capture all the necessary data with great accuracy and we can scope out, for example, the issue of overclaiming. As I pointed out, overclaiming has been happening throughout the history of the scheme, at an average cost of more than £1 million a year.

Stewart Stevenson: Does Charlie Gordon recognise that since the scheme was introduced, there has been a real-terms increase in expenditure of 17 per cent? It is against that backdrop that we have been able to maintain the scheme and to extend it slightly.

Charlie Gordon: When we are discussing future financial administration, real terms is the realistic way to look at things.

The issue is not just the significance of smart cards. Leonard Cheshire Disability has pointed out the rather disappointing review when it considered including lower rate DLA people in free bus travel. There was a substantial measure of double counting in calculation of the numbers of those people. I remind members that as recently as two years ago, thousands of those people were in the base budget of the free bus travel scheme. It is a bit like winter maintenance for trunk roads. We do not know what kind of weather we will have the

following year so we put in an amount and see what requirements are generated.

Quite a number of vulnerable people are represented by the organisations that have been in touch. Leonard Cheshire has said that access to transport is vital in enabling disabled people to live independently. In the context of evidence for my proposed bus bill, the Highland users group, which works with people with mental health issues, said that it strongly supports the restoration of a concession that people have lost. NUS Scotland said that

“Students on DLA, regardless of their rate of support, need to access ... college campuses ... lectures and classes”.

That is why they need this type of assistance. There are many more. The estimable Inclusion Scotland, for example, which represents a host of organisations on a delegate basis, has made, in the context of my proposed bus bill, a powerful case for the measure that Labour is proposing today.

I said at the start of the debate that this was the first Parliament debate on concessionary travel for five years. I look back to June 2008 and I realise that it is 18 months since we had a comprehensive debate about bus travel in Parliament, and on that day, we all voted down the others’ motions and amendments, and there was ambiguity about public policy on buses.

However, the debate is not really about concessionary travel, buses or transport generally, but about people. It is about doing things for people. Is not that really why we are here? That is why I will accept the Liberal Democrat amendment, although legislation would be required to implement its proposals. Labour will also accept the Government amendment and will introduce an amendment at stage 2 of the budget bill. I am delighted.

There are vulnerable people who have a lot riding on this morning’s debate—some are represented in the public gallery. The outcome of the debate will illustrate how grown up MSPs—from all the parties—and their priorities are. We should not be deflected from people priorities because we are entering hard times. The recession provides all the more reason why we should do the right thing and all vote the same way tonight at decision time.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Human Rights

1. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has considered the potential impact on constitutional issues of Conservative party proposals to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 in favour of a British bill of rights. (S3O-8807)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): Robert Brown has a long-standing interest in human rights matters, and I fully understand the reason for his question. Repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998 could have important constitutional implications in Scotland. The Scottish Government would expect to be consulted about the detail of any such future proposal by the United Kingdom Government.

Robert Brown: I am grateful to the minister for his answer, but does he agree that Conservative proposals to water down the European convention on human rights are irresponsible and reprehensible? Does he further agree that human rights are a key foundation stone of our Scottish Parliament?

Will he explain why the Scottish National Party Government's international framework and international development strategy avoid committing Scotland to any human rights principles, and indeed fail to mention human rights at all? Is it wise for the SNP Government to take its lead from the Tories in that area? Will he raise the matter urgently with the newly responsible minister?

Bruce Crawford: I refute entirely the second part of Robert Brown's questions.

Although human rights is a reserved matter under the Scotland Act 1998, it is one in which the Scottish Government has a direct interest. The Government would oppose any proposals that did not adequately take account of Scotland's distinct legal system and identity or that undermined the effectiveness of where we are now.

I understand why Robert Brown raises the issue of the Conservatives' proposals, but from what we have seen so far we are totally unclear about what they mean. We do not know in what direction they are going. What we do know is that the Tories' track record in Scotland has been to act against the best interests of the people of Scotland on

many occasions, and we can expect more of the same.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Scottish Executive Relocations (Rural Areas)

3. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many of its posts have been relocated to rural areas since May 2007. (S3O-8797)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Government will consider proposals to relocate posts based on the opportunity to deliver value for money and to ensure operational effectiveness for public administration. We will also consider the prospective relocations under the small units initiative.

Elaine Murray: When the Scottish Government announced its relocation policy in January 2008, the minister indicated that small unit relocations would continue and that particular weight would be given to communities deemed to be remote, rural or fragile, of which there are many in Scotland, including in the South of Scotland. I ask the minister again, how many posts have been relocated in the past two and a half years?

Jim Mather: Elaine Murray shares my lively interest in the matter. That was the case when she was on the Finance Committee when it considered the matter in detail. The focus now has to be on legitimate rural needs and what we are doing to pull them forward. Essentially, we are organising asset management so that we know exactly what properties there are and where the potential is. We are also working with local authorities, the Scottish local authorities economic development group, community planning partnerships and the business organisations to ensure that there is a new localism and a pull towards local areas, and that we can make a compelling case for people to relocate to those areas.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): For the third time, how many jobs? If the minister evades the question again, can we assume that it is none?

Jim Mather: The issue here is one of positioning ourselves to move forward. We are in a recession, and the issue now is to ensure that we come through this period more competitive, in a much better position and much more able to create genuine localism. In terms of assets, working with local authorities and the business community, and energising community planning partnerships, the Government is positioning Scotland for that new beginning.

Wick High School

4. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what further discussions it has had with the Highland Council regarding funding for a new Wick high school. (S3O-8819)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): Subsequent to the announcement on 28 September that Wick high school would be one of the first 14 secondary schools to benefit from the new £1.25 billion school building programme, discussions have taken place between the council and the Scottish Futures Trust on how best to take the project forward.

Jamie Stone: The school is far from being fit for purpose and people in Wick have waited for a very long time. Will the minister undertake to keep a close personal eye on the situation and continue to liaise as closely as possible with Highland Council to ensure that the project is not kicked into the long grass and that we see positive progress towards the laying of the first brick?

Keith Brown: I am happy to give that assurance. The member will be aware that the council is undertaking a feasibility study to ascertain whether a refurbishment or a rebuild would represent best value for money, and consultation with key stakeholders is continuing. The feasibility study is due to be completed in mid-January 2010, and matters will be taken forward as swiftly as possible thereafter.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): As the project could become a benchmark for good practice, I ask the minister what range of options to pay for the transformation of Wick high school should be considered by Highland Council with the Scottish Futures Trust, whose mission is better-run procurement, in order to ensure early progress towards the urgent renewal of the school?

Keith Brown: First, I congratulate Rob Gibson, Jamie Stone and everyone else who is involved in the campaign for Wick high school.

I refer to my previous answer. The feasibility study, which is continuing, will answer some of the questions, as will the continuing discussions with the Scottish Futures Trust. Ultimately, however, the decision is entirely a matter for Highland Council, which I understand is still at the stage of considering what work needs to be done at the school. For that reason, I am unable to comment further at present.

Stroke Rehabilitation Services

5. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that rehabilitation services for stroke

patients are adequate throughout Scotland. (S3O-8761)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The better heart disease and stroke care action plan has a particular emphasis on all aspects of rehabilitation following stroke. There are some excellent examples of stroke rehabilitation services, including some that use telehealth care. However, as we acknowledge in the action plan, access to specialist stroke rehabilitation outside hospital has been patchy. That is why we have made it clear that community health partnerships need to work with stroke managed clinical networks and rehabilitation co-ordinators to make such services available much more consistently throughout Scotland.

Mary Scanlon: I agree, and I support that. Stroke patients in Highland acknowledge the excellent care and treatment at Raigmore hospital. Unfortunately, however, access to aftercare and rehabilitation is more difficult. In particular, access to physiotherapy, which is known to be hugely beneficial to stroke patients, appears to be limited to an initial number of sessions following discharge. Will the health secretary look into aftercare and rehabilitation services for stroke patients and ensure that adequate and appropriate physiotherapy services are provided?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that NHS Highland will be pleased with Mary Scanlon's comment about Raigmore hospital, which I had the pleasure of visiting earlier this week.

Mary Scanlon makes some valid and legitimate points. I recognise that there is work to be done. Work is continuing to make rehabilitation services for people who suffer stroke much more consistent throughout the country. The action plan that I mentioned requires NHS boards to ensure that early supported discharge and community rehabilitation teams are integrated and easily accessible. As Mary Scanlon will be aware, rehabilitation co-ordinators have been appointed in every NHS board, and specialist stroke rehabilitation services will be included in the redesign of rehabilitation services that the co-ordinators are carrying out. The intention of that work is to identify gaps in provision. That comment applies throughout Scotland, of course, but it is particularly relevant to the areas that Mary Scanlon mentioned.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): What percentage of stroke patients who use rehabilitation services make a partial or full recovery?

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that everybody recognises that the road to recovery following stroke is, in most cases, a long and hard one. Half of the people who survive a stroke will have some

level of impairment as a result of it. Nevertheless, with the right support, some degree of recovery is usually possible for most people. It is thought that up to 80 per cent of people who survive a stroke are amenable to rehabilitation. That statistic and that potential underline Mary Scanlon's point and the importance of ensuring that rehabilitation services are available to people on a consistent basis.

NHS Lanarkshire (Meetings)

6. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of NHS Lanarkshire. (S3O-8784)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I meet all national health service chairs regularly. The most recent meeting was on 23 November. The Minister for Public Health and Sport met NHS Lanarkshire on 20 October when she chaired the board's annual review.

Andy Kerr: I wonder whether, at the next meeting, the minister could discuss the state of our health centre in East Kilbride. I read with great concern our local newspaper, the *East Kilbride News*, which told us that our largest health centre, which caters for more than 50,000 patients, has been branded a safety hazard by staff and the public.

Before we get the usual misinformation about Westminster being a terrible thing, about the pre-budget report and about budgets, I remind the minister that the decision in effect to drop the renewal of the Hunter health centre was taken by the SNP in 2007. It was a decision by the minister and the minister alone. Will she reverse that decision?

I also wonder whether she would care to address the recent report by the Auditor General for Scotland, paragraph 54 of which tells us:

"the retention of three A&E departments in Lanarkshire has affected the level of resource that can be allocated to primary care".

Nicola Sturgeon: Well, well, well. Andy Kerr must be one of the only people in Scotland—if not the only person—who still argues for the closure of the accident and emergency department at Monklands. No wonder Labour is still behind in the polls in Scotland. The Government was right to save the A and E departments at Monklands and Ayr, and the vast majority of people in Scotland back us in that decision.

The crux of the matter is that we saved those A and E departments while ensuring that, in the case of NHS Lanarkshire, it had increased capital budgets in order to invest in primary care services.

Andy Kerr: Read the report.

Nicola Sturgeon: Andy Kerr says, "Read the report." Let me read out some of the primary care developments that are being delivered as we speak by NHS Lanarkshire—Caird house in Hamilton, Coatbridge dental and integrated resource centre, the learning disabilities assessment and treatment centre at Kirklands, and the Carluke health centre. Those are examples of real investment in primary care.

On Andy Kerr's important point about Hunter health centre in East Kilbride, I have seen the report in question and I was concerned to learn of the difficulties that had been experienced there as a result of the heavy rains. I have been assured by the NHS board that the necessary repairs have been made and that it will continue to monitor carefully the situation.

In conclusion, I am proud to be part of a Government that has safeguarded essential services in our hospitals while ensuring that we continue to invest in primary care—something that the previous Administration was unable to do.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Given the cabinet secretary's response, can she tell the people of the Monklands area when they can expect substantial investment in Monklands general hospital to ensure its long-term future, given all the promises that the SNP made before the election?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Elaine Smith for her support for the Government's decision to save the accident and emergency unit at Monklands hospital. She is right to point to the issues around investment in the hospital. We expect an initial agreement in early 2010, which will develop options for what will be complex work with a significant capital value to upgrade the hospital to meet current standards. I am happy to keep Elaine Smith apprised of developments in that regard.

Sustainable Development Commission Annual Review (Transport)

7. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what conclusions it has drawn from the annual review of the Sustainable Development Commission Scotland as it relates to transport. (S3O-8843)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Sustainable development is at the heart of our commitment to sustainable economic growth. We welcome the Sustainable Development Commission's report and its positive assessment of much of the work that we are doing. We will consider carefully all its specific recommendations, including those on transport policy.

Alasdair Morgan: The commission refers to strategies to discourage driving, such as pricing

and fuel taxes. Does the minister agree that in rural areas there will always be a greater proportion of unavoidable vehicle journeys? Is he therefore committed to ensuring that the measures that are adopted to discourage driving in urban areas do not adversely affect rural areas?

Stewart Stevenson: Yes. Much of Scotland is clearly rural in character; indeed, as the area that I represent is in the mainland council area with the highest proportion of people living in a rural setting, I certainly understand the member's point. We also understand the tension between trying to reduce the number of very short journeys that are undertaken in urban settings and appreciating the social and economic necessity of journeys that are undertaken in rural areas.

M8 (Traffic Volume)

8. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S3O-8422 by Stewart Stevenson on 12 November 2009, whether it will provide full details of all available traffic volume projections for the M8 motorway between the south side of the Kingston bridge and Glasgow airport, expressed in proportion to design capacity. (S3O-8779)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We do not hold the information requested as traffic forecasts are calculated on a specific project-by-project basis.

Charlie Gordon: I thank the minister for his answer, although I have to say that I am very disappointed by it. All roads authorities should be monitoring traffic volumes against design capacity now and in the future.

Given that the stretch of road in question has the highest proportion of vehicles carrying manufactured goods for export of any stretch of road in Scotland, will he consider monitoring capacity issues on it—and, indeed, on all Scotland's trunk roads and motorways—and reporting the outcomes to Parliament?

Stewart Stevenson: We carry out very substantial monitoring of the road network. For example, I can tell the chamber that between junctions 23 and 24 on the M8, the afternoon westbound peak is 4,000 vehicles and the eastbound peak is 3,300. As I say, we certainly measure what goes on on our road network, but capacity is a different matter. As engineering knowledge develops, capacity changes. Instead of being able to supply instantaneously an answer for each part of our road network, we tend to consider such matters when we are required to do so.

Orkney Islands Council (Funding)

9. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will address the difference in the funding it provides to Orkney Islands Council when compared with that provided to the other two island councils. (S3O-8810)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): The recent joint review with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities of the local government distribution methodology considered the issues and concluded that the current indicators of relative need were fair and reasonable and should be retained.

Liam McArthur: I thank the minister not only for his answer, but for stepping in at late notice.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth's comment last week that

"there were no genuine anomalies"—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2009; c 21560.]

in the current council funding formula was greeted with incredulity in Orkney. Given the difference in the per head of population funding between Orkney and Shetland—and, more particularly, between Orkney and the Western Isles—the statement made little sense. Will the minister urge the cabinet secretary urgently to look again at this issue, not least in light of the cuts and efficiencies that Orkney Islands Council, like all other councils, is being required to make?

Bruce Crawford: The joint review of local government distribution concluded that the existing needs-based indicators should be retained because they are reasonable and generally fair. I point out that all 32 local authorities were given the opportunity to identify genuine anomalies and that the director of finance of Orkney Islands Council was one of the local authority representatives on the review group. Councils working on a cross-party, cross-Scotland basis have agreed that the current system remains fit for purpose and suitable for all 32 councils.

I also point out that all councils with island communities receive additional provision through the special needs allowance. Under the current settlement, Orkney, for example, receives an additional £5.8 million each year and in 2009-10 and 2010-11 will receive a larger share of core revenue funding than either Shetland or the Western Isles. Finally, I remind Liam McArthur that the present distribution formula is the same one that we inherited from the previous Administration.

Bus Services

10. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it plans in order to safeguard bus services across Scotland. (S3O-8775)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We are taking forward a number of initiatives with local government partners and bus operators to maintain and improve bus services, including quality partnerships, punctuality improvement partnerships and the appointment of a senior bus development adviser.

Patricia Ferguson: Does the minister agree that it is unacceptable that bus routes that provide many communities with their only convenient access to local services such as hospitals are being withdrawn? If he does agree with me, what specific action will his Government take to ensure that that practice does not continue?

Stewart Stevenson: I agree that we have an issue with a number of bus routes, which is one of the reasons why we have appointed the senior bus development adviser to help local councils to discharge their responsibilities in that regard. We are also promoting statutory bus partnerships; I welcome Glasgow City Council's progress on that. We will work with councils across Scotland to ensure that we have the best possible bus services everywhere.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions, but before we come to First Minister's questions, I know that members will want to join me in welcoming to the gallery the Ambassador of Ireland to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Bobby McDonagh, and the Cuban Ambassador, His Excellency René Mujica Cantelar.

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-2072)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland. I also intend to send a Christmas card to every member of the Scottish Parliament, as well as to many other people from across Scottish society.

Iain Gray: On 29 October, I told the First Minister that I had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer suggesting that he should consider accelerating capital for one more year if, and only if, the SNP sorted out the budget by, for example, reinstating the Glasgow airport rail link and the housing budget. Let us not forget that the chancellor has already accelerated £333 million. What percentage of that went directly to creating new jobs?

The First Minister: The accelerated capital spending was part of the recovery programme that generated 5,000 jobs across Scotland.

Iain Gray is quite right. I welcomed his conversion to accelerated capital spending on 29 October. At that stage, we had reason to be confident that the chancellor was going to assist the Scottish economy. After all, it was included in the communiqué for the joint ministerial committee on 16 September, and we had Iain Gray's support on 29 October, only for the chancellor to dump it in December. I suppose that the lesson we should take from that is that if someone is running a successful campaign, for goodness' sake, they should not get Iain Gray's support.

Iain Gray: Of course, the First Minister could not answer the question. Perhaps that is why he could not make the case. However, Nicola Sturgeon gave the game away at the Local Government and Communities Committee. She admitted that only one fifth of the first tranche of accelerated capital—only 20p in every pound—had directly supported construction jobs. Is it not the truth that the First Minister got the money last year and he had not got a clue about how to use it?

The First Minister: There is a certain inflexibility in the way that Iain Gray asks his question. I answered his earlier question by pointing out that we had calculated that 5,000 jobs had been generated by the use of accelerated capital spending. I can do better than that: I can share with members the list of projects that we

earmarked, given the confidence we were entitled to feel that we would get accelerated capital spending this coming year.

We identified 25 transport projects, including the M8 White Cart viaduct, the A9 Cromarty bridge refurbishment and the Glasgow subway modernisation. There were key health service projects such as the Forres health centre and the Airdrie community centre. We had general infrastructure projects such as completing the Scottish exhibition and conference centre and the Dundee waterfront. There was a range of national renewables investments such as the Fife energy manufacturing hall and the Dundee renewables port. There was also investment to build another 2,000 social rented houses in Scotland. That is the cost of a Labour chancellor who has humiliated a Labour leader by not assisting economic recovery.

The reality, of course, is that the United Kingdom is last out of the recession, but first out of the stimulus package.

Iain Gray: Presiding Officer, I will tell you what humiliation is—it is what the First Minister did to Fiona Hyslop last week to save his skin.

In 2007, the First Minister inherited £1.5 billion of reserves from the previous Labour-led Executive. That is all gone. He cancelled the Edinburgh airport rail link, which got him another £1 billion. That is gone. That £2.5 billion, which could have built all those projects that he reeled off, is all gone. What did he do with that money?

The First Minister: Iain Gray's record on capital projects is not particularly auspicious. He forgot to mention the Edinburgh trams project. The people of Edinburgh would have been delighted if £500 million had been available for investment in capital projects in Edinburgh and throughout the country.

Let us deal with the capital acceleration and the total humiliation of the Labour leader in Scotland. The Labour leader was the adviser to Alistair Darling, now the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The capital acceleration was generally regarded as necessary for stimulating the economy and economic recovery. Yesterday, Alistair Darling sabotaged economic recovery in Scotland at a cost of 5,000 jobs, 2,000 homes and capital projects throughout the country. That will hang like an albatross round the neck of the Labour Party in Scotland.

Iain Gray: The First Minister loves to remind me that I worked for Alistair Darling. He really does not have to—I know that he knows, because I used to bump into him when I was down there. That was when he was hiding in Westminster from Holyrood.

The First Minister has more money next year than ever before. The question is: what is he doing

with it? Let us look at his track record. Low Moss prison: delayed. Southern general hospital: delayed. Aberdeen bypass: delayed. Borders railway: delayed. Edinburgh airport rail link: cancelled. Glasgow airport rail link: cancelled. A further £2 billion of projects have been lost because of the Scottish Futures Trust fiasco. How many jobs? Twenty-five thousand Scottish construction jobs have been destroyed. Will the First Minister admit that the real problem is that he could not build his way out of a paper bag, never mind a recession?

The First Minister: The only problem with Iain Gray's analysis is that the Scottish construction industry, although severely hit by Labour's recession, is doing better than the construction industry across the United Kingdom. Yes, I was in Westminster when Iain Gray was a Government adviser—I was opposing the illegal war in Iraq, which Iain Gray and his colleagues supported.

Today, we have the revelation from the Scottish Parliament information centre that the £500 million cut that was thanks to the refusal to give accelerated spending is now an £800 million cut. That is in a paper from SPICe today. Sooner rather than later, the Labour Party will have to face the reality of real-terms public spending cuts in Scotland that are imposed by a Labour chancellor, supported by his adviser in Scotland.

I mentioned the inflexibility of Iain Gray's questions. A document has come into my hands—found in Costa Coffee—which is apparently Iain Gray's briefing for last week's question time and which he followed almost word for word. It was written by Sarah Metcalfe. I am beginning to think that perhaps we should have Sarah Metcalfe in asking the questions and cut out the middle man. Whatever she did, it would be a lot better than the Labour adviser in Scotland.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2073)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: Yesterday, the nightmare of Labour's economic incompetence and the true extent of Labour's debt crisis were laid bare in shocking terms. Every child born in Scotland is now saddled with a Labour debt of £23,000. It just gets worse. Everyone working in Scotland who earns more than £20,000 a year will see their pay packets cut; equally, employers will be hammered by Labour's tax on jobs. Unless it is bingo, boilers or barbecues, Labour cannot be trusted on the economy.

How big will Labour's cut be in our Scottish budget and how deep will it be in our Scottish public services? Is it not time that Labour Treasury ministers appeared before the Scottish Parliament to explain the devolved consequences of the pre-budget report?

The First Minister: I can give Annabel Goldie an exact answer to her question. Today, SPICe published a financial scrutiny unit briefing that gives the exact figure for the change to the Scottish budget since publication of the draft budget for 2009-10: there has been a reduction of £814.4 million. That is the exact figure caused by Labour's spending squeeze in Scotland as a result of the Labour recession in Westminster.

As for the consequences of that figure, Annabel Goldie believes that we should summon Labour ministers before this Parliament. I believe that the entire Labour Party should be summoned before the Scottish people at a general election.

Annabel Goldie: Unusually, I thank the SNP First Minister for his response, although it is with no pleasure that I hear about the SPICe projection of the budget cut. Given the number of people in Scotland who work in our health service, schools and other essential public services, Labour's tax on jobs will rip an estimated £200 million out of Scotland's public sector and a third of that could hit the national health service alone.

Since last April, I have repeatedly challenged the First Minister to confront reality and tell us precisely what he will do. My party has identified hundreds of millions of pounds of savings that could be made and the First Minister has disagreed with every one of our proposals. I say to the First Minister, listen up: Labour has brought us to the brink of bankruptcy; doing nothing is not an option; living in denial is not an option; and saying that all will be well in an independent Scotland is not an option—just look at Ireland. Face reality—come clean with the Scottish people and tell us where the cuts will be made and where the savings will come from.

The First Minister: Given the £10 billion increase in projected oil revenues over the next six years—the total estimated by the chancellor yesterday was £50 billion—I would have thought that Annabel Goldie might cast her eyes across the North Sea to Norway to see what a country can do when it has the ability to mobilise its resources.

Unlike the chancellor until yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth in this Parliament, John Swinney—who is not accountable for the £178 billion of borrowing, because he operates within a balanced budget formula—has already proposed a budget for next year, which makes tough choices. Given Annabel

Goldie's realisation of the extent of the Westminster spending squeeze, I hope that she will get behind that Scottish budget and pass it in the best interests of the Scottish economy and the Scottish people.

I hope that Annabel Goldie, unlike Iain Gray, has more influence over her Westminster colleagues and that she will get behind the claim and argument of this Government—and lo! even of the Calman commission—that the Government should have access to borrowing so that we can mobilise more capital spending and sustain more jobs across Scotland.

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-2074)

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

Tavish Scott: The sum of £11 billion in the chancellor's pre-budget report is marked down as "efficiency savings". It shows the depths of crisis brought upon this country by Labour that there is £1.5 trillion of consumer debt, banks are not regulated properly and public sector spending is based on a property price bubble that Labour claimed would never end.

An Audit Scotland report on NHS boards, which was published this morning, makes sober reading. On efficiency, the report says that it will be difficult for some boards

"to achieve the required level of savings without any negative impact on the services they provide."

Does the First Minister agree with Audit Scotland?

The First Minister: I agree with Audit Scotland when it praises the financial performance of the NHS in Scotland and says that most of the key targets were met. We should congratulate the national health service and its staff throughout Scotland on achieving that.

No one pretends that, given the financial clouds emanating from Westminster, budget decisions will be anything other than extremely difficult. That is why I hope that the Liberal Democrats will get behind John Swinney's financial proposals, which, of course, protect the NHS in Scotland.

Tavish Scott: It would be much easier to get behind those proposals if Mr Salmond would answer the specific question that Audit Scotland put to him this morning.

With tough times in the health service, the priority must surely be for nurses and doctors to be in post and for services to be kept open. However, health boards themselves have released

new figures under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, which show that more than 2,100 people in the Scottish health service get paid more than £100,000 per year—they make a total of more than £300 million every year, £30 million of which is in bonuses. Will the First Minister guarantee that those very well-paid people—not the nurses, carers and cleaners, who earn a fraction of that money—will shoulder the burden? Would that not be a fair way to protect front-line services?

The First Minister: To protect workers in the health service we had better not follow the proposals from the Liberal Democrats in London, which, of course, would hit the pay of key workers across the national health service.

Let us look at the Audit Scotland report, which found that the national health service in Scotland has a good record on efficiency savings. It exceeded its target last year and achieved savings of £300 million against a target of £215 million. The big difference in terms of the efficiency targets of this Government, whether in the national health service or across the public services, is that every single penny of those efficiency savings achieved by the national health service is reinvested in front-line care in Scotland. That is the key difference and that is why we should have the support of Tavish Scott.

Pre-budget Report

4. Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what impact the pre-budget report will have on Scotland. (S3F-2093)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As we have heard—there seems to be a general majority throughout the chamber on this—the pre-budget report is deeply damaging for Scotland, with the Scottish departmental expenditure limit budget set to fall by 1.6 per cent in real terms next year.

The weight of opinion among economists and the International Monetary Fund is that it is still too early for Governments to withdraw their support for the economy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledged that yesterday. Yet, despite £50 billion in North Sea revenue flowing to the United Kingdom Exchequer over the next six years, the UK is the only developed economy that has entirely withdrawn its fiscal stimulus package.

By ignoring the sustained requests to bring forward further capital spending, as we have heard—the Labour Party will have to get used to that—the PBR will cost 5,000 jobs across Scotland.

Combined with the £500 million cuts—we now know that the figure is £800 million, thanks to this morning's SPICe briefing—that the chancellor has already imposed on our budget, the PBR puts in

jeopardy the progress that has been made in economic recovery and threatens to undermine the fragile signs of recovery across the Scottish economy. Sooner rather than later, the Labour Party, collectively and individually, will have to take responsibility for the looming crisis in the Scottish economy and the failure to support recovery.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I am not sure that we need one, but I call Linda Fabiani to ask her supplementary question.

Linda Fabiani: As the First Minister said, North Sea oil revenues are projected to reach up to £50 billion from this year to 2014. Does he agree that the £9.5 billion increase in that projection strengthens the case for capital acceleration, as called for by the Government and the Opposition in this Parliament? Does he agree that the chancellor's intransigence and Scottish Labour's ineffectiveness is indeed holding back Scotland's economic recovery?

The First Minister: It is holding back economic recovery. There is an interesting statistic relating to Linda Fabiani's question. At the same time that the chancellor uprated by £10 billion his estimates on oil revenues over the next five years, he downrated the capital support required for the financial sector to £10 billion. In other words, the £10 billion of capital support for the financial sector is more than compensated for by the increase in—not the total of—oil-generated revenues. That is exactly why, as I said to Annabel Goldie, more and more people in Scotland will cast their eyes across the North Sea to what the Norwegian economy is doing with the capital asset that is securing prosperity for future generations of people in Norway.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): The Treasury has been unable—or, more likely, unwilling—to publish details of spending for Scotland beyond 2010-11. However, it is helpful that pages 108 to 111 of the pre-budget report spell out how, if Labour won the election, it would implement £12 billion of cuts by 2012-13. The cuts range from £118 million from concessionary fares schemes to £500 million from the NHS. Given that the Treasury cannot spell out the Barnett consequential for the Scottish Government, will the Scottish Government ensure that the figures are calculated and made available to inform members before we debate the pre-budget report next week?

The First Minister: There should be the maximum information to allow members who attend the debate to see the consequences. As Derek Brownlee well knows, John McLaren and other economists in Scotland have projected the likely fiscal framework, which the chancellor refuses to reveal. When I brought those forecasts

to the chamber on 10 September, Andy Kerr described them as “fictional forecasts”. I see him nod—he still believes that the forecasts are fictional. If they are so fictional, why is the chancellor so unwilling to spell out the figures?

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): The First Minister is aware that yesterday’s pre-budget report was hugely disappointing for Dundee’s computer games sector. The head of Dundee’s largest games company described it as a “missed opportunity” to bolster the industry and create hundreds of jobs. Does the First Minister agree that the report was a missed opportunity and that the lack of a level playing field with the likes of France and Canada will hamper growth and could threaten jobs in an industry that is important in Scotland and Dundee? Does—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

Joe FitzPatrick: Does the First Minister agree that the pre-budget report is another example of why it is increasingly important that we complete the Parliament’s powers?

The First Minister: I agree with Joe FitzPatrick.

Members: Ah.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Well, it is disappointing that the chancellor did not listen to the games industry, given that “Digital Britain”—which, if we remember, the United Kingdom Government commissioned—says that providing tax relief for that industry is important. We will continue to make the case to the chancellor until he recognises the problem. We will also continue to support our world-class games industry. That support includes Monday’s announcement of £2.4 million from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and the European regional development fund, which was good news.

One aspect of the pre-budget report is that changes to research and development rules to remove the intellectual property ownership requirement for small and medium-sized enterprises mean that it should be easier for games companies to claim tax credits on their development spend. However, it is disappointing that, although the requirement to support this vital industry was identified in “Digital Britain”, the chancellor did not require the tax changes to be made to ensure that the industry flourishes and succeeds.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

5. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government has made toward its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 42 per cent by 2020. (S3F-2079)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I thank Cathy Peattie for her question, which comes at a pertinent time. I acknowledge her presence at the event at the Falkirk wheel earlier this week.

The latest figures on greenhouse gas emissions, which were published on 8 September, show that emissions in 2007 were 19.2 per cent below our baseline. As the member knows, the Scottish Government has since 2007 made significant progress on meeting the challenges and opportunities that climate change poses, not least with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which is the most ambitious climate change legislation in the world and which the Parliament passed unanimously, with the strong support of business and civic society. The implementation of that is set out in detail in the climate change delivery plan.

Scotland’s leadership on climate change has been noted throughout the world and sends a powerful message to Copenhagen. Scottish ministers will relay that message in person.

Cathy Peattie: What progress has the Scottish Government made on implementing the public duty? When will it produce a public engagement strategy and offer council tax reductions?

The First Minister: Our public engagement strategy is encapsulated in the work of the delivery plan and of the 2020 delivery group. I know that Cathy Peattie welcomes them—I saw her nodding vigorously at the event in Falkirk earlier this week.

The Parliament should take enormous pride in the 2009 act and it is clear that we are making the most rapid progress in the world on implementation.

Although the Scottish ministers will carry that message to Copenhagen, I think that most people know full well in their heart of hearts that it would have been better if they could have done that as a full part of a delegation at the intergovernmental meeting. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the United Kingdom Government was not prepared to accede to that simple request. Nonetheless, the 2009 act, which is world leading, and the implementation, which is world leading, will stand Scotland well as an exemplar for the rest of humanity of what we can achieve to fight climate change.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I think that everyone acknowledges that setting targets is the easy bit—taking the action will be far more challenging. Is the First Minister aware of the UK Committee on Climate Change’s report, “Meeting the UK aviation target: options for reducing emissions to 2050”, which was published this week? The report makes it very clear that unrestricted aviation growth will make our climate change targets physically unreachable. What

proposals does the Scottish Government intend to make to restrict aviation growth?

The First Minister: As Patrick Harvie well knows, because he campaigned successfully on the issue during the passage of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, aviation is included in the Scottish Government and Parliament's targets. In other words, unlike the position elsewhere, emissions from aviation are part of the targets that we are required to meet. That is a significant difference from legislation in other Parliaments, and something else of which we should be proud.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Given that the Scottish Government proposed an emissions reduction target of 34 per cent when it introduced the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill but the Parliament adopted a 42 per cent target, how does the First Minister intend to meet the gap with new initiatives? Has he launched new initiatives in the past six months?

The First Minister: I launched them earlier this week—I have just referred to the 2020 delivery group, which was launched in Falkirk.

I know that Sarah Boyack is a strong supporter of renewable energy and a considerable sceptic on nuclear energy, so I am disappointed that she did not acknowledge that since the Government took office it has consented to 25 major renewable energy projects in Scotland, which is a dramatic advance on anything that had gone before. In an atmosphere in which the entire Parliament can take pride in the legislation that we have passed, for goodness' sake let us project Scotland as being unified on the issue. We might disagree about other things, but on our climate change objectives and our campaign for implementation, all members of the Parliament can take legitimate pride in what we are doing.

Literacy Commission

6. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government plans to implement all of the recommendations of the literacy commission. (S3F-2083)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is committed to improving literacy for everyone in Scotland. The new curriculum—curriculum for excellence—has literacy at its heart and, for the first time, we are introducing specific qualifications in literacy and numeracy in secondary school.

I welcome the literacy commission's constructive contribution. The new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will consider the commission's recommendations in detail and he will respond to every one of them.

Margaret Smith: I am sure that the First Minister shares my concern at the commission's suggestion that almost a million Scots do not have basic literacy skills. The report highlighted that socioeconomic problems are the main underlying cause of poor basic literacy and that programmes are needed to address those problems. What plans does the Government have to set up pilot schemes to address socioeconomic issues, as was recommended in the report? Will the First Minister give the Parliament a timeframe for urgent action by the cabinet secretary on that crucial issue?

The First Minister: I think the member will find that the cabinet secretary has exactly those matters in mind. The correlation that was identified between illiteracy and areas of disadvantage in Scotland was one of the strongest aspects of the report.

As the commission noted, the examples and international criteria that we are using to evaluate Scottish performance are based on studies that took place in 2006 and 2007. Although studies show a slippage in Scottish performance in relative terms from 2003, when the previous studies were done, a number of studies of the position in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries show that the Scottish position is still above average. I say that not because there should be the slightest complacency about the figures, but because if we are to attack the problem of illiteracy and ensure that numeracy is the entitlement of every Scottish child we should not start from a position in which we berate the achievements of our children and teachers throughout Scotland. We should start without any complacency at all, recognise the improvement that requires to be made and address the issues together, as I am certain the new cabinet secretary is prepared to do.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): T-h-e c-a-t s-a-t. Will the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning reintroduce synthetic phonics into the teaching of reading? He will find that it is much easier to get people to read then.

The First Minister: The new cabinet secretary, who has always been a keen supporter and admirer of Margo MacDonald, says that it is in place across Scottish education at present. He has also indicated to me that he is prepared to meet her on the issue to inform her of the developments that are taking place and consider her ideas for new developments that could improve the position further.

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Rural Affairs and the Environment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Flood Prevention

2. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will reinstate a specific fund for flood prevention work. (S3O-8771)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Substantial funding for flood prevention is already included within the local government financial settlement. Removing ring fencing has given councils greater flexibility in how they use their resources and has reduced bureaucracy. We currently have no plans to reverse that and, of course, any changes would have to be agreed by the Scottish Government in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Malcolm Chisholm: Does the cabinet secretary understand the frustration and anger of my constituents in Bonnington and Stockbridge at the further delays to the Water of Leith flood prevention scheme because of the failure of the Scottish Government to meet the original commitment to fund 80 per cent of the work? In view of the increasing flooding that we are seeing because of climate change, is it not time to reconsider his decision on a specific fund? Will he give this area of work the priority it requires, particularly in a week in which we all are thinking about climate change?

Richard Lochhead: I know that the member takes a close interest in the issue on behalf of his constituents who are, of course, very concerned about the impact of flooding on their lives and properties. I fully understand that but—I am sure that he will forgive me for saying this—it is disingenuous of him to lay the blame at the door of the Scottish Government.

Funding is made available through the spending reviews in relation to proposals that local authorities bring forward in the first place. On 13 August, the Minister for Environment wrote to the local council. She explained that we had taken into account the needs of Edinburgh schemes in distributing resources for 2008 to 2010 and she confirmed that, with the agreement of COSLA, we will continue to take into account the contractual

commitments for the Water of Leith in the decisions that will be taken later this year on resources for 2010-11 and, crucially, in next year's spending review for the years up to 2014.

I hope that the member can take some comfort that the spending settlements continue to take into account the needs of his constituents and other people in Edinburgh. It is simply disingenuous of him to lay the blame for any delay at the door of the Scottish Government.

Flooding (Inverclyde)

3. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to ensure effective action is taken to address the recurring flooding problems in the Inverclyde area. (S3O-8793)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 provides the framework within which Inverclyde Council, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Water, working together, will have duties to assess, map and act to reduce flood risk in Inverclyde. Most of the act came into effect on 26 November, and we are working to bring the remainder into effect as quickly as we can over the coming year.

Duncan McNeil: I am confident that the cabinet secretary will want to congratulate Inverclyde Council, which is already hard at work with partners in its flood management action group. In his previous answer, and in correspondence to members, the cabinet secretary referred to the £42 million capital allocation for flood prevention measures. Inverclyde Council's conservative estimate is that it requires £10 million—a figure that is 10 times what it might expect as its share of the fund. Does the cabinet secretary agree that special recognition—which SEPA recognises—is required to address the significant problems of coastal communities, such as those in my constituency of Inverclyde, if we are to improve the situation for home owners and businesses?

Richard Lochhead: I agree with the member when he says that as a nation we have to take seriously the threat of flooding in our coastal communities, in particular, and in all Scottish communities. I am pleased that he referred to the £42 million that the Scottish Government has made available to take account of flooding needs in local authority areas. Of course, the figure is many times the annual average spend of the previous Administration on flood schemes between 1999 and 2007. It is a recognition that the current Scottish Government is taking the issue a lot more seriously and that investment is taking place across Scotland to address the issues.

I know that the member takes seriously matters in his constituency. I join him in congratulating Inverclyde Council on the hard work that it has undertaken on some of the problems that we have seen again in those local communities. At the invitation of Stuart McMillan MSP, the Minister for Environment recently visited the area and met some local agencies and others to discuss the problems that have occurred there.

I welcome the work that Inverclyde Council has undertaken. As a country and a Government, we must take seriously the implications of the proposals that come forward from our communities in the years ahead.

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his response to Duncan McNeil's question. I am sure that he will agree that Inverclyde's response until now has been nothing short of tardy, to say the least. I welcome the fact that the council has eventually decided to do some work on the issue. I offer the cabinet secretary the chance to come down to Inverclyde; I have made the same offer to Roseanna Cunningham in the past. Will he take into account fully the important issues affecting Inverclyde when considering the distribution of further moneys in the future?

Richard Lochhead: I thank the member for his comments. He is right to highlight the fact that the onus is on local authorities such as Inverclyde Council to put together proposals for flood alleviation schemes and other measures in their communities. The Scottish Government can react to demand for resources or other assistance only once it has received proposals from Inverclyde Council or other authorities in Scotland. It is welcome that, at long last, Inverclyde Council is putting together some recommendations that will help to protect the safety of local residents.

Flood Prevention (South of Scotland)

4. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what flood prevention measures it is taking in conjunction with agencies across the South of Scotland that will stop annual damage to businesses and homes in the region. (S3O-8809)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): As I mentioned in response to previous questions, we will bring part 4 of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 into effect as quickly as we can over the coming years. That will allow a modernised, sustainable approach to flood management, with streamlined decision making for local authority schemes. Most of the 2009 act came into effect on 26 November. We will ensure that there is a portfolio of responses, including rural land management, to manage flood risk.

Jim Hume: Recent flooding in the South of Scotland region has been devastating, and flooding is a continuing problem in Hawick and Dumfries. I met NFU Scotland representatives and the voluntary Hawick flood group recently, before and after the November floods. Both organisations stated that maintenance of rivers by removal of gravel and dislodged trees, as used to happen, would lessen flood risk and danger to life, and that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is preventing that from happening. Will the cabinet secretary meet stakeholders, including the local NFU and Hawick flood group, to examine the issue as a matter of urgency?

Richard Lochhead: I echo the member's comments about the devastation in the South of Scotland that has been caused by recent flooding, in particular. He was right to highlight the need for all agencies in Scotland to work together efficiently to carry out some of the remedial work that is necessary to restore damaged land, especially farmers' fields, which have in many instances been flooded.

It is necessary to inform the Scottish Environment Protection Agency of any intended works. If a situation is considered an emergency, licences can be applied for retrospectively, once the work has been undertaken. I am keen to hear about any issues that may be causing difficulties locally. I will be more than happy to meet local stakeholders, including the farmers and others involved, if the member thinks that that would be helpful.

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I concur with Jim Hume's views on gravel removal, as gravel is also a problem in the River Nith and the River Esk. Dumfries and Galloway Council recently wrote to the Minister for Environment to request a meeting to discuss the removal of gravel. That request was refused. Will the cabinet secretary revisit the decision? Will he or the Minister for Environment meet Dumfries and Galloway Council to discuss the problem of gravel in the River Nith? As he knows, the Whitesands floods regularly, and many businesses are unable to get insurance because of that. Sadly, during the November floods many of them lost their livelihoods.

Richard Lochhead: I indicated to Jim Hume that, if the issue that he raises is persistent and continuing—Elaine Murray appears to be talking about the same issue—we should meet SEPA and others with an interest to see what can be done. However, it is important to put on the record that I am assured that SEPA treats such issues with the utmost seriousness and works as closely as it can with local bodies to address them and to ensure that bureaucracy and licensing regimes do not get in the way of urgent action to protect property and the environment. I will look into the issue, as I

assured Jim Hume, and keep Elaine Murray up to date.

Farmers Markets (West of Scotland)

5. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recent announcement of £200,000 funding for farmers markets, what support will be provided to farmers markets in the West of Scotland region. (S3O-8842)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Farmers markets and producers from across the whole of Scotland will have the opportunity to take advantage of the additional support, guidance and advice that will be made available through this exciting collaborative initiative. The funding will go to the Scottish farmers markets development partnership, which will help local producers to develop markets for their products and will encourage growth of the farmers market sector throughout Scotland.

Stuart McMillan: I fully welcome the announcement. Over the past few months I have visited farmers markets in Kirkintilloch and Greenock, and I have learned a lot about their contribution to communities and economies. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that, when any funding is distributed, areas that might not necessarily be viewed as traditional farming communities, such as Greenock and Kirkintilloch, are fully considered?

Richard Lochhead: I should mention that the funding will go towards creating a number of posts that will help to further the cause of farmers markets, I hope in all parts of Scotland. I recommend that the member contact the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets and discuss with its members their plans for his constituency.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer and a stallholder at farmers markets. Does the cabinet secretary have views on how farmers markets should develop from the current total of 80 or so in Scotland? Does he agree that one way forward might be to develop covered markets in town and city centres throughout Scotland, which could further promote high-quality local food production and consumption?

Richard Lochhead: We all recognise John Scott's long track record of supporting farmers markets, and he rightly highlights their benefits. Producers can deal directly with consumers, and farmers markets are great for the town and village centres where they take place.

I see farmers markets as having a role in food policy, in promoting the wellbeing of primary producers and in giving local communities access to good-quality local food, as the member

suggests. He also suggests an innovative way forward for farmers markets. I am happy to leave that sort of decision in the hands of farmers and their representatives, but we would be very supportive of anything that expanded the farmers market movement in Scotland.

Crofting

6. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it sees as the priorities for the Crofters Commission in the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill. (S3O-8822)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Government's priority for the Crofters Commission, as set out in the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, which was published this morning, is to regulate crofting and to contribute fully to sustaining crofting in our most remote and fragile areas. The Government listened carefully to all consultees on the draft bill. Priorities must include directly addressing absenteeism and the neglect of crofts, as well as ensuring that land is retained in crofting tenure so that economic, social and environmental benefits continue to be delivered.

Alasdair Allan: Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the bill, which was published today, represents a significant improvement on the draft bill? Will he comment on that with particular reference to the fact that provisions on three areas—area committees, standard securities and residency requirements—have been dropped from the bill? Will he undertake to engage further with crofters on the bill, which is a much more rational way forward?

Richard Lochhead: I thank the member for his comments. Many stakeholders have issued positive statements today in response to the bill. The member has rightly alluded to the fact that we are a listening Government—we have listened to members from all parties represented in the chamber and, more importantly, to people in the crofting communities.

A number of contentious issues were contained in the original proposals, and they have been removed. As the member said, they are those relating to area committees, standard securities and occupancy requirements.

We will continue to listen to Scotland's crofting communities over the next few weeks and months as the bill moves through the parliamentary process. It is important to do that. The issues are sometimes challenging, because of the diverse nature of Scotland's crofting counties from Sutherland to the islands—including the Western Isles, the member's constituency. It is important that we continue to listen carefully to what our crofting communities say.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

The minister says that he listened to crofting counties, but the one thing missing from the bill is the reinstatement of the croft housing loan scheme. Will he commit to that scheme, having heard the unanimous voice of crofters all over the Highlands and Islands?

Richard Lochhead: As I said in answer to the previous question, we will continue to listen closely to our crofting communities. In recent months, members on the Labour benches have said that some of the funding is under threat, but that has proved not to be the case and many of the schemes continue in place. The less scaremongering there is, the more rational a debate we can have in the coming weeks and months on the future of crofting in Scotland.

We will continue to listen carefully to the views of our crofting communities.

Land Purchase (Highlands and Islands)

7. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the benefits have been of land purchase by communities in the Highlands and Islands. (S3O-8800)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Community buyouts of land have brought a number of benefits to communities in the Highlands and Islands. They include empowering people and communities in rural areas to take responsibility for their own future. Community empowerment promotes confidence, participation and cohesion, and has promoted the long-term sustainability of communities.

New houses have been built and house improvements undertaken. There has been improved access to amenities and services, and the retention and enhancement of vital community assets such as filling stations, post offices and shops. Population decline has been stemmed and the average age of community members has been reduced—patterns that go against the demographic trends for other remote areas in Scotland.

Peter Peacock: I take this rare opportunity to agree wholly with what the minister just said. Land purchase in the Highlands and Islands is one of the most significant and important developments in recent centuries. The prospect of more purchases holds out hope for many communities into the future.

The minister is probably aware that there has been recent commentary in the Highlands and Islands that the progress in the early part of this decade that followed the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has stalled somewhat in the past couple

of years. Part of the reason for that is the availability of funding, but another part is how the 2003 act is working. Does the minister share my view and that of my colleagues who introduced the bill that it is now time to review the practical experience of the working of the act and to make whatever changes are necessary to ease and encourage more community land purchases in the future?

Richard Lochhead: I am pleased that the member agrees on the success of the community land buyouts, which received a lot of support, albeit not cross-party support, in the Parliament when the legislation was made a few years ago.

The member mentioned funding and revising the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The act is relatively new in the scheme of things, and it is important that we give it time to bed in properly and reflect on its successes in the past few years. We will continue to do that. We have not had evidence of gross failure of any aspects of the act, although we monitor it closely and will take any required action in due course.

The member is aware that the Scottish land fund was closed in 2006 and replaced by the growing community assets fund, which was run by the Big Lottery Fund. The Big Lottery Fund is now taking forward the investing in communities portfolio, which will contain a new fund in June 2010 to help deliver funds to communities for the purposes given. Things are moving forward. I am convinced that the success of past years will continue as time goes on. We are listening closely to the views of the member, of Highland Council and of others who are expressing their views on the whole agenda. We will respond positively.

Climate Challenge Fund

8. Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the next round of successful applicants to the climate challenge fund will be announced. (S3O-8836)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): An announcement of the successful applicants to round six of the climate challenge fund was made just a few days ago on 3 December 2009, with 41 communities receiving £3.6 million of funding support.

Tricia Marwick: The minister is aware that Tullis Russell Papermakers in my constituency received almost £500,000 following a previous round of applications to the climate challenge fund. It will allow the company to construct its new eco-interpretation centre, which will run alongside its biomass project, which will save 250,000 tonnes of carbon emissions from its plant.

Everybody recognises how valuable the climate challenge fund is, but what steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that as many organisations as possible know about the fund to ensure that they too can make a positive and sustainable contribution to their communities?

Richard Lochhead: I join the member in paying tribute to the project in her constituency to which she referred. Given that, as we speak, the world leaders are meeting in Copenhagen to discuss the future of the planet and how we can tackle climate change, it is absolutely fantastic and very encouraging to see so many communities throughout Scotland coming forward at grass-roots level with their own projects, ideas and innovations to reduce their carbon footprint and show leadership to the rest of the world, just as this Parliament is doing through the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

The member referred to the need to advertise the scheme. Of course, £27 million was made available over three years. So far, £15.6 million of that has been awarded to 198 communities, and 700 organisations or communities have expressed interest in it. More and more communities throughout Scotland are being attracted to the scheme and are finding out about it. In Fife alone, more than £2 million has been allocated to 16 projects. The member is right that we have to keep broadcasting how successful and valuable the climate change fund is and how it will enable communities the length and breadth of Scotland, in our all constituencies, to reduce their carbon footprint and help to tackle climate change.

Justice and Law Officers

Antisocial Behaviour (Scottish Borders)

1. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is helping to tackle antisocial behaviour in the Scottish Borders. (S3O-08759)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government is committed to tackling antisocial behaviour through our antisocial behaviour framework, "Promoting Positive Outcomes". On Tuesday this week, I visited the Scottish Borders to see how its community safety agencies are putting that framework into practice using central funding, including safer streets funding to tackle alcohol-related violence and disorder and cashback for communities to provide activities for young people.

I am sure that the member will join me in congratulating Scottish Borders Council, Lothian and Borders Police and local partners on their continued efforts to make communities in the Scottish Borders safer and stronger.

John Lamont: The minister will be aware of the negative effect that antisocial behaviour can have on a community. Having visited the Borders this week, he will also be aware of the tremendous work undertaken by the various agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour and, in particular, to ensure that those guilty of destructive behaviour are held to account, through antisocial behaviour orders or other disposals.

Does the minister agree that by scrapping sentences of six months or less, the Scottish Government will be removing from the courts a vital tool in tackling those who persistently commit antisocial behaviour and taking away the possibility of respite for those who have to live with that behaviour day in, day out?

Fergus Ewing: I certainly agree with the member that much good work is being done in the Scottish Borders. I pay tribute to Councillor Alex Nicol, the deputy leader and chair of the community safety partnership, along with Chief Superintendent Graham Sinclair, Chief Inspector Paula Clark, and Douglas Scott, the team leader for tackling antisocial behaviour. The key to the success that they are having is that they work together in an integrated fashion. The practitioners use ASBOs, as they are able to choose to do, but they and others acknowledge that, although ASBOs provide temporary respite, they do not tackle the root causes of behaviour.

The member made a point about six-month sentences. Someone who, on conviction, is sentenced to six months in jail, spends an average period in jail post-conviction of less than one month. I am afraid that I do not regard that as an effective disposal. I entirely disagree with the position that the member has taken, for the reasons that we gave during the recent parliamentary debate on this topic.

Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi (Representations)

2. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent representations the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has received regarding the release of Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi. (S3O-08776)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I have received a variety of representations over recent months regarding the release of Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi. I was particularly delighted to hear of the support from Nelson Mandela and I personally met Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, who expressed his agreement with my decision.

George Foulkes: Will the cabinet secretary update the Parliament on the current state of Mr al-Megrahi's health?

Kenny MacAskill: No, I am not able to do that, because those reports remain with the council that is charged with dealing with his release. They will be forwarded in due course and, as before, we will make them available. Lord Foulkes will know that, if we have been given the opportunity to do so, we have made everything available on the internet. The latest report has not been received, but, as previously, we will make matters fully available.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the matter has been the subject of intense public controversy. Given that, does he not agree that many might find it surprising that he has not been much more proactive in finding out precisely what the position is, especially bearing it in mind that the prognosis upon which the cabinet secretary based his decision—in part at any rate—was one of a life expectancy of three months and that that prognosis was given about five months ago?

Kenny MacAskill: I made it clear when I made the statements to the Parliament and at St Andrew's house that the criteria for compassionate release had been met in respect of the prognosis of a life expectancy of three months in the information provided by the director of health and social care at the Scottish Prison Service. I indicated that, although that was his prognosis, these matters are not an exact science and that Mr al-Megrahi might live longer or die sooner. The position remains that the timing of someone's death is a matter of when their body fails, an accident befalls them or their maker calls them. That is, correctly, not within the domain of the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. Mr al-Megrahi will die when one of those criteria is met.

Domestic Violence

3. Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government in what proportion of domestic violence crimes alcohol is believed to be a contributing factor. (S3O-08841)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government recognises that alcohol does not cause domestic abuse. However, we acknowledge that it is a contributing factor to the frequency and severity of abuse a victim will experience. In the 2007 evaluation of the pilot domestic abuse court in Glasgow, police identified that in 43 per cent of cases

"the alleged offender had consumed enough alcohol to merit mention."

The findings from the partner abuse section of the Scottish crime and justice survey 2006 also highlight the link between domestic abuse and alcohol misuse. More than 63 per cent of men and women who had experienced force said that the

perpetrator had been drinking alcohol on at least one occasion.

We are clear that tough action on Scotland's drink culture will not in itself end domestic abuse, but it will greatly contribute to decreasing the risk of harm to many thousands of victims and children affected by the issue.

Christina McKelvie: According to Scottish Women's Aid, research has shown that around a third of all reported domestic abuse incidents involve alcohol, which would account for approximately 18,000 recorded incidents in Scotland last year. Although it would be wrong to imply that there is a straightforward causal link between alcohol and domestic violence, research shows that there is a complex relationship between them, with alcohol functioning variously as an intensifier, an excuse and a method of exerting control when it figures in domestic violence incidents. Does the cabinet secretary agree that people on the receiving end of the worst excesses of Scotland's relationship with alcohol include many victims of domestic violence? Can he confirm that the Scottish Government will consider radical action to address that destructive relationship?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. As I indicated in my answer to Ms McKelvie's first question, there is a clear correlation. As night follows day we have a culture in Scotland that my predecessor, Cathy Jamieson, referred to as a cocktail of bevvie and acts of violence. That has to be tackled. The Scottish Government has made it clear that there is a clear link between alcohol abuse and offending. That offending clearly penetrates into the home, damaging women in particular but also scarring children for years to come. It is for others in the chamber, given the opportunity to take tough action on the root accelerant that fuels so much domestic violence, to support this Government in taking action to change Scotland's unacceptable relationship with alcohol and to support minimum pricing.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): In the cabinet secretary's response to Christina McKelvie's first question, he mentioned the pilot domestic abuse court in Glasgow. Organisations that deal with the victims of domestic abuse support that court, which has been able to deal with cases effectively and swiftly. Does the Government have any intention of continuing the pilot in Glasgow and rolling it out to other areas?

Kenny MacAskill: These matters are work in progress. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to see the court in operation, to meet Sheriff Raeburn and those involved in the care of women victims and to meet the police officers. As Ms Craigie will be aware, the court does not cover every police

division in Glasgow, because of its size and the volume of cases, and clearly the matter is dealt with in different ways. In the recent debate in the Parliament, we fully accepted the convener of the Justice Committee's logic, albeit that he was wearing his political hat. We have to progress the matter.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. I was a practitioner for 20 years in the courts of Scotland and I have been in courts in places such as Lochmaddy, Stonehaven and Dingwall, which clearly cannot deal with a specialist domestic abuse court—that is not to say that there is no domestic abuse in the Western Isles, the north of Scotland and elsewhere. We must adopt the approach that fits and works. The action that has been taken in Glasgow has been remarkably successful. I give the commitment that I have given to Mr Aitken: we will do what is appropriate for each jurisdiction in Scotland.

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing)

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact it considers that there will be on the incidence of violent crime and disorder if minimum pricing of alcohol is introduced. (S3O-08830)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Minimum pricing is one of the most effective ways of reducing alcohol misuse and harm and a broad consensus of support for the approach is building, particularly among people who see the effects of alcohol misuse every day.

The University of Sheffield alcohol policy model showed clearly that the policy would bring substantial benefits in the context of health, crime and employment harms. The estimated reduction in crime includes violent crime, criminal damage and acquisitive crime. For illustrative purposes, I point out that it is estimated that a 40p minimum price, combined with a discount ban, would result in 3,200 fewer criminal offences each year, including 850 fewer violent crimes. The associated total financial value of harm reduction is estimated to be £4.7 million.

I hope that all members will carefully consider the evidence and research during the passage of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the evidence for minimum pricing is so overwhelming that if the approach does not become law there will be more violence and disorder, more people will be arrested and hospitalised and there will be more distress for families and communities than would otherwise be the case? There is a proven link between price and consumption. Does he therefore agree that the responsible and sensible way forward is for all

members to support minimum pricing, which is an important law and order and public health measure?

Kenny MacAskill: I absolutely agree. As I said in response to Christina McKelvie, it is unfortunate that, for a far-too-significant section of Scottish society, when alcohol abuse takes place, violence follows. We must break the culture of bevvvy and blade or bevy and batter the wife, which means that we must tackle alcohol abuse. A fundamental aspect of that is consideration of how alcohol can be not just promoted and consumed responsibly but priced responsibly.

Instead of giving us vacuous words about talking tough on crime, some members should think about taking action on the root cause of much crime, which is that far too much alcohol is available at pocket-money prices to fuel youth disorder, whether in the Borders or elsewhere.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary acknowledges a link between price of alcohol and consumption. Does he also acknowledge concerns that minimum pricing could lead to an increase in the illicit and unregulated sale of cheap alcohol that has been purchased across the border?

Does the cabinet secretary accept the link between crime and the consumption of popular caffeinated alcoholic products, which would not be affected by minimum pricing? The link has been identified by Bill McKinlay and others.

Kenny MacAskill: I heard similar arguments from the voice of WalMart when I was visiting Asda at the Jewel.

People have always travelled to buy alcohol—whether to Calais or elsewhere. If minimum pricing were to be introduced in Scotland, some people might seek to do that—albeit at great cost, given the huge cost of fuel in this country as a consequence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's levy.

Let us be clear. South of the border, the chief medical officer supports minimum pricing. The solution in Scotland is not simply to repeat the vacuous and mealy-mouthed words of the supermarket industry but to take action to protect our communities from low-level antisocial behaviour and to stop the serious violent incidents that are occurring in people's homes and on the streets because of the availability of cheap drink. We have to tackle the root cause, and that means bringing in minimum pricing.

Scottish Crime Recording Standard

5. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what is being done to monitor the implementation of the Scottish crime

recording standard across police forces to ensure a more victim-orientated approach in crime recording standards. (S3O-08757)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Since its introduction in April 2004, the Scottish crime recording standard has helped to provide a more uniform and victim-orientated approach to crime recording standards across Scotland. Ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with the SCRS lies with chief constables and is discharged by crime registrars in Scottish police forces. The development of the SCRS was reviewed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland in February 2008 and the recommendations from that report are being taken forward by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, in liaison with the Scottish Government.

John Wilson: What impact has the introduction of the Scottish crime recording standard had on the recorded incidence of domestic violence and, in particular, the statistics recorded on male victims of domestic violence?

Kenny MacAskill: There is greater recording, which is to be welcomed. That is why Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary seeks to ensure that the good practice that operates in some jurisdictions is rolled out. It is clear and is accepted that domestic violence is perpetrated against males, but we must always take cognisance of the fact that it is clear that domestic violence and violence against partners is almost invariably—90 per cent and more—perpetrated by men against women. That is not to downplay the incidence of domestic violence against men or the undoubted trauma for the individuals, but we would do well to remember that it is primarily perpetrated by men against women.

Environmental Justice

6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the cost of court action acts as a barrier to members of the public seeking environmental justice. (S3O-08763)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): No. Individuals who seek to use the courts to protect their rights have access to legal aid where appropriate, and this Government has made financial eligibility for legal aid significantly more generous. Nevertheless, we have invited the Court of Session Rules Council to consider whether there would be any merit in further provision in rules of court regarding protective costs orders to control the level of exposure to costs in appropriate cases.

Patrick Harvie: For many members of the public who suffer from, or are at risk of,

environmental damage, the thought of going to court can be not only emotionally daunting, but financially terrifying. Cases can run into tens of thousands of pounds, and cash-strapped communities are often up against well-resourced business interests. I ask the minister to go further than simply saying that he has written on the issue of protective costs orders: does the Government accept the principle that such orders should be granted in environmental public access cases?

Fergus Ewing: Patrick Harvie mentions the anxiety that people who pursue environmental matters may feel about going to court. I point out to him that many individuals who raise other matters may have exactly the same anxieties. I assume that he is not suggesting that, in contrast to the position of all other litigants, there should be a special rule to indemnify actions that relate to the environment from any possible liability that would fall from losing the action.

Mr Harvie will be aware that Lord Gill covered protective costs orders in chapter 12 of the "Report of the Scottish Civil Courts Review". Lord Gill makes a case for such orders, which will be considered in the round with the other matters that he raised.

Car Parks (Fines)

7. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has had any discussions with private car park owners regarding the methods by which they issue and collect fines. (S3O-08798)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): No. That is primarily a matter of contractual law between those who own and those who use such private car parks. However, we are aware that the High Court concluded in 1992 that wheel clamping on private land amounted to theft and that the demand for payment of a release fee amounted to extortion. Therefore, wheel clamping is not an option available to private car park owners to enforce fines.

Irene Oldfather: Does the minister share my concern regarding the threatening tactics that some private car park companies use in collecting fines, which cause considerable distress to elderly and disabled constituents and families on low incomes? Is he aware that penalties include almost doubling the fine if it is not paid within 28 days and, sometimes, quadrupling it if it is not paid in shortly more than that period? Does he share my concerns about the distress that many of those companies cause vulnerable families that may need to budget to pay their fines? Will he consider regulation to ensure that any fines are collected in a fair way that does not impose undue time penalties on those who have the most difficulty in paying?

Kenny MacAskill: I share Irene Oldfather's concerns. If there is any harassment or abuse, that is a matter for the police. The Government would give full support to the police in dealing quite severely with anybody who sought to intimidate people, whether low-income families or the elderly. I am bemused by the terms of the contract that Irene Oldfather described and fines that increase in such a way. It is a matter of getting legal advice, because it seems to me that, in many instances, such contracts are not enforceable and cannot be successfully pursued.

Climate Change

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-5379, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on climate change. I point out to members that time is not on our side, so they should stick to their time limits.

14:56

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): This year is a landmark year for climate change. The 15th conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—COP15—is meeting in Copenhagen as we speak. As the Danish convener of the summit said in her opening statement,

“This is the time to deliver. This is the place to commit.”

In Scotland, of course, we have already made commitments and begun the task of delivery. We know that we have a moral duty to act, because climate change will affect the poor, the vulnerable and developing countries first and worst. We were strongly reminded of that last month, when the Scottish Government, the Scottish Human Rights Commission, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency hosted a conference on climate change and human rights, at which we heard about the social impacts of climate change on the peoples of developing countries.

Beyond the moral and environmental case, we in Scotland also see the low-carbon economy as a vital opportunity for Scotland and for Scottish jobs. Scotland is a small, developed nation, and our strategy is that we should set an example to the industrialised world by acting as a model of best practice in tackling climate change. We hope that strong action by Scotland will influence other nations to agree an ambitious climate change treaty.

On 24 June 2009, the Scottish Parliament, with the strong backing of civil society in Scotland, unanimously passed the industrialised world's most ambitious climate change legislation: the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Our statutory targets are to reduce emissions by 42 per cent by 2020 and by 80 per cent by 2050, which covers all recognised greenhouse gases and international aviation and shipping. All-party and public support for the 2009 act, including from the business community, was and remains vital. The 2009 act is designed to give certainty to industry, business and the public about Scotland's low-carbon future.

Even before the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was passed, we had published our climate change

delivery plan to set out the scale of the transformation required in energy generation, energy efficiency, transport and the rural economy. We are now developing the detail of our report on proposals and policies, to be published next summer.

On Tuesday, the First Minister gave further impetus to our implementation by announcing the convening of the 2020 climate delivery group, consisting of influential people from business and civic society who wish to help Scotland to meet its ambitious climate change targets.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the contribution that I am sure many of the 2020 group members will make. However, could the minister explain a little more clearly what the relationship between Government and that group will be? The United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change is the advisory body that is listed in the legislation and which the Government chose to stick to. What is the relationship between the two?

Stewart Stevenson: The 2020 climate delivery group has no legal status of any kind. It consists of a group of people who have come together to help us to work our way through the issues. We very much welcome the contribution of time and effort that the climate delivery group will provide. As members will recall, the 2009 act gives us the facility to designate who will provide us with legal advice. For the time being, that will be the UK Committee on Climate Change, which is the only body that will provide the advice that will formally be part of the parliamentary process. However, I very much welcome the additional support that we will get from the climate delivery group.

We published a carbon assessment of our spending plans in September and we will now do that annually. That integration of carbon assessment into the key budget process is another world first.

Of course, some impacts of climate change are already on the way, so on Tuesday the First Minister also launched the finalised version of "Scotland's Climate Change Adaptation Framework". Scotland is one of the few countries to take a strategic approach to resilience to climate impacts.

As further evidence of Scotland's commitment to respond to our global responsibilities on climate change, I am pleased to announce today that we will establish the 2014 climate change saltire fellowships. The fellowships will deliver on a commitment that was made as part of our Commonwealth games bid to set up and deploy a carbon emissions reduction fund. The fellowships that will be supported by the fund will be targeted at climate change mitigation and adaptation

measures in Commonwealth countries, particularly those that are least able to deal with the impacts of climate change. Talented individuals from Commonwealth countries will be able to come to Scotland to share in our cutting-edge knowledge on climate change adaptation and mitigation. The fellowships will be rooted in knowledge and skills transfer in areas where Scotland is strong, such as renewable energy technology, carbon capture and storage, community action on climate change, forestry and climate change policy and legislation.

I have a second announcement. Scotland is a nation with a record of supporting others in their development. Although our first priority is to focus our efforts on developing our contribution to low-carbon development at home, we recognise that developing countries urgently need capacity-building support through knowledge exchange and financial assistance to make low-carbon energy possible in their countries, too. In support of that, a range of Scottish organisations from across industry, Government, academia and civil society have come together to co-operate with the efforts of the United Kingdom and the European Union to establish a global framework for low-carbon energy supplies. The partnership will work together to support those international efforts by offering expertise and capacity and by pulling together packages for funding support where necessary. Assuming that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process is able to agree a legal and financial framework for low-carbon mitigation and adaptation actions in developing countries during 2010, the Scottish partnership stands ready to work with our UK, European and global partners on a series of practical actions to deliver on those.

Finally, to prove that we are committed to taking action on the ground, I am delighted to announce that, on 27 March 2010, the Scottish Government will again support earth hour. Earth hour is an important symbolic event that brings together organisations and individuals worldwide to demonstrate their commitment to addressing climate change. To spread the reach of earth hour across Scotland, we will work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Trades Union Congress to promote next year's event. We will switch off all non-essential lighting in our buildings, promote the initiative to our staff and involve non-departmental public bodies and agencies in supporting earth hour as a visible sign that we are committed to change.

Through our actions and through those further announcements, Scotland is building a world-leading climate change framework and staying at the leading edge of international thinking on climate change. We think that it is vital to let the world know about Scotland's stance to inspire others to take similar strong action. Therefore, we

have had a full programme of engagement in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit. In September, the First Minister wrote to the UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, to tell him about the level of commitment from Scotland. We have been commended by European commissioners, the White House and the Governor of California. I attended the UN climate conference in Barcelona, where Scotland's programme was the subject of much international interest. As well as being a spur to action by other countries, Scotland's framework can be a practical model for other nations. The Basque Government has translated the 2009 act, so it will now be available to the whole Spanish-speaking world. The fact that Scotland is now a full member of the climate group puts us on an equal footing with key world players.

We will, of course, work closely with the UK Government on climate change. We would like to have been on the UK delegation to Copenhagen, in line with the arrangements of other EU nations such as Spain, Belgium, Germany and Denmark, which will have representation from their devolved Governments, but I will be in Copenhagen all of next week to ensure that Scotland's climate change ambitions are widely promoted. As opportunities present themselves, I will, of course, work closely with the UK delegation, as appropriate.

On Monday, I will host a Scottish event for the international audience on Scotland's climate change framework, the low-carbon economy and Scottish society's support for action. We will speak to other world leaders at the climate group's climate leaders summit the following day, as well as holding a range of ministerial bilateral meetings. We will report back to Scotland from the United Nations conference centre via a telepresence link.

I hope that, by endorsing the strong position on climate change that is set out in the motion, Parliament will challenge the countries of the world to look to what Scotland is doing and to ensure that we are not alone in setting such targets. I intend us to take that strong message to the international community at Copenhagen next week. Let us all wish all the nations that are engaged in the summit the very best in their deliberations, and let us hope for a successful and appropriate outcome.

I move,

That the Parliament, having agreed unanimously on a 42% target reduction in Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and an 80% reduction by 2050, agrees that MSPs and Scotland as a whole must focus on the practical implementation of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009; urges that all countries bring forward the most ambitious commitments appropriate to their circumstances early in the talks; looks to participants in Copenhagen to reach a legally binding agreement at the earliest

opportunity that will prevent world temperatures rising by more than 2°C, and notes that a failure to do so would threaten vulnerable countries with, for example, inundation and desertification.

15:06

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am sure that the Parliament will, as the minister has called on us to do, endorse the motion that he has moved. I do not disagree with a word of it, and I agree with and welcome much of what he said in his speech.

However, I lodged my amendment because there is an important question that we need to discuss face to face, which is about the meaning of consensus. What is the nature of the consensus, such as it is, that we have achieved? With the Parliament's unanimous passing of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which, as Stewart Stevenson mentioned, received broad support from the private sector, community groups, churches, trade unions and tens of thousands of individuals in Scotland, we achieved consensus of intent—consensus on what the objectives are and where we want to get to by 2020 and 2050.

We have achieved consensus right across the political spectrum, without conspiracy theory, denial or anyone arguing the case against reductions in emissions. That has not been the case in every country, and we need to recognise the value of that consensus of intent. Whereas here the issue has not been politically controversial, in the US, Australia and some of our fellow European member states, there has not been consensus of intent. In some of those countries, it seems that the stronger the evidence on climate change becomes, the louder grow the complaints from those who will not accept the science or who, for reasons of right-wing ideology, fear that responding to climate change poses a threat to the dominance of the unfettered free market. They are right to fear that, because it is increasingly clear that the free market cannot give us the answers that we need on climate change.

It will be important to stress in Copenhagen that it is possible to achieve the consensus of intent that we have achieved. Not just today's Governments but all their successors for decades ahead need to sign up to the programme that comes out of Copenhagen, which will mean achieving consensus of intent across the political spectrum. I value the limited consensus that we have achieved.

Sadly, there is no consensus on action, and it is wrong to suggest that there is. The First Minister was wrong when he said during First Minister's question time that the Parliament was unified on climate change objectives and the delivery

programme. We have agreed the objectives, but we are divided on many of the actions that are required. The consensus that we have achieved is valuable but limited at best.

The First Minister's answer to my question about some of the actions that we need to take on aviation was disappointing. At present, it is projected that UK aviation levels will grow by some 200 per cent by 2050 if we do not impose some form of control. At that rate of growth, it will become at first extremely challenging and then physically impossible to reach the target of cutting our emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. Even the UK Committee on Climate Change's recommendation that aviation growth be limited to 60 per cent will require tougher targets for the rest of the economy at a time when every Government department seems, understandably, to be daunted by the challenge that has already been set.

When the First Minister is challenged on the impossibility of matching existing aviation policy with existing climate change policy, all that he can say is that aviation emissions are included in the targets. I know that we are going to count the emissions, but we need to count them as they go down, not watch and count them as they go up. We need to restrain aviation growth if even the UK Committee on Climate Change's recommendations are to be met. No consensus exists on the actions that require to be taken in that area.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Does the member agree that, if we get high-speed rail and a much improved link between London and Glasgow and Edinburgh, many people can be removed from flights, that that would be one of the best ways for us to recover, and that there would not be a commensurate replacement of flights by other ones?

Patrick Harvie: I agree that that is possible, but I do not agree that it is guaranteed. Rob Gibson will remember that, in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, we have heard voices calling for, "More of everything, thank you." Some people have wanted more aviation, more high-speed rail links and more of all the other modes of transport. More plus more still equals more.

There is no consensus on the priority that climate change deserves. I have lost count of the number of times that ministers, including the First Minister, have stated that climate change is one of the most urgent issues of our age, and of the number of times when ministers, including the First Minister—he generally does so with more pride than most—have answered criticisms of their construction record by puffing themselves up and talking about the road building programme rather than their record on constructing low-carbon

homes, retrofitting existing homes or building public transport schemes, which the current Administration has developed a habit of cancelling. Only last week in the chamber, John Swinney sang the praises of the M74 extension in Glasgow. Whenever the false choice between the economy and the environment is posed, the short-term dash for growth wins out. We have no consensus yet on the priority that is attached to climate change; if we had that, we would all understand that the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, and that it must operate within limits.

Transport is an interesting issue. Unlike other areas for which there are portfolios, transport is not a good in itself. We all agree, for example, that we want a country with good health, and that education is more than a means to an economic end but enriches life in itself. Transport is different. Although 20th century economists may have worked under the absolute assumption that ever-increasing mobility is always desirable for human freedom or for the economy, 21st century economists must come to recognise that aiming to satisfy an ever-growing demand for transport will hugely damage our quality of life and environment, and that, for energy reasons, that will ultimately be impossible.

We need to ask ourselves what the role of mobility is. What is it for? After years of hearing Government ministers saying how seriously they take climate change, why are we still not counting the carbon impact of infrastructure decisions? Why are we not using the planning system to localise public services, economic activity and food production, to name just a few things, so that we can reduce the demand for transport?

Energy generation is perhaps the clearest area in which consensus breaks down. I am sure that members will talk about nuclear power in the debate. Nuclear power is no longer simply a question of waste and where to put it; it is also a question of where to get the fuel from. The world has a limited supply of uranium, just as it has limited supplies of all the other mineral commodities. For fuel reasons, aside from the issue of waste, Scotland is not the kind of country that should pursue the nuclear route. I do not want to swap peak oil for peak uranium.

Other people argue for carbon capture and storage. Perhaps carbon capture and storage technology is being developed, but it does not yet exist. It might work one day, but the UK and Scottish Governments seem to think that it is a dead cert. On that basis, they have opened the door to new coal-fired power stations. I draw members' attention to the briefing that we have received from RSPB Scotland about the proposal for a new unabated coal-fired power station at

Hunterston. The use of unabated coal must end—we must be unequivocal about that.

Even on renewable energy, although everyone is signed up to it on paper, too many politicians are happy to indulge misguided local opposition to development instead of challenging the assumptions that underlie that opposition. The Scottish Environment LINK report on the sustainable land use strategy says that our landscapes are important to us because they

“contain the record of the achievements and failures of those people who went before us”.

Our landscapes must contain the record of the achievements of the renewables industry or they will be doomed to contain the record of our failure on climate change.

There are areas in which there is no consensus on action. We must address the values that underpin our society—not just questions of what mobility is for, but questions of what consumerism and economic growth are for. Those are the fundamental questions that must be addressed before we can have consensus on action. As political leaders, all members of the Parliament have a responsibility to show the way. We do not yet have a consensus among ourselves about the actions that must be undertaken in our own lifestyles.

I am not happy to break the consensus, but I feel that it is important to move the amendment in my name. I move amendment S3M-5379.1, to insert at end:

“, and further agrees that the targets set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 leave no room for complacency and that the Scottish targets can only be achieved with a fundamental policy shift in areas such as road building, energy generation and use and aviation expansion.”

15:16

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I thank the minister for agreeing to Labour's amendment to his motion. I understand that he wants to take with him to Copenhagen a motion on which there is consensus, so I have toned down what would have been a rather more robust comment on the progress that has been made on action. The words

“implementation of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009”

are now in the motion, in the interest of unity. Nevertheless, that will not hold me back in my comments.

I will focus on Copenhagen and on Labour's disappointment at the Scottish Government's lack of progress on implementation of the 2009 act. We passed our radical climate change legislation in

June, after months of debate and lobbying. Amendments were lodged by us and by others to bring forward target dates and to add a raft of practical measures that would enable us to make big cuts in our emissions in the early years. Therefore, it is hugely disappointing that so little progress has been made on translating those legislative provisions into practical policies and spending commitments.

Politics matters, and the choices that we make in electing government—whether at national or local level—matter. Kyoto did not deliver because we did not get Australia and the United States on board. It matters that Kevin Rudd is now Australia's Labor Prime Minister and it matters that Barack Obama is now the US President—someone who believes that the US must be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. The UK Labour Government has been key to the preparations for Copenhagen. At every level of government and at every opportunity—whether at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, in Commonwealth meetings or in meetings of the EU—the UK has tried to bind countries together in looking at the radical commitments of other Governments, in getting a binding deal and in providing financial support to developing countries. Even if Copenhagen secures a deal on emissions next week, significant amounts of money must also be given to developing countries to enable them to transform their economies, to sustain their citizens in the challenging years of climate change that lie ahead and to prevent deforestation.

As the birthplace of the industrial revolution, Scotland can play a leading role in developing a route map to challenge climate change and develop action on a low-carbon economy. We all agree that we must seize the renewables opportunities but, whether those are in marine renewables or householder and community renewables, the Scottish Government could do much more now to support the expansion of those industries. That is why, if the Scottish ministers are going to be in Copenhagen, they should please talk about the progress that we are making and about what we will do when they come home. As we said in the debate on climate change this summer, it must be an honest offer. It cannot be a matter of “we will if you will”; there must be a commitment to act, whatever is agreed in Copenhagen.

In June, when we moved our amendment for a 40 per cent reduction in carbon emissions, we believed that that was doable. We also moved a raft of amendments to make it happen. When the Scottish National Party Government's target leapt to 42 per cent—after it had repeatedly signed up to 34 per cent as a maximum—it raised the bar on what it needs to do.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, thanks. My time is tight because I have not lodged an amendment.

Disappointingly, the SNP Government has dragged its heels. We have not heard a word from it about putting in place the council tax and business rates reductions that we all agreed to. Where is the timescale for the land use strategy? How will the forestry targets be met? What plans will the Scottish Government put in place to tackle degraded peatlands? When will the public duty be put in place? Kicking such issues into touch until after the next election is not good enough. If the act is to be successful, it must be embraced by the whole of the public sector so that we can get on and dramatically reduce the carbon footprint.

Scotland has companies that lead the way in electric cars and battery technology, which are vital components of a low-carbon transport strategy. However, companies need to be able to compete for business. If the Scottish Government were to change its procurement process, that would enable those companies to drive the market and cut costs. The same thing applies in relation to householder renewables and community heating systems. We know that they work, as can be seen across the country. However, the cost of delay on both those issues is that we have lost one of our best-known companies, Windsave, which went into liquidation because it could not get contracts in Scotland.

What about the SNP's manifesto commitment to have renewables in every school? Will the minister tell us when that target will be met? I suspect that it is going the way of the class sizes target.

What is happening is not good enough. We need to make progress now on our existing buildings and on the next generation of buildings that will be here in 2050. Soon, we will see the first annual implementation report. Setting up a fellowship and establishing the 2020 group, however worthy those ambitions are, are not enough; we need the practical stuff now.

We need to do the easy stuff first. I want the minister to tell us, in his summing-up speech, what he is going to do to fund sustainable travel in the budget next week. Also, how much more money will be in the pot for cycling facilities, given that that funding is now at the lowest level that it has been for years? Will there be more money for bus and train travel, rather than forcing people to drive to work? Will there be more investment in energy efficiency, so that we can have a proper scheme that delivers, and a commitment to match the UK Government on its boiler scrappage scheme and its green investment plans? Is there any likelihood that, before the next Scottish Parliament elections,

we will be able to offer our constituents money off their council tax if they install energy-efficiency measures?

We need action to be taken now. We are prepared to work constructively with the Scottish Government, and there is massive public support for action—that was evident at the wave demonstration at the weekend—and there is a similar appetite in the world of business.

We must work together, but we need leadership now from the Scottish Government. We must have a timescale for action to drive towards a low-carbon society and a public engagement strategy to bring us all together to work for those serious carbon reductions.

The Scottish Government needs to get on with it, not just talk about it.

15:22

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I was interested to hear Patrick Harvie's comments. Indeed, I felt some of them stabbing me in the back. He stated that, unlike in some other countries, no one in Scotland resisted the idea that climate change was happening or dragged their heels as they were taken, kicking and screaming, towards the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. I would like to think that I manifested some concerns and did some of the foot-dragging that was necessary during the passage of the bill—foot-dragging, not knuckle-dragging, of which I will not be accused.

We established a consensus that climate change is happening, that it was appropriate that Scotland should be a leader in tackling climate change and that we should produce a piece of legislation that would put us at the forefront of dealing with climate change issues. Let us not forget that my party voted for the decision to move from 34 per cent to 42 per cent as the 2020 target, although that was difficult for me to accept.

The minister described the Copenhagen summit as the time to deliver and the place to commit. I believe that now is the time when we should look back on what has happened in the few short months since we passed the 2009 act and express concerns—some have already been expressed from the Labour benches—about how we can make progress.

The recent announcement of the 2020 group, in which experts will come together to offer their expertise and ideas about how we can make progress, was a great step forward, and I welcome some of the announcements that have been made today. Some of the other proposals that we have heard about today to develop new ideas in Scotland and across the Commonwealth in

connection with the 2014 games are also welcome. However, we must dig deep and do what is necessary to ensure that we are not simply talking about targets that have been set but may be ignored.

As we have heard, the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill contained opportunities. I and other members lodged amendments that offered us the opportunity to introduce rebates for the council tax and business rates that would allow individuals in their rented or privately owned homes and small businesses to improve their energy efficiency. I had hoped that that opportunity would have been one of the first that we would take. I am aware that money is available from sources outside the Government to deliver on that in the short term. As a consequence, we need to take every chance to move forward and ensure that we make progress as quickly as possible.

We have achieved a hard-won consensus in Scotland on climate change; it concerns me that such consensus is not universal in Europe or, indeed, the world. That is why the Copenhagen conference is so important. It is also important that our minister goes to that conference—whether as part of the national delegation or not—and explains to the world exactly how Scotland has positioned itself as a world leader in the area.

However, I have some of the reservations that Patrick Harvie mentioned. I believe that the centre-right approach to economics is the right way to go. It is important that we take the opportunity to use the chances that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the climate change process give us to encourage the involvement of the private sector.

I believe that the concept of the free market is key to our success and that those who say that the free market cannot achieve our objectives, and that, consequently, we should take a more authoritarian approach, are endangering not only our climate, but our political democracy.

Patrick Harvie: I do not disagree that the private sector—whether the market is free or less free—is capable of achieving good results. However, it is clear from the past year or two that when the free market fails, it fails on a scale of historic proportions. Should we not be worried about what might happen if we hand the challenge of climate change to the free market?

Alex Johnstone: I have never been in favour of a completely unregulated market, and for that reason perhaps Patrick Harvie and I are on closer territory that we are prepared to admit during this debate.

I point out that the Conservative Opposition in the south took an active part in the passage of the UK Climate Change Bill and, in Scotland, the Conservative party placed itself close to and

became actively involved in the passage of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

The UK Conservatives have stated—I repeat their demand in the Scottish Parliament—that any agreement that is achieved at Copenhagen must be a rigorous one that

“binds the world in a common commitment to keep the rise of global temperatures to below 2 degrees C”

and

“which finds an international mechanism to help people in the poorest countries to protect themselves against future floods, famine and drought, in addition to what they need to help relieve their current poverty”.

It is important that we have a deal that will save the environment around the world and protect the rainforests, which are the lungs of the planet.

We are at a crossroads—as the minister said, a time to deliver and a place to commit. That is exactly where we are, and the minister has our best wishes when he goes to the conference.

15:29

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I thank the minister for bringing to the chamber this timely debate on climate change. I imagined that after countless committee appearances and numerous debates on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill during the first half of the year, he might have become rather fed up at the sight of me and my committee colleagues, but he is back for more. I reassure him that although we may have had our differences over certain aspects of the bill, we are singing from the same sheet today, and I am pleased at the outward-looking nature of the Government's motion.

In the months that we spent working on our bill, we naturally focused on a great many details, but it is very much the bigger picture that has been in focus this week as the COP15 got under way in Copenhagen. I do not think that there will be a single dissenting voice in the chamber when I say that we look to the participants in the talks to bring forward the most ambitious commitments and reach a legally binding agreement at the earliest opportunity that will prevent world temperatures from rising by more than 2°C.

The threat that we face from human-caused climate change is very real and very serious. I do not quite agree with the newspaper headlines that proclaim that COP15 represents our two weeks to save the world, but it is perhaps fair to say that we have two weeks in which we must at least start to save the world.

The fact is that, here in Scotland, we can cut our carbon emissions by 42 per cent, by 80 per cent or by 100 per cent, or we can turn everything off completely, but it will not make a difference unless

the rest of the world is with us. It is therefore gratifying that in the past few weeks so many nations have announced their own commitments to cut emissions. Some of those are welcome commitments, but some need to go much further. We need countries that are willing to take the lead and set an example for others to follow.

Although Scotland is, disappointingly, not officially represented in the negotiations, we have already set our example with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. I believe that the targets that we have enshrined in law are the minimum for which any developed nation should aim. Indeed, I hope that we can achieve even greater reductions. The motion rightly alludes to the fact that nations find themselves in different circumstances so it is likely that a range of targets and commitments will be needed to find the best overall deal. That is okay. It is only right. However, everybody needs to remember that, on the whole, it is the world's richest countries that contribute the most to global warming and the world's poorest countries that will suffer the most devastating consequences.

I certainly do not envy the negotiators in Copenhagen. It will not be easy to find the right combination and the right compromises. This week, some of the many differences between parties have been exposed already. The leak of the draft text that was prepared by the Danish hosts was certainly not ideal, but it at least served to highlight some of the things that need to be addressed and, I hope, to underline how vital it is that the UN and its representatives are not sidelined in the negotiations. There is too much at stake to risk the talks becoming fractured over leaked and unofficial documents.

Bringing together the developed world, the rapidly industrialising world and the developing world is not going to be easy. We cannot allow industrialisation to continue without restrictions on carbon emissions, yet it seems unfair to impose on expanding economies handicaps that we never had to face. I firmly believe that just as important as the limiting of carbon emissions is that industrialised nations put in place proper support and incentives to encourage developing nations to turn to sustainable technologies as an integral part of their growth. Similarly, the Liberal Democrats have long argued that it is only right for the poorest nations to be given financial support to help them adapt to the effects of climate change. I certainly hope that that will be properly addressed in Copenhagen.

Ultimately, of course, the parties at Copenhagen can put forward the most ambitious targets imaginable, but until they are acted on, they will be just that—targets. Getting an agreement will be a challenge, but the hardest work lies not during next eight days but during the next 40 years.

Governments can and must do a lot, but making a difference will still rely greatly on the public's attitude.

On Saturday, I had the pleasure of joining 7,000 or so other people to march—sorry, that should be to flow—through the streets of Glasgow as part of the wave climate protest. Another 50,000 people took part in London. There is no lack of public awareness. Indeed, despite the levels of scepticism that remain, there is no lack of desire to take action, but the desire to take action and the actual taking of action are two different things. If newspaper reports are to be believed, Copenhagen has been swamped with some 1,200 limousines to chauffeur around people from the various delegations, and its airports will receive more than 140 private jets. That will happen while the city is hosting supposedly the most climate-conscious politicians in the world.

I say that not by way of criticism—although I would hardly applaud it—but to highlight that it is our actions and not our words that show our true commitment. Of course there will be times when we need to fly to places or travel by car, but each of us needs to consider carefully our actions and our carbon footprint. Engaging fully with the public and with industry is absolutely key if we are successfully to tackle climate change. Scotland's public engagement strategy is due to be published by the end of next year, but I take this opportunity strongly to encourage the minister to do everything in his power to accelerate that timescale as much as possible. The sooner we properly engage with the public on fighting climate change, the better our chance of succeeding.

15:34

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

As the Copenhagen conference opens, we have to measure how we in Scotland can not only contribute to the international discussion but make progress in this country to achieve the goals that we set ourselves in June.

The phrase “getting our ducks in a row” came to mind. In the 1980s, Dr Salter was developing wave power. Had he been given the go-ahead, wave and tidal power might have been developed at a much earlier stage. It is important to recognise that much of the science has been talked about for some while but is only now being developed. I will not go into the reasons for that today, other than to say that it is important that we get our ducks in a row now.

We have a fantastic opportunity. As Jim Mather, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism said:

"We enjoy a vast array of potentially cheap, renewable energy sources and harnessing that potential will create thousands of long-term jobs while reducing emissions."

Our task is to see that we get that done as well as we can.

Where powers over the development of those energy sources lie is an issue that can act as a drag on development. In this debate, I cannot fail to remember that we are working in a competitive situation in relation to energy distribution that was created in the Thatcher period and which is unfit for purpose. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets proposals with which we have had to deal are so difficult to apply that we find ourselves unable to help Britain to reduce its emissions as quickly as we might have done. We need to change those conditions. Sustainability is being built into UK law. The annual energy law—as someone put it—that London passes, is coming soon, and I hope that that will change that form of regulation.

The body that the London Parliament hardly ever seems to hold to account is the Crown Estate. Those people are the tax collectors of the seas and can make a lot of money for the London Treasury, but they are taking far too long to put in place the licences that will help us to develop renewable energy such as tidal and wave power and offshore wind farms in areas such as the Pentland Firth. The processes are complex—the Crown Estate has to see that licensees can deliver. However, the fact is that the Crown Estate is not within the control of the Scottish Parliament, and we need to get that control.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Does the member concede that the critical factor in moving forward with offshore wind and other marine renewables potential lies in the Marine (Scotland) Bill that is going through this very Parliament?

Rob Gibson: No, I do not. The bill deals with the management of the seas, but we still will not have control over them. The 85 acts that control the seas in this country are not within the control of the Scottish Parliament. Many of them need to be; the member made my point for me very well.

I praise the work of the North Scotland Industries group. Its chief executive, Ian Couper, told its annual general meeting this week:

"By 2013, I want the North of Scotland and the Islands to be recognised as the renewable energy centre for Scotland and the UK ... This is where the majority of activity will be happening for the UK and we need to blow our trumpet a bit more, to make more people aware of our strengths in this sector."

We should not only blow our trumpet but make the case that we should have the powers over the development of the sector that will aid the process.

It is up to members of the Scottish Parliament to confront some of the issues that are holding back development. It is for that reason that I mentioned UK bodies.

In the energy section of *The Press and Journal* this week, there is criticism of the failure of some of our well-known high street banks to put up money for the development that needs to take place. Some banks are doing that, but we must ensure that banks that are based in Scotland and which take deposits from Scotland are seen to be using that money for developments in offshore renewables, which pose far less risk than the way in which the banks used our money in the past. It is important that that focus is kept on the banks.

In contrast to the mixture of powers between London and Edinburgh, the EU's policy for renewables development—20/20/20 by 2020—provides us with a lot of opportunities. It is up to us to ensure that we make the most of them, given the North Sea grids that may develop at a later stage and so on.

My final remarks relate to the worldwide scene. On this very day, Latin American peoples have launched a report on monocultures and violations of human rights to adequate food, housing, water, land and territory. It is called "Red Sugar, Green Deserts" and will show how

"Current global agricultural and trade policy, which promotes monoculture-based agriculture, has been designed essentially by the governments of the United States and the European Union. The corporate interests of these countries are strongly reflected in these policies, with devastating impacts in the global South."

We in Scotland believe in supporting people in Africa and that it is necessary to ensure that they can be sustained in their lives. We should not have agricultural policies here that demand monocultures to support our farming. Such issues must be discussed in Copenhagen; I hope to join in that discussion.

The motion points us in the direction of many things that we must do and provides a benchmark for the way forward.

15:41

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I was pleased to join the wave demonstration last Saturday. I saw Alison McInnes and Sarah Boyack when I greeted the marchers who flowed through the streets of Glasgow to my constituency of Glasgow Kelvin, just over the squinty bridge. I was disappointed not to see Stewart Stevenson in Glasgow, as I know how much he likes it.

I have taken a strong interest in climate change since we passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill—a far-reaching and radical act of the Scottish Parliament that will ensure that we take action at

home in Scotland and refrain from relying on buying carbon credits from overseas. Rightly, Patrick Harvie has reminded us twice today that the targets that the bill sets are hard and that they are targets. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 is world leading in print but, as others have said, the challenge for all of us—especially the Scottish Government—is to turn that print into reality.

We can see with our own eyes how we got here. We see that our country's climate is changing—it is wetter and a bit warmer than it used to be. If members think about the past—depending on how old they are—they will see that our relative wealth has resulted in our using more energy and landfill. Despite some of the sceptics from whom we have heard this week, I have no doubt that we have been storing up environmental problems for ourselves over all these years. Time is running out to solve them.

As other members have said, at a time when developing countries are expanding their economies and wealth and need the world's natural resources, there is a diminishing capacity for such activity. That is why the Copenhagen summit and the negotiation that will take place around the table about how the world responds are critical. The summit is not really a platform for us to boast about how good we are, although we have passed the right radical legislation.

As other members have said, it is clear that we should not rely on trading carbon emissions or exploit poor countries. Recently I visited India, a country that is expanding rapidly. It has a small carbon footprint per head of population, but a population that is growing by a staggering 14 million every year. It has just announced that it will build five nuclear power stations and is building the largest underground in the world in New Delhi, a city of 16 million inhabitants that is highly polluted, due to the number and range of old vehicles that are on the road.

I had the privilege of meeting the former minister who enforced the conversion to gas of New Delhi's taxis and autoricks—a mode of transport on which people in New Delhi rely a great deal. He says that the difference in New Delhi is staggering. People can now stand at the roadside, if they dare—anyone who has seen the traffic in New Delhi will know what I am talking about—and their shirt will stay white. That is a great achievement by a developing country. I was surprised to see that even the area outside the Taj Mahal is environmentally friendly, with notices on the bins saying "We recycle our plastic bags". Clearly, nowhere is beyond such notices.

The challenge for policy makers and Government is how to make addressing climate

change real, part of people's everyday lives and something that they want to participate in.

I have led debates in the Parliament on the regulation of the bus industry, and I support Charlie Gordon's proposed member's bill. In Glasgow the regulation of buses is of concern to those who use them, who tend to have lower incomes. They have a right to have a bus service that meets their transport needs. If we are to persuade other people to make positive travel choices in preference to using their cars, we will have to sort out the bus industry, bring in joint ticketing, and, if necessary, legislate. We need bus lane improvements for faster journeys, as it is faster journeys—

Stewart Stevenson: And more reliable journeys.

Pauline McNeill: Yes—faster and more reliable journeys will prompt people to make that choice. Timetable information is crucial. People who are not regular bus users will not get on the bus unless they have the information that tells them where the bus stops and where they can go to. Such practical steps are required to give people positive choices.

Rail is highly important in giving people such choices. I remain to be convinced of the Government's commitment to rail as a positive choice. The cancellation of the Glasgow airport rail link was a mistake, as it would have taken some travellers off the roads. More positively, I welcome the joint working between the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change and the Labour Government, which is an example of good interparliamentary activity. Both are committed to high-speed rail, and the minister appreciates the importance of starting that project from Scotland at the same time that it starts from London and the south. That makes perfect economic sense and is not just about fighting our corner.

It is important for the Scottish Government to make the commitment now and to do its bit to ensure that we have the foundation for high-speed rail. That choice might be further away than we would like, but it is important, as I think Rob Gibson said in an intervention, to have shorter journey times from both the central belt and the north of Scotland to London and the south. If we can get the journey time down to the magic three and a half hours, people will make that positive choice.

Our best chance of reaching the climate change targets is to make them a reality for people as they make their individual choices. If we show leadership, we can meet those targets.

15:47

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): That the Parliament passed a world-leading climate change bill is beyond question. That the decision of the Scottish Government to push for an 80 per cent emissions reduction target by 2050 dragged the UK Government in its wake is equally beyond question. To be world leading is to pull others along behind us, to encourage, to persuade or to embarrass them into following our lead. In the case of the UK Government, it must have been embarrassment. There can be no other reason for its churlish refusal to allow Scotland a seat at the Copenhagen table. Other small nations will be there, arguing their case, explaining how the most successful European nations in economic terms can also be the nations that lead the way in combating climate change.

On Saturday 8,000 Scots marched through Glasgow. Many of the members present marched, or flowed—whatever they were doing on the day. The voice of those 8,000 people could clearly be heard in this Parliament, yet they have no voice in Copenhagen. Scotland has made strong commitments on climate change, with a target of a 42 per cent emissions reduction by 2020 and another of an 80 per cent reduction by 2050, and what is decided in Copenhagen will impact on how successful Scotland is in delivering its reduction targets. We need Copenhagen, yet Westminster has not invited Scotland to take a seat in Copenhagen. Other small nations will be there, but not Scotland. The UK will not deign to allow us to control our drink-drive laws or air-gun sales—far less to rise to the giddy heights of speaking at a climate change conference.

Climate change is arguably the single greatest issue on our planet. The World Health Organization estimates that climate change is already causing more than 160,000 deaths a year in the poorer parts of the world and, according to *New Scientist*, there is a 90 per cent chance that, within 100 years, climate change will force 3 billion people to choose between going hungry and moving their families to milder climes. Yet the poorer are least responsible. The average UK citizen produces the same amount of carbon dioxide in only two and a half days as a Malawian produces in a year. The world's wealthier nations are responsible for 80 per cent of the man-made increase in carbon dioxide. It is surely imperative that the developed countries that are leading the way in cutting greenhouse gas emissions are present at international meetings on the issue. Scotland is undoubtedly leading the way, yet we have no presence, no place at the table and no voice in Copenhagen.

If we are to deliver on our targets, it is vital that we ensure that the massive renewable energy

potential of Scotland's seas and coast is fully utilised. Scotland's potential is highlighted in the recent report, "The Power of Scotland Renewed: clean, green energy for the nation's future", which demonstrates that Scotland is capable of delivering a clean, green and secure energy supply.

The report shows that by 2030 Scotland can produce between 60 and 143 per cent of its projected annual electricity demand through renewable energy. The actual level of renewables production, however, will depend on the level of investment and commitment in renewable energy. That is a strong argument against significant investment in nuclear power. Billions invested in nuclear will be billions diverted from research and development in renewables. We lost the opportunity to be world leaders in wind technology, at least in part because the money that we should have been pouring into the infinite resource of renewable energy was instead poured into the finite resource of nuclear power.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that if Scotland chooses to go down the road of being overly reliant on environmentally based energy sources for electricity, it is inevitable that we shall have to enter into partnership with our near neighbour, England, so that, on certain days, we will sell surplus power and on others, when we are deficient, we will buy it back, and that when that energy comes, it will be nuclear generated?

Bill Wilson: No, I do not accept that. If we are generating power via wind, tidal and wave, and if we use new technologies to store power, it is clear that we will not need to purchase. Furthermore, we can follow the idea of connecting various nations that all use wind power to a supergrid—the wind will always blow in some part of Europe. It is clear that there is no need for nuclear. It is equally clear that we cannot keep relying on finite resources, especially if countries such as China expand substantially their nuclear base, putting ever greater pressure on that finite resource.

That aside, although it is vital that we push forward in investment in renewables, we are losing an opportunity to do so every day, as the £150 million of fossil fuel levy surplus funds, accumulated on Scotland's behalf, sit languishing in a London bank. In Copenhagen, we might be sent like a little Jack Horner to sit in the corner—or even some considerable distance from any corner anywhere near Copenhagen—but whatever corner we sit in there is no plum for us because the £150 million stays firmly in London vaults. It is time for the UK to release Scotland's money to Scotland, and it is time for Scotland to show what a good boy he is by using that £150 million plum to drive forward development in wind, wave and tidal power.

For that reason, we can all support initiatives such as the saltire prize, which is one way of building on Scotland's research and development capacity. To be fair to members, I realise that it is difficult for some on the Tory benches to welcome saltires, terrified as they are that the saltire—the flag of Scotland—might represent some deep nationalist plot. However, I hope that even the Tory party can overcome its saltire phobia and support the aims of the saltire prize.

The Marine (Scotland) Bill represents another opportunity—the opportunity to simplify the planning and building of renewable energy stations along the coasts and in the seas of Scotland. However, development in Scotland's seas must take account of the need to protect and enhance biodiversity and be based on a sound scientific assessment of the environmental impact of any new development.

To ensure success in delivering Scotland's commitments to the 42 and 80 per cent reductions, we must involve the people of Scotland. That is, of course, what both the climate challenge fund, which is £27.4 million over three years, and the comprehensive energy package, which is £55.8 million per year, are about. The first allows community groups to make their contribution to tackling climate change; and the second aims both to help the most vulnerable members of our society and to reduce energy demand. There are also opportunities in public transport. I am sure that the minister is aware of the proposals for the fast link between Glasgow and Renfrew. I recommend it as a fine opportunity to cut carbon demand and improve transport links between Glasgow and Renfrew.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should conclude now.

Bill Wilson: I will finish today not with McGonagall—I know that some members will be disappointed—but with Burns, who wrote:

“The billows on the ocean,
The breezes idly roaming”.

Therein lies Scotland's future. Today the deluded swains are the followers of nuclear energy and the climate change-denying dupes of multinational corporations.

In past times, Voltaire said:

“We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation”.

Once again, Scotland has much to contribute. The question is: will she be gagged and restrained, or will she have the power to act and speak out?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think you were okay with Burns, but perhaps not with Voltaire.

15:54

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I cannot follow that.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Nor would we want you to.

Nanette Milne: I am pleased to be taking part in this debate on climate change. I hope that the debate will send out a signal to all those who are participating in the Copenhagen meeting that the Scottish Parliament takes seriously its commitment to the stringent targets that we set when we voted unanimously earlier this year to support the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. That groundbreaking legislation should ensure that we set an example for others to follow in meeting the unprecedented environmental challenge that nations around the globe currently face.

Despite the recent severe flooding episodes that have afflicted people in the north of England, the Borders and parts of north-east Scotland, which were terrible for them, our problems are as nothing compared to the devastation that people in some of the poorest and most heavily populated parts of the world will face unless early action is taken to achieve a significant reduction in the volume of greenhouse gases that are emitted from our terrestrial activities.

Of course, there have always been cyclical variations in climate, but I have seen enough in recent years to convince me that there is more going on than that. The increase in the melting of the Arctic ice cap in 2008, which was sufficient to clear the north-west and north-east shipping passages north of Canada and Siberia of ice for the first time in probably thousands of years; the loss of glacier snow in the French Alps, which requires artificial snow to secure the ski season; the extended growing season in our gardens; and the early mating of birds—to name but a few examples—all convince me that global warming is real and that urgent action must be taken if world temperature rises are to be kept below the critical 2°C, above which there are likely to be very serious consequences of flooding or drought for vulnerable countries.

The consequences of unmitigated climate change pose a long-term threat to political stability and economic growth. In a recent speech, William Hague MP, the shadow Foreign Secretary, said:

“in areas dogged by conflict, instability, terrorism, poverty and scarcity, global warming has the ability to act as a ‘threat multiplier’. Disagreements between countries could increase as tensions rise and existing problems are exposed.”

He went on to say that the 2,500 mile-long “security barrier” that has been constructed by India along its border with Bangladesh to reduce existing high levels of migration would be put

under enormous strain by the potential increase in migrant numbers were the sea level to rise by just 1m, which would permanently flood a fifth of Bangladesh and endanger the lives of some 30 million people. That is just one example—there are many more in other parts of the world where global warming is a serious political threat, as well as a physical threat, to the people who live there.

There is a growing international acceptance that action needs to be taken urgently to tackle climate change, that the developed world has to be serious about cutting its emissions of greenhouse gases, and that it must support developing countries to allow them to undertake the significant action that is required if they are to do likewise.

Of course, Scotland's contribution to global emissions is relatively small, but given that it is the birthplace of the industrial revolution, it is right that we take some responsibility for climate change. We have the proven ability to show leadership in the fight-back against it, and our commitment to the stiff targets that were set in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 show that we as a country are serious about that. We must strive to ensure that the targets are met if we are to do our fair share in fighting climate change.

As others have said, to be successful we must all work together as countries, Governments, businesses and individuals. We must all do our bit. It is heartening that at an individual level more and more people are looking at their lifestyles: they are seeking to reduce their energy consumption, improve insulation of their homes, reduce the amount of waste that they send to landfill and generally be aware of the importance of reducing our carbon footprints.

However, Governments have to take the lead and I am encouraged by my party's statement at UK level. I will repeat Alex Johnstone's quotation, because it is important: UK Conservatives have said that any deal agreed at Copenhagen must be a rigorous one that

"binds the world in a common commitment to keep the rise of global temperatures to below 2 degrees C, which finds an international mechanism to help people in the poorest countries to protect themselves against future floods, famine and drought, in addition to what they need to help relieve their current poverty, and which stops the destruction of the world's rain forest."

Within the past two weeks, five members of the shadow Cabinet, including the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, have made significant speeches committing a future Conservative Government to giving high priority to caring for the environment and putting forward proposals for action, should we be fortunate enough to form the UK Government after next year's general election.

My party is serious about fighting climate change and about achieving the stringent targets

that were laid down in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. In agreement with the motion that we are debating today, we look to the participants in the Copenhagen talks to be ambitious in their efforts to fight global warming and to reach a political agreement that will, at the earliest possible opportunity, lead to a legally binding commitment to keep the rise in world temperatures at or below 2°C.

16:00

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I hope that the minister finds his visit to Copenhagen as informative as those of us who went there in April as part of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's energy inquiry found ours to be. He will be interested to learn that, in a leafy suburb of Copenhagen, we visited a waste combustion plant that supplies the district heating system that serves that community. I hope that he will agree that we must take a similar approach to energy from waste, if Scotland's local councils are to meet their obligations to reduce landfilling with waste, and if ministers are to meet their targets for renewable heat. We need political leadership to achieve that.

We discovered that district heating is the rule in Denmark rather than the exception. Many district heating systems there use fossil fuels. In central Copenhagen, for example, the minister may be warmed on his visit by a heating system that is fuelled by steam from a coal-fired power station, because district heating is recognised in Denmark as being beneficial in its own right, whether it is fuelled by coal, gas, waste or wood. The reason is simple: if all of a town or city is served by a single source of heat, it will by definition make far more efficient use of energy than if every single household has its own separate heat source. Even more significantly, if a district heating system is already in place, the process of conversion to a lower carbon fuel in the future will be relatively straightforward and is likely to have a very significant impact in respect of carbon reduction and climate change.

In the urban context, the kind of scheme that the minister will see in Copenhagen offers the opportunity for mass conversion of households to low-carbon energy in the future. It is crucial that that happens on a larger scale.

The minister recognised, during the passage of what is now the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, the relevance of district heating and of combined heat and power. He was generous in acknowledging the example that has been set by Aberdeen Heat and Power Ltd, which leads in this country in provision of combined heat and power to domestic properties. He also agreed to alter the rating position of CHP schemes to match the

position in England, where more of the schemes are exempt from non-domestic rates. I am pleased that ministers have since then published draft regulations and consulted on them. I hope that they will acknowledge the concern that has been raised in that consultation that simply to replicate the English regulations will not, on its own, do the trick, because regulations south of the border are not designed to take into account the common areas that are typical of many high-rise properties here in Scotland.

I would not expect to chide Stewart Stevenson very often for being unwilling to take a different approach from England, but in this case I hope that ministers will take a lead and go beyond even the good example that has been set by Westminster, in order to reflect Scottish circumstances and Scottish housing, and that they will go further to reduce the costs that face those who seek to set up district heating or combined heat and power schemes in Scotland in the future.

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): I suggest that Lewis Macdonald does not need to go as far as Copenhagen to see such schemes. He mentioned the ones in Aberdeen, but he may also be interested in the one in Banchory, which has received from the Scottish Government grants to develop biomass.

Lewis Macdonald: Indeed. As Maureen Watt says, biomass is the fuel for a number of schemes in rural Scotland. That is a good development and one that I wholly support. In the urban context, it may not be possible immediately to do that, which is why I think that a different approach is needed.

It is not simply a case of reducing local tax liability if we are to see the new approach happen: we also need political will and Government investment. I am disappointed that, in the current financial year, Scottish ministers have not invested in district heating any of the £2 million in consequential that they received because of Westminster spending in that area. I hope that we will see a different approach. That £2 million could go a long way in advancing CHP schemes, such as are being planned in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, or the community heating aspects of the sustainable Glasgow project. Scottish Government spending on new CHP in those cities would send a positive message to all the communities and businesses that are considering making more efficient use of energy by capturing surplus heat. The Sustainable Development Commission advised ministers to progress renewable heat by supporting district heating schemes in the short term, even when those may start life by using fossil fuels. Such schemes will make immediate carbon savings and help to cut fuel poverty, and beyond 2020 their conversion to renewable fuels

will enable us to make a step change in efforts to meet low-carbon targets, given the scale involved.

The Scottish Government's consultation on energy efficiency acknowledged those points, but its renewable heat action plan for Scotland did not. I hope that ministers will consider aligning both strategies behind support for district heating. If they do so, they will put Scotland in a much better position to be able to meet its carbon reduction targets in the years ahead.

As Sarah Boyack said, we want the Scottish Government to deliver on its promises of support for microgeneration of renewable electricity and domestic-scale production of renewable heat. It is therefore important that Scotland should adopt the right system of feed-in tariffs for microrenewable generation. The trade association for the electrical industry in Scotland, Select, has devised a scheme in line with the relevant European Union directive, but there seems to be some doubt about how certification for microgeneration will be done. I hope that the minister can clarify the position and ensure that the scheme that is adopted does not place an undue burden on consumers who want to install microgeneration in their homes.

16:06

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): There is little doubt that climate change is happening, and we do not have to look far for evidence of the change. There has been record rainfall in a single day, when a foot of rain fell in 24 hours. November, which is normally a wet month, was the wettest month ever recorded. According to the World Meteorological Organization, the first decade of this millennium is set to be the warmest since records began 250 years ago.

The effects of climate change on biodiversity are tragic, and climate change affects not just plants and animals but us, sometimes with tragic results, as we saw recently in Cumbria. Last month in Hawick, in my region, the voluntary flood group sprang into action for the first time since the damaging flood of 2005. Flooding has become a major issue throughout the region. Bowmont valley's worst flood in living memory was followed the next year by a similar flood, and problems at the Whitesands area of Dumfries are worsening.

As I said at question time today, the Hawick flood group and local NFU Scotland members said before and after the recent floods that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency should, in order to prevent flooding, allow clearing of gravel and dislodged trees from rivers, as used to happen. We must revisit the issue as climate change makes flooding events more common.

Further afield, droughts in Australia mean that once-viable farmland is becoming unsuitable for

vital food production. Who knows what medicines might be lost to us if more plants in rainforests and elsewhere become extinct? As we all know, the loss of Arctic ice threatens to alter our planet for generations to come. The north-west passage is more navigable this year than it has ever been and the extent of Arctic ice in 2007, 2008 and 2009 was at its lowest since records began. Melting ice not only raises the sea level but releases trapped methane—a greenhouse gas—into the atmosphere, in a vicious circle that will further increase global warming.

We must concentrate on what we can do to combat the threat. Individuals can all sign up to the 10:10 campaign and pledge to produce 10 per cent less carbon by the end of 2010. There has already been good work in the Parliament. We united to pass the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill in June. I am glad that the minister mentioned forestry, because part of my input to the bill was about preventing the Government from going ahead with the bizarre proposal to sell off a quarter of our public forests.

Rob Gibson: Can Jim Hume tell us the current planting level and explain why planting is at its lowest for many years? What will he do to ensure that there is far more planting?

Jim Hume: It is for the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment to find methods of encouraging forestry. Selling off forests through lifetime leases to private banks would not have helped to encourage planting. There would have been a loss of income from timber and we would have lost control over our forests, whatever the agreements said. As we know, our forests are a necessary resource for industry and are places that communities and tourists can access.

Peaty soils and agriculture can also play an important part. Livestock can play an important part in maintaining our countryside and providing natural fertilisation of soils. Grazing land encourages the growth of plants, which absorb CO₂.

Our Liberal Democrat minister Ross Finnie started the process by being the first to introduce climate change targets, and now we have set ambitious targets for Scotland with the 2009 act, which is widely recognised. At a recent European and External Relations Committee meeting, we were reliably informed that Scotland is seen as a leading light in terms of climate change targets. Therefore, it was a case of double standards for Mr Miliband not to allow the Scottish Government to attend Copenhagen officially, as Jack McConnell attended the earth summit in 2002.

We must also remember that it was the Lib Dems who held out for 42 per cent by 2020 in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. We remained

unswayed throughout the process. However, we all know that the targets mean nothing unless we achieve them.

The much-fanfared heating insulation scheme will spend a third of its funding on administration, which is a bit concerning, and not a penny will be spent south of the central belt, which is a concern for my area. Climate change measures should not be a postcode lottery. They should also not be a country lottery. The key nation in the world is the USA. If it does not sign up to legally binding targets, there is a threat that others, such as Australia, Japan and Canada, will follow suit. That would be a backward step for us all. Climate change is happening now and action is needed now.

The Government motion is correct to focus on the world threat of climate change, especially in vulnerable developing countries. We have started the process in Scotland, and the UK Government needs to follow with a 42 per cent reduction by 2020. Europe can be a big player in influencing world policy, so I urge all the delegates at Copenhagen to come out with a worthy successor to the Kyoto protocol that will ensure action now to tackle global warming head on.

16:11

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): The Copenhagen conference has been billed as the most important international conference for a generation, and rightly so. A great deal is riding on the decisions that will be made by the men and women who have the responsibility to deliver a fair and binding agreement that will prevent the world from careering headlong into a man-made catastrophe.

Other members have spoken about many of the facets that must be included in any legally binding agreement, but I will focus initially on just one: adequate finance for mitigation against, and adaptation to, climate change in developing countries.

The Prime Minister has proposed that \$100 billion should be raised globally per year for such a fund. That would certainly be a very welcome step in the right direction if it could be globally agreed, and it is good to see that the UK Government has taken a lead on the issue. However, non-governmental organisations such as Christian Aid believe that developed countries must go further than that and that at least \$150 billion is needed. I hope that progress like that can be made in Copenhagen.

Of even more concern is the UK's proposal that 10 per cent of such climate financing should come from the international aid budget. Such a move would be retrograde and unacceptable. Climate

finance is, after all, compensation from developed countries that have got rich by jeopardising the sustainability of the planet. It must not come at the expense of an already overstretched aid budget.

Although I will not travel to Copenhagen with some of my committee colleagues, I am pleased that the minister will attend to take part in events that will focus on our ambitious climate change framework. With this Parliament having passed some of the world's most ambitious legislation, it is only right that we should have the opportunity to set out our proposals to others on the world stage. The world is watching and those who are taking part in the negotiations need to hear clear examples from countries that have set tough and challenging targets. That is a policy area where Scotland is, and should remain, an example to the rest of the world. Therefore, it is unfortunate that the UK Government has, by not allowing the minister to be part of the official UK delegation, not taken the opportunity to promote the Scottish Parliament's act with pride on a world stage, and to challenge others to raise their game as Scotland has done.

Despite that recent decision, I am pleased that the minister has said in the past that he has a good working relationship with his Westminster counterpart. I welcome that, because progress towards Scotland meeting its ambitious climate change targets will be directly influenced by a range of measures that are reserved to Westminster or governed by EU-wide regulations. For example, the emissions reduction targets for the EU emissions trading scheme—the largest carbon-trading scheme in the world—are set at EU level. Key fiscal levers to tackle climate change—including vehicle excise duty, fuel duty, driver licensing, speed limits on motorways and landfill tax—are all reserved to Westminster, while responsibility for road pricing, smarter transport measures and transport infrastructure are generally devolved. Those are but a few examples to demonstrate how we must all work together constructively across the Parliaments and political divides to deliver real change.

The motion rightly recognises that we must now focus on practical implementation. With the powers that the Scottish Government has, I am pleased that steps are being taken towards meeting the ambitious targets that are set in the 2009 act. First, with heat generation being responsible for no less than 50 per cent of current energy demands in Scotland, it is pleasing that the renewable heat action plan will ensure that the topic gets the attention that it requires, although progress in that area will also have to rely on action at UK level, with the renewable heat initiative that is planned for 2011. However, by targeting information at the biggest users of heat, by developing skills, by investing in renewable

heat installations and by taking a number of other measures, the Scottish Government is making a welcome contribution to expanding the role of renewable heat. By 2020, in Scotland, heat from renewables will be more than 11 per cent of the total, which will be a welcome increase from the present level of 1.4 per cent.

Secondly, but on a similar theme, funding for microgeneration has been tripled, which is another measure that will help householders, small businesses and communities play a role in meeting climate change targets and, which is important, in creating jobs.

Thirdly, I welcome the continued good news that is generated by the climate challenge fund, which is yet another investment in community innovation to tackle climate change. Edinburgh benefited to the tune of £1.2 million in the recent round of awards, including £750,000 for the Bike Station project, which helps employers help staff to cut down on their car use, and £340,000 to support the University of Edinburgh in taking student and staff cars off the road. Those are local Edinburgh examples, but forward-thinking projects up and down the country also benefited in the same round.

As we look forward to debating the budget next week, we should welcome the Scottish Government's carbon assessment of the budget. If we are to expect and demand change in the approach of businesses, communities and individuals, it is only right and proper that Government, too, casts a critical eye over its own actions and policies. That is another welcome innovation that is truly world leading.

I join those who are urging—indeed, demanding—an ambitious agreement from Copenhagen. I support the Government's call for a renewed focus on practical action and I continue to support the leadership that the Government has shown in that regard.

16:17

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I apologise to members and to the minister for missing the first couple of minutes of his speech. No doubt, given past practice, he would have told us how he will get to Copenhagen. There is an interesting debate to be had about the sensible use of air travel in particular circumstances versus the approach that Mr Harvie has taken in such circumstances. Perhaps we need to debate that issue more widely.

No one could doubt, however, Stewart Stevenson's personal commitment to reduce his carbon footprint, nor could they doubt the efforts that he and his officials have made to map out what might need to be done to take forward the

climate change targets. My concern is whether the Government as a whole is committed, not just in principle but in practice, to bringing forward the choices that are needed to meet the targets that we have set ourselves. The focus has to be on delivery. I understand what Shirley-Anne Somerville said about the minister going to Copenhagen and talking about the example that might be set by Scotland's legislation, but how much more effective would it be if we could go to Copenhagen and talk to people about the example that we have set by our delivery of climate change reductions? Delivery, delivery, delivery is what is important; everything else, I am afraid, is rhetoric.

Even within his portfolio, Mr Stevenson presides over a twin-track strategy in which the different elements seem to point in opposite directions. He gives us all the right words on climate change, but the actions in transport often go in the opposite direction. I am not in Mr Harvie's fundamentalist anti-roads camp, but it seems to me that there has been no sign yet of a fundamental review of the road building programme to take account of climate change commitments. That is only one dimension of the Government's budget and spending profile that has to be looked at in the context of climate change.

If we are to be serious about climate change, we almost have to go back to first principles and ask, "What do we need to do to actually make the kind of changes that we're saying we want to happen?" We cannot have a situation whereby the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 exists in a vacuum and we occasionally genuflect to it and say, "Aren't we all wonderful? We've passed the most challenging climate change bill in the world," but do nothing whatsoever about it in reality.

In our discussions on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, the key issue for me from the beginning was the need for an interim target. I thought that it was entirely pointless to talk about what we will do by 2050 if we could not talk sensibly about what we will do by 2020. One reason for that is the urgency of the need, given what we know about what is happening to the global climate. A second reason is that, if we did not include a 2020 target, it would be all too easy for Governments to keep deferring action by saying that the process would start tomorrow rather than today. In fact, we really needed to start the process yesterday and yesterday and yesterday.

We will not know whether the current interim target has been set at the right level until we get the Committee on Climate Change's report, which was due to be published by the end of the year but which we now hear will come out in February or March. We know that whatever agreement is reached at Copenhagen will affect what we can do

here, but whatever happens in Copenhagen should not be an excuse to lower the target. If the target needs to be revised, any revision should happen in the context of what is achievable here in Scotland. There must be a scientific proper analysis of what we can practically do in a rigorous way to take forward the agenda. We need to base our approach on the science of what can be achieved, as well as on the science that describes the trends in global warming.

Members know that I have a particular interest in development issues, on which there was much discussion in the context of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. We considered what impact such measures would have on the wider world and how our actions on climate change need to be integrated with the aid and support that we give to other countries. I am not sure whether the Government has yet established its final position, although it previously opposed Labour's proposals. I would certainly like ministers to make a clear statement on how their climate change proposals will interface with our relationships with other countries.

Let me end by perhaps disagreeing once again—in a good way, I hope—with Patrick Harvie. He said that a consensus exists in Scotland on what we should be doing, and I agree that we have a political consensus in favour of tackling climate change. He is right to say that we do not seem to have quite as many deniers of climate change in Scotland as perhaps are found in other places—although they might just be a bit more silent in Scotland and do not speak up quite as loudly as they do elsewhere—but I do not think that we should waste any time by focusing on climate change deniers.

However, a crucial element of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was a public engagement strategy, which should tackle the indifference and lack of knowledge about climate change, both about the problem and about what practical steps we can take. That is our enemy here. If we can engage the whole of civic Scotland including the churches, the schools and everyone with an interest in the issue—as well as those who are perhaps not sufficiently interested yet, but who are demanding knowledge and need to be informed—we can develop that strategy to ensure that it makes a significant difference. The public engagement strategy might actually be the most influential part of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 if it engages the whole people of Scotland. That is certainly the provision that I was personally involved in during consideration of the bill and of which I am proudest. The public engagement strategy won commitment from across the parties, so I hope that members from all political sides will be involved in that.

I look forward very much to the minister's strategy being published in the next couple of months.

16:24

Patrick Harvie: Perhaps it has been that kind of debate, but even though Des McNulty said that he would disagree with me, he then said things that I do not really disagree with. I welcome all the speeches that we have heard in the debate. Many have stressed the importance of the consensus, to such an extent as that exists, that we now have. Let me say again that I agree about that.

However, sometimes the things that are not said in such debates are the most important. For example, I do not recall any member answering the questions that I raised on the extent to which we can allow aviation to grow. I will be interested to hear what the minister says about that in his closing remarks.

Can we contemplate a future for Scotland if we allow the projected growth in aviation, which still seems to inform Government policy, to proceed, or do we need to do what the UK Committee on Climate Change has suggested or, indeed, go further and fly less instead of more? Any Government minister for climate change will be able to come to the chamber and read out a long list of the things that he is doing well—the actions that are busily being taken in every department in every office of the Scottish Government—but the other list of achievements, which are proudly announced when we debate the economy, is very different. That list includes infrastructure and economic policy decisions that will generate higher rather than lower levels of emissions. We never hear that list of achievements being read out in climate change debates. It is the policies that ministers never mention in climate change debates that we need to face up to, and we need to begin to do that now, rather than continually pat ourselves on the back for achieving consensus.

I am sorry that I will not have time to reply to every member who spoke in the debate, all of whom made important and serious points, but I will try to respond to what some members said. Sarah Boyack spoke optimistically—and reasonably so—about the chances of a constructive deal being agreed at Copenhagen, even if it cannot be made a legally binding treaty quite yet. She also stressed the UK Government's role in providing leadership and identified the Scottish Government's shortcomings on electric vehicles, community heating, household renewables and translating ambition into action, which has been my theme, too. Even on issues such as energy efficiency and cutting our energy demand, we do not have consensus. We agree on the fuel poverty objectives, but we have not yet found a way to

incorporate the climate change and energy security objectives, which we must work on consistently. We need to recognise that a three-pronged approach is necessary. Some of us favour a universal approach; others favour targeting. For many years, our targeting has failed.

Alex Johnstone expressed concern that he had not dragged his feet enough during consideration of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill but, seriously, I recognise his desire to represent the country's economic interests as he sees them, even if we disagree on the basic assumptions behind that. In this Parliament, we heard nothing of the irrational, anti-science rhetoric that we hear elsewhere. No MSP could fairly be labelled as the Melanie Phillips of Holyrood, and we can be extremely grateful for that.

The consensus on intent has been hard won, but we must not delude ourselves that consensus covers every detail of action. Alex Johnstone and I will not agree on the emphasis that he placed on the role of the free market, but I put to him an issue that the operation of the publicly owned banks raises. RBS is still investing substantial amounts of what is now our money in tar sands, which could be one of the most polluting fuels on the planet. Alex Johnstone might point out to me that if RBS were to pull out of that, another bank would step in to fill the hole in investment. That illustrates the fundamental problem with leaving our efforts on climate change in the hands of the free market.

Alison McInnes recognised that the issue of Scottish ministers having formal status in the UK delegation is less important than what is said, and I agree. We should move on from that debate and work together to ensure that we make Scotland's case for other developed countries to take more ambitious action.

Like Des McNulty, Alison McInnes also mentioned politicians' personal responsibilities when it comes to our travel choices. I do not want to make an issue of that right now, but in the future it will be for the Parliament, corporately, to take action on the development of a meaningful sustainable transport policy, because it will be a matter of shame if we cannot provide leadership in that area. There might be times when using a more sustainable form of transport will take more time out of our lives or cost more money, which might mean taking fewer people or going on visits less often, but we will have to do something on that front.

I have covered the banks issue that Rob Gibson raised, on which I wanted to reply, so I finish by replying to Pauline McNeill, who talked about making tackling climate change part of our lives. That means expressing priorities in ways that are relevant to real people. Phrases such as

“alternatives to GDP” sound a bit academic and pointy headed. Measuring and valuing the things that matter, such as human relationships, good health, time to spend with our families and happiness, are among the ideas that we need to communicate properly to people. If we do that, we can replace the shallow and selfish values of consumerism with something more humane, viable and liveable. That is the challenge that we must resolve before we can say that we have consensus on action.

16:30

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Consensus has been a consistent theme this afternoon, but that has not prevented the debate from being usefully robust. There is consensus on the seriousness of the challenges that we face with climate change and on the scale of the response that is needed. As Patrick Harvie said, the chamber is blessed in harbouring no so-called flat-earthers, knuckle dragging or otherwise. My colleague Alison McInnes and other members have stated and demonstrated that that consensus does not reflect a lack of willingness to debate and disagree on the actions that we need to take and the timeframe in which they must be taken.

As all eyes focus on Copenhagen, it is right that members take pride in our achievements to date while they recognise and restate that the hard work is still very much ahead of us. In that context, I hope that ministers accept that the concerns that Sarah Boyack, Alex Johnstone and other members have expressed about slower than expected progress in certain areas since the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was passed were expressed in the hope that the issues can be addressed. Given the timeframes within which we now operate and the targets that we have set ourselves, particularly in the interim, we simply do not have the luxury of allowing progress to stall. Indeed, it is increasingly apparent that we stand little chance of achieving our longer-term ambitions without early, radical action.

We should not be under the illusion that significant behavioural changes will not be needed, particularly by those of us who are fortunate to have been brought up in the developed world. There are certainly some quick wins that will require relatively little effort or resources from us, but, even in the case of energy efficiency, the need to scale up what we do is becoming ever more pressing. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee identified that recently. There are significant opportunities for developing and exploiting the technologies that will drive our low-carbon and zero-carbon economies, but it would be wrong to delude ourselves into thinking that technological development will offset

the need for major behavioural change on our part. I accept that those concerns lay behind Patrick Harvie's decision to lodge his amendment to the motion, but a competition to see who has the hairiest hair shirt serves limited purpose. We made our statement of intent in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Like Patrick Harvie and others, I fully intend to ensure that the Government and those who are responsible for delivering its objectives—I include myself in that, as Pauline McNeill included herself—are held to account regularly and robustly.

Of course, however much we are invited to pat ourselves on the back for adopting our legislation, we need to be realistic about the direct impact that it will have on global emissions levels. As Alison McInnes said, Scotland's achievement of emissions reductions of 42 per cent, 80 per cent or even 100 per cent will register only a blip on the global scale. Equally, it would be wrong to underestimate the influence that we can still have in Copenhagen and beyond. I have little doubt that the provisions of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 will be cast up in the faces of legislators and regulators from around the world as evidence of what could be adopted elsewhere. I am sure that that will be Richard Dixon's mission for the rest of the week when his train finally arrives in Copenhagen, assuming that a free bike is still available to get him to the conference centre.

I agree entirely with the point that Des McNulty made about delivery. However, it is regrettable and was somewhat petty that UK ministers excluded Scottish ministers from being part of the formal delegation, although I remind Bill Wilson that loving the saltire does not require people to dress up in it every day of the week.

Of course, Scotland's influence ought to be felt in a more direct and practical sense. With its competitive lead in the development of marine energy technology—principally wave and tidal technology—Scotland is ideally placed to play its full part in leading a global renewables revolution and harnessing and exporting technological and supply chain expertise in the years ahead. In that regard, I make my now customary plea to the Government to introduce a dedicated marine research and development scheme to build on the success of the wave and tidal energy support—WATES—scheme. That, with an urgent focus on addressing grid requirements, is key to unlocking the potential of that important sector.

It is worth noting that there are real concerns about the approach that is being taken by ministers with regard to the proposals for new coal-fired generation at Hunterston, as Patrick Harvie said. I accept the potential benefits that CCS can deliver in the future and fully support Scottish Power's bid to pilot a scheme at scale at

Longannet, but there is a world of difference between retrofitting CCS to reduce existing emissions and sanctioning new-build generation—with its consequent emissions—unabated or only partially abated by CCS. I am sure that we will return to that issue in the chamber in the weeks and months ahead.

In the meantime, with the focus squarely on Copenhagen, let me make clear what I believe needs to emerge. As others have said, Copenhagen needs to produce a fair, ambitious and binding agreement. Despite earlier pessimistic predictions, it appears that the outcome is back in the balance. I do not think that portentous declarations that we have two weeks in which to save the planet are accurate or even helpful, but there is no doubt that we are running out of time to strike the type of binding deal that is necessary to avert the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

The paradox of the developed world creating the lion's share of the problems and the developing world bearing the lion's share of the consequences is shaming, as Stewart Stevenson said. As well as limiting our emissions in the developed world and tying the developing world into tough targets, a properly funded finance package is therefore crucial, as Shirley-Anne Somerville said. That support—like other steps that we must take as a matter of increasing urgency—cannot become a victim of the squeeze on public finances.

We have been treated to a strangely stimulating flavour of consensus this afternoon. Alex Johnstone's attempt to fold Patrick Harvie into a warm, consensual embrace was particularly remarkable. Indeed, if such a thing is possible, the challenge of achieving a fair, ambitious and binding agreement in Copenhagen is not beyond us.

16:36

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer and welcome the Government's debate on climate change. I offer our party's support for the motion, as far as it goes.

Every Government and individual has a duty to leave things better than they found them; after all, that is how society advances. However, at the moment, the UK Government is failing in that objective. Britain is close to bankruptcy due to the Labour Government's mismanagement of the economy, and climate change is now threatening to change our planet, certainly not for the better and perhaps irreversibly. Polar, Greenland and tundra snow and ice are melting. Feedback loops are reducing the reflective, protective cover that our planet needs and, as Nanette Milne noted, we are moving towards a +2°C world. We therefore

need to start taking real decisions that will begin to reduce our carbon output now.

We have heard from the minister about the benefits of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which we all supported, and the need for Copenhagen to come to legally binding and deliverable objectives. Sarah Boyack and Alex Johnstone spoke about that, and the Conservatives agree. However, results from that act are some way off, and we need to take implementing action now—although we all have different ideas about what needs to be done, as Patrick Harvie noted.

I agree with the Met Office and William Hague that climate change is one of the biggest threats that humanity faces. In Scotland, some of the likely effects on us will be increased flooding and storminess, sea level rises leading to coastal inundation, and tidal surges threatening both the upper Clyde and, particularly, the upper Forth.

If we in Scotland expect our aim to reduce carbon emissions to be taken seriously, we must start by accepting that nuclear power generation must be included in the mix of energy provision. In a war situation such as we are now in, with our country threatened by climate change—one has only to remember the recent flooding—we must throw every resource that we have at fighting off the challenge. In Scotland, we cannot be regarded as being serious about winning the battle unless the Government accepts that nuclear power generation is a low-risk, proven technology that can quickly reduce our carbon output.

Although the authors of the Wood Mackenzie report, which was published yesterday, were expressly instructed by the Scottish Government not to consider nuclear power as an option for Scotland, they obliquely noted that nuclear power will continue to play a role in the wider European market. That is as close as they could come to endorsing nuclear power without actually saying it.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

John Scott: No, I will not.

The Scottish power-generating industry believes that nuclear power must be part of the future mix—although Bill Wilson does not—even with limited supplies of uranium available to us.

Bill Wilson: Will the member take an intervention?

John Scott: I am sorry, but I have a lot to say.

Yesterday's appointment of Ian Marchant as chair of the 2020 delivery group is very much to be welcomed. He has spoken positively of the need to embrace nuclear power and renewables, and I hope that he and his group will convince our Government of the necessity of that mix.

We need to consider planting more trees, as well as considering geo-engineering solutions to absorb more carbon, although I do not believe that it will make strategic sense to plant up good agricultural land—that is the farmer in me speaking—which must be kept available for food production in a daily more hungry world and a strategically more vulnerable UK, in food-production terms. Indeed, as John Beddington has recently pointed out, by 2030—only 20 years from now—we will need to produce 50 per cent more food worldwide using less land, less water, less energy and less pesticide while producing no more carbon than we currently do. That means that Scotland, the UK and Europe must again consider genetically modified crops if we are to be considered serious in our intention to feed future generations without increasing our carbon output.

In addition, we in Scotland have to consider ways of protecting ourselves from the increased risk of sea level rise and storm surges, which pose a real threat to the upper Forth and Clyde. At the moment, an opportunity exists—as the minister is aware—to protect the upper Forth by creating a barrage across the Forth instead of building a new bridge. A barrage would protect Grangemouth oil refinery and Longannet from tidal surges and sea level rise, as well as protecting Bo'ness, Grangemouth and Kincardine. In addition, it could take all the traffic, and more, that a new bridge could carry and, given the tidal rise and fall in the Forth, it could also generate electricity, which would enable it to pay for itself in the long term.

A Forth barrage would provide several bangs for the one buck: storm surge protection for towns and key installations, the provision of a new Forth crossing and the generation of renewable electricity. Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern Energy might consider offering to develop and finance that idea, as it would, in the long run, provide renewable base-load generating capacity and free up £2 billion in a shrunken Scottish Government budget while providing a market solution to some of the above problems.

We wish Stewart Stevenson well at Copenhagen, and we regret that he has not been properly included as part of a UK delegation, as Shirley-Anne Somerville noted. Given how much the Labour Government at Westminster talks about inclusion, it is bizarre how exclusive it becomes when confronted with the realities of the devolution settlement that it created. As is the case with the economy and the stalling for years over the development of a nuclear programme, the Labour Government's inability to confront realities and situations of its own making when they occur serves the country poorly.

Procrastination is the thief of time, and we have little time left to start reducing our carbon output, as Des McNulty acknowledged.

16:43

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): This has been a really good debate with a lot of excellent input. I absolutely agree with the minister that we have a moral duty to deal with climate change.

The Scottish Parliament has a good record on climate change. We have been recognised throughout the world for the groundbreaking Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 that we passed earlier this year. As Sarah Boyack said, it is radical legislation that takes a radical approach. The 2009 act has been strengthened by the widespread endorsement that it has received from organisations that campaigned for strong climate change legislation. I pay tribute to those organisations for their invaluable input to the development of that act. Undoubtedly, those organisations have helped to win the hearts and minds of many people in Scotland. We need only witness the number of people who turned up at the wave demonstration on Saturday.

That said, there are still some who doubt or even deny that climate change is a reality. They will seize on any excuse to belittle the science and denounce action on climate change, as Des McNulty said. However, we know that the evidence is overwhelming and we should not allow ourselves to be distracted from the challenge ahead.

The longest journey starts with a single step. We should never underestimate the importance of individual actions. The cumulative impact of millions of people making different choices—from children who learn to switch off lights to motorists who leave the car and walk—can make a massive contribution. That message needs to be constantly reinforced through public engagement and participation.

I appreciate the verbal and written commitments from the Government, and I know that some things can take time to sort out, but time is something that we do not have much of, especially given the size of the task that is ahead of us. We need action now, and we need to know that the plans are progressing quickly and not getting lost in the corridors of power.

It has often been observed that the longer we take to get things moving, the more we have to do. There are, of course, many benefits from moving on quickly. Investing in energy efficiency—which Lewis Macdonald mentioned—recycling, renewables, public transport and active travel will bring benefits beyond the mitigation of climate change; it will benefit the economy, the

environment and people's health, wealth and wellbeing.

We need to make progress, and we must involve the public and public bodies. A public engagement strategy is essential. We need to move forward together as a country to tackle climate change. Our local authorities and other public bodies have a crucial role to play in taking action against climate change. They have a public duty to consider what they do, and in achieving their aims they must consider how they are meeting the climate change objectives.

Local authorities can help by providing better insulation; using energy more efficiently; using microgeneration for new and upgraded buildings; improving public transport and making it more accessible; providing family-friendly, flexible working arrangements that reduce commuting and rush-hour traffic; and reducing waste and increasing recycling.

Local authorities can contribute not only through actions in their own organisations, but through their role in supporting and enabling planning, to ensure that communities grow in ways that minimise their carbon footprint; through their role in the local economy, to encourage good practice and the development of green jobs; and through their role in education and training, to raise the awareness of staff and students through courses that take account of climate change opportunities. Public bodies can also contribute through public procurement, as they have enormous power and influence over the ways in which goods and services are delivered.

The Scottish Government is obliged to introduce guidance for public bodies on the implementation of public duties. That guidance needs to be discussed and developed with stakeholders, and the sooner that process begins, the better.

I note the publication this week of Scotland's climate change adaptation framework. It is a step in the right direction and provides some of the information that we need and have been seeking—it will be my reading over Christmas. I look forward to more information on the subject from the 2020 group, the launch of which I attended on Tuesday. I hope that the minister will address the underrepresentation of civic organisations and the scientific community, both of which are essential to the success of the climate change programme.

As I said earlier, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 has been widely acknowledged, but we cannot rest on our laurels; we need to maintain the momentum. I will join my Scottish and UK colleagues in Copenhagen on Sunday. I hope that during the weekend we all influence those in

power to make a major difference, and that negotiations deliver the best possible outcome.

Pauline McNeill, Alison McInnes, Rob Gibson, Shirley-Anne Somerville and Des McNulty have all spoken about the developing countries and the importance of speaking to them, learning from them and ensuring that they have the resources to tackle climate change. We can take on board the needs of those countries in many ways, and I am sure that the discussions will be equally useful in progressing our climate change programme. However, as with the 2009 act, Copenhagen will not be the end of the story. We have an act, but we need to consider how we move forward. Sarah Boyack, Patrick Harvie and Alex Johnstone all spoke about getting on with what we can do. We cannot sit back and say, "Hey, we have had the debate, we have been to Copenhagen and we've got a really good act." We have a lot to do.

Everyone in this chamber has a responsibility, not just in relation to the work that we do, but in relation to our families and our communities. No action is too small; we all have a big job to do. It is about what we do next and how we move on, and—as we have all said—we need to get on with it.

16:49

Stewart Stevenson: I begin by welcoming Cathy Peattie to her new portfolio and thanking her for the considered and interesting contribution that she made in her first speech on the subject. I extend my thanks to colleagues around the building for working with me to enable me to lodge a motion that reflects shared aspirations and belief. That was a good start.

As many have said, climate change is the biggest environmental threat that we face, and 2009 is crucial. We might not have only two weeks to save the world but, as Alison McInnes said, we have two weeks to start to change the world. We have had a mature and useful debate on an enormously complex issue that has generated a lot of good comment. We have disagreed on the detail—that is to be expected—but we are united in common purpose. That is a good foundation on which to build as we go to Copenhagen, not just to talk to people but also to listen to people, because we do not and could not have a monopoly on all the answers.

We laid the groundwork with our world-leading Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and we now have to press ahead with the practical solutions. We have an excellent story to tell about the greening of our energy supply. We launched our 10 energy pledges, and we are comfortably on track to meet our targets to meet 31 per cent of electricity demand from renewable sources by

2011 and 50 per cent by 2020. We are pursuing international partnerships for the Scottish European Green Energy Centre and the saltire prize, which is the largest Government innovation prize in history. We are making Scotland a centre for the key technology of carbon capture and storage, and we have been consulting on energy efficiency and low-carbon vehicles. Mention has been made of the climate challenge fund, under which a panel of people outside Government has ensured that 198 communities have benefited from awards to date.

The purpose of today's debate is to restate for the Copenhagen audience the all-party consensus on the need for strong action. I very much look forward to welcoming Patrick Harvie, Rob Gibson and Cathy Peattie to Copenhagen. I believe that they will be able to come to the reception that we are hosting on Monday evening. I certainly hope to see them there to meet many other people from other countries.

I cannot agree with everything that Patrick Harvie said in his contribution. It is not entirely inappropriate that the nickname for the US dollar is the greenback. We have to help the United States to understand how to live up to that appellation. Turning our back entirely on the free market is unlikely to leave us with the economic resources that will be necessary to deal with climate change. Patrick Harvie said that ever-increasing mobility must stop—I paraphrase his comment—but in the case that we have wholly greened our transport we can of course take a different way forward. Until we have done that, however, moderation has to be our watchword. We are, of course, counting the cost of infrastructure developments, even now.

Patrick Harvie: I welcome the minister's comments on my contribution on mobility, but I note that he has still said nothing on my question on aviation, which I have put to him twice and to the First Minister once. Does the Scottish Government accept the recommendation by the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee on restrictions on aviation growth?

Stewart Stevenson: Aviation represents 4 per cent of our emissions and the figure for the United Kingdom is 6 per cent or so. We strongly support, in particular, the provision of alternative travel arrangements for people through high-speed rail. There is a degree of unanimity about that, even if there are some different views on the detail. Andrew Adonis's support for that way forward at Westminster is a welcome breath of fresh air.

I want to respond to a number of Sarah Boyack's comments. I agree that having Kevin Rudd and Barack Obama in place is probably helpful internationally as they represent two key nations that have to look at the issue differently

from the way in which it has been considered in the past.

Copenhagen cannot simply address the needs and aspirations of the developed world but must find ways of supporting countries that are less able to do that for themselves. It has to ensure that we support their needs in a whole variety of ways.

Our procurement process, which I think Sarah Boyack referred to, increasingly provides access for small companies across Scotland and therefore economic opportunities in our communities. The sustainable travel budget has risen over the period of our Administration. Bus and train budgets are enormous and, of course, the council tax provisions that we put into the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill place a duty on councils. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is working hard on that, and Alex Johnstone made reference to the measure in his speech. The centre right is probably in a minority in the chamber, but it has a legitimate voice and contribution to make. I welcome Alex Johnstone to the debate. He can join our team any time. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I am sorry to interrupt, minister, but could we please have less noise, particularly from members who are entering the chamber? A very important debate is going on.

Stewart Stevenson: The conference of the parties in Copenhagen will talk about targets but must, of course, also talk of delivery. Alison McInnes made that key point. There is also the need to raise public awareness. Until I came into office, I confess that my engagement on the issue was pretty modest. It was a serious wake-up call. I am awake; we must now waken the whole of Scotland.

Rob Gibson talked about the Salter ducks and highlighted the potential for tidal and wave energy in Scotland. Pauline McNeill said that she would have liked to have seen me in Glasgow on Saturday. I am afraid that Lachlan Murdoch McIntosh—my best man—and his wife Jan Reekie were celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary in a village hall in Crail that day. I simply had to be there. I believe that the champagne was from sustainable sources; members do not need to worry about that.

Pauline McNeill mentioned New Delhi. Following my visit to the city in the now-rather-distant past, I am glad to hear that things are getting better and that the three-wheeled tuk-tuks are now more environmentally friendly. I share her aspiration on high-speed rail.

Bill Wilson and other members spoke about Scotland being on the UK delegation. We have a good relationship with UK ministers. I have been

to the past two environment council meetings as part of the UK delegation. The Bella Center in Copenhagen, where the COP15 meeting is taking place, is extremely crowded and so we will be ensconced round the corner in a very comfortable place, from where we can speak to people from across the world. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, minister, but I will have to try again. Could members please be quiet?

Stewart Stevenson: In speaking about flooding episodes, Nanette Milne highlighted an important and fundamental issue. Non-scientists do find it difficult to deal with the scientific debates on the issue, but it is not beyond any of us to understand the very real world impacts that we have seen in Cumbria and the north-east of Scotland. We can understand the issues.

I recently met Yvo de Boer, who is leading the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. He is interested in what we are doing, as others around the world are. A senior official will be on the United Kingdom delegation and, if the bullying that he inflicts on me from time to time is anything to go by, I am sure that Scotland's voice will be heard by Ed Miliband. The BBC survey is hugely encouraging; it shows that two thirds of Scotland's people not only understand the issue but are up for it. As a result of our participation in Copenhagen, we will, of course share, copy and change.

In her references to India, Pauline McNeill talked of standing at the gates of the Taj Mahal, which reminded me of one of the most inspiring set of words from Shah Jahan—words that are appropriate in this context. In commissioning the design of the Taj Mahal, he had these words inscribed on the side of the building:

"Happy are those who dream dreams and are prepared to pay the price to make them come true".

We have a shared dream of a world that is unaffected by the problems of climate change. We share the responsibility to deliver to our successors a world that is better than the one that we inherited. Let us join together on that ambitious mission.

Decision Time

17:00

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

The first question is, that amendment S3M-5378.2, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5378, in the name of Charlie Gordon, on concessionary travel, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5378.1, in the name of Alison McInnes, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5378, in the name of Charlie Gordon, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-5378, in the name of Charlie Gordon, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the recommendation of the *Review of the Scotland Wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People* to include seriously injured armed forces veterans to the scheme but notes with disappointment and concern the review's recommendation to disenfranchise disabled people who receive the lower rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from the scheme; further notes that the review paints a worst-case scenario of the costs of including disabled people who receive the lower rate of DLA and that these costs are open to scrutiny and debate and that the review also played down the positive social impact that the scheme has on people's lives; acknowledges that denying disabled people on the lower rate of DLA access to the scheme will damage the main aims and ethos of the scheme, namely to allow disabled people improved access to services, facilities and social networks by free scheduled bus services and so promote social inclusion and improve health by promoting a more active lifestyle for disabled people; notes that previous local schemes operated in West Lothian and Strathclyde provided people on the lower rate of DLA access to concessionary travel schemes and that they supported the national scheme mirroring their eligibility criteria instead of the stringent criteria that are now adopted; welcomes disability organisations Leonard Cheshire Disability, Learning Disability Alliance Scotland (LDAS), Inclusion Scotland and many more in challenging the review's negative recommendation; considers that disabled people's views, that the national concessionary travel scheme should include people who receive the lower rate of DLA instead of backing the unfair recommendation on eligibility from the review, should be listened to; considers that if the Labour Party wishes this to be the case, it should bring forward a costed proposal to the Budget to show where the resources will be taken from to pay for this; recognises that rural areas suffer disproportionately from bus fare increases or reduced bus services, and calls on the Scottish Government to consider extending eligibility for the national concessionary travel

scheme to include older and disabled people using community transport in rural areas.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5379.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5379, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 3, Against 117, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-5379, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, on climate change, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, having agreed unanimously on a 42% target reduction in Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and an 80% reduction by 2050, agrees that MSPs and Scotland as a whole must focus on the practical implementation of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009; urges that all countries bring forward the most ambitious commitments appropriate to their circumstances early in the talks; looks to participants in Copenhagen to reach a legally binding agreement at the earliest opportunity that will prevent world temperatures rising by more than 2°C, and notes that a failure to do so would threaten vulnerable countries with, for example, inundation and desertification.

World March for Peace and Non-violence

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-5210, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the world march for peace and non-violence. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament endorses the ideals of the World March for Peace and Nonviolence, which set off from New Zealand on UN International Day of Non-Violence on 2 October 2009 and ends in the Andes mountains on 2 January 2010, that call for an end to war, the dismantling of nuclear weapons and an end to all forms of violence including physical, economic, racial, religious, cultural, sexual and psychological; notes that the Peace Torch, which has passed across continents and been greeted by thousands of supporters including Pope Benedict XVI, who offered his blessings to the delegation, will visit the Scottish Parliament on 17 November 2009, and would welcome support for this important endeavour from all those who share these ideals.

17:03

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): I am pleased and honoured, on human rights day, to open this members' business debate on the world march for peace and non-violence, which started in Aotearoa—New Zealand—on 2 October this year and will arrive at its finish in the high Andes on 2 January 2010. There, the flame of peace, which was lit at Hiroshima, the site of the explosion of the first atomic bomb, will be held aloft as the sun rises on a new year of hope for the world. The relevance of 2 October, the start date, is that it is the anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi and the international day of non-violence; the relevance of New Zealand, the start point, is that it allows no foreign military bases on its soil and no nuclear weapons to be stationed there.

Among the signatories who have supported the world march are United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former Ireland President Mary Robinson, former United States President Jimmy Carter, the Dalai Lama and First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond.

I was delighted that, after visiting 40 countries in 50 days on the way to visiting 100 countries in total, the core team of the world march accepted, at very short notice, my invitation to come to Scotland. On 20 November this year, Alexander Mora Mora, a deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica and the envoy for human rights in Latin America, flew into Edinburgh for a two-hour visit, with the flame of peace, on his way from Spain back home to central America.

Prior to coming here, Mr Mora Mora had met Mikhail Gorbachev, Lech Wałęsa and Pope Benedict, but he emphasised, through his interpreter, that it was a matter of major importance that the march and the flame of peace should come to Scotland because this Parliament had made clear its commitment to work to remove nuclear weapons from our land.

Mr Mora Mora also told us that the world march for peace had not received an invitation to visit Westminster, and that Scotland was therefore the only place in the United Kingdom to accept the message that he carried. I express sorrow on behalf of many of our parliamentary colleagues at Westminster, of all parties, who had hoped to welcome the world march delegation as they carried the flame of peace, but who had their hopes dashed. Although it was lobbied for, no invitation was issued from Westminster. The world march for peace has visited Parliaments across the world and many thousands of people have joined it, from Sydney to Los Angeles, from Rabat to St Petersburg; it is shameful that it has been ignored by the UK media. It has been wilfully ignored by the press probably because of the Westminster Government's failure to issue an invitation to the delegation. That is very parochial of the UK media.

Just two days before they came to the Scottish Parliament, the same core team of the world march for peace were received in Berlin by the 10th world summit of Nobel peace prize laureates, with the words:

"For the first time in history an event of this magnitude has been put in motion by the participants themselves. The true strength of this impulse is born in the simple act of one who, out of conscience, joins a dignified cause and shares it with others."

Three days before, the team had been received at the Vatican by the Pope with the blessing:

"May God bless you all."

It is incumbent on all of us here to celebrate the human spirit that has carried the flame of peace, which was lit at Hiroshima, around the world as a symbol of hope and of the belief that there is a better way than war and violence to settle disputes.

The aims of the world march for peace and non-violence have been stated as nuclear disarmament at a global level; the immediate withdrawal of invading troops from occupied territories; the progressive and proportional reduction of conventional weapons; the signing of non-aggression treaties between countries; and the renunciation by Governments of the use of war as a means to resolve conflicts.

Some people might believe that those aims are just pie in the sky or wishful thinking, but the

impact that the world march for peace has had on so many Parliaments and populations around the world suggests that we might be pushing at an open door, even though there will still assuredly be those with vested interests and closed minds.

Scotland might be a small country in square miles, but we carry a big responsibility, as has been demonstrated by the determination of the world march for peace to ensure that this place was one of the stops that it made on its historic journey. Let us not allow the message to falter here. The flame of peace should burn strongly in this place.

17:09

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing this evening's members' business debate in support of the ideals of the world march for peace and non-violence. The march has called for an end to war and the dismantling of nuclear weapons. Those are sentiments with which all members of the Parliament will concur.

I wish to focus on the current proliferation of nuclear weapons and the path to world peace. Conservatives believe that a world free of the threat of nuclear weapons is no less important an issue than tackling climate change.

Although I am not optimistic that total disarmament can be achieved in my lifetime or, possibly, in Bill Kidd's lifetime, far greater progress is being made in pursuit of that goal now than happened in the past. Since the cold war, significant progress has been made on reducing the threat of nuclear weapons. The UK has reduced the total explosive power of its nuclear arsenal by 75 per cent and the US, Russia and France have made significant contributions. However, progress has stagnated in recent times and much more still needs to be done. I am pleased that, this summer, the US and Russia agreed to reduce their arsenals further. Between them, they have about 12,000 nuclear weapons, which is 95 per cent of the world's capacity. They have an outline agreement to cut their stockpiles to fewer than 1,700 weapons each. That is welcome progress.

Even for people who, like me, believe strongly in the need for a deterrent, there is no reason to argue that further reductions cannot be made—an arsenal of 500 weapons would be enough to destroy the world many times over and would not change the fundamental defence strategy of the US or Russia. However, it remains vital that Britain renews its minimum strategic nuclear deterrent.

Reaching a stage at which the world is free of nuclear weapons will be a lengthy journey and, sadly, the suggestion that it will ever be achieved

on a unilateral basis seems to be pie in the sky. We live in a world in which nuclear proliferation continues with the possible participation of rogue states and the possibility of terrorist groups acquiring such weapons. In those circumstances, removal of the UK's deterrent would be the most token of gestures; it would do nothing to change the rationale of countries that wish to gain nuclear capability and it would serve only to reduce our power and influence in an uncertain world.

Nuclear proliferation, not the threat of an accidental or deliberate nuclear war between the major powers, is the real threat. The only way in which to counter that threat and to move towards total disarmament is to work on a multilateral basis. I still recall from my time as a young reporter the bravado, but in my view utter futility, of the city of Dundee unilaterally declaring itself a nuclear-free zone. I recall wondering whether the pilots of the Soviet bombers that regularly flew up the east coast of Scotland on sorties in those days were aware of the Tayside city's nuclear-free status, especially since I lived in nearby St Andrews. In all honesty, I preferred the more tangible deterrent of the two squadrons of fighter aircraft that were strategically positioned at RAF Leuchars with orders to intercept any hostile action by the Russian bears.

Iran's recent posturing in pursuit of its nuclear programme highlights how important it is to take a multilateral approach in trying to prevent nuclear proliferation. Russia and China have been reluctant to impose tough sanctions on Iran because of commercial interests of which we are well aware, but as a result of pressure from the US, the UK, France and Germany, they now seem more likely to favour stiffer sanctions to curtail Iran's nuclear aspirations.

The Conservatives are pleased that the UK Government has adopted several of our party's proposals, including those on action to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency and ensuring that Britain takes a leading role in tackling nuclear proliferation. Of course, we would like the Government to take on still more of our proposals, such as that on action to track and block the illicit trade in nuclear weapons technology and to disrupt the financial networks that support the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

I believe that a nuclear-free world is a realistic ambition—we have been successful in virtually abolishing chemical weapons, which provides real encouragement—but it will be a long and complicated road and require huge co-operation between many countries, first to stop proliferation and then, we hope, to progress to total disarmament. Marches can be hugely important. I do not underestimate the yearning for world peace

and non-violence—I share it—but keeping our guard up in an increasingly dangerous world is every bit as important.

17:14

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Bill Kidd on bringing the debate to the chamber and for issuing the invitation that resulted in Alexander Mora Mora's visit to Scotland on 20 November. That was an achievement of which we should all be proud.

Paragraph 3 of article 2 of the charter of the United Nations states:

"All members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered."

Many of the nation signatories to that charter would do well to remember that statement.

I am absolutely delighted that people across the world have decided to take part in the march for peace. It is fascinating to see who is taking part. The world march was a humanist proposal, but people of various belief systems—people of religious faith or of no faith—and pacifists and non-pacifists are coming together to say, "Enough. What is happening in our world today is ridiculous. There is too much violence of all sorts." That is not simply as if it were just about nuclear weapons; it encompasses the world. We find that more civilians are being killed in conflicts than ever before, because of the changing nature of war. We have Governments that actively carry out what I would say are terrorist acts against their own populations in order to do no more than maintain control.

I am really pleased that Bill Kidd managed to bring the beacon of peace to Scotland, which is so important. For all that we have a military history, which we talk a lot about, we also have a good history of peaceful reconciliation and of finding ways forward in conflict resolution.

I often think that Scotland is in a great position, particularly since the Parliament reconvened more than 10 years ago, to take a bit of a lead in such issues. We are a small nation that is in the process of re-establishing itself through self-government, but we should never underestimate the fact that we have achieved significant constitutional change in a totally peaceful and democratic fashion. For all that we shout and bawl at each other and take stances in here, we should never underestimate what we have achieved. In today's world, which is a very dangerous place, that is to be lauded and applauded.

We should recognise the number of people from countries and legislatures throughout the world who come here to learn from this Parliament about

how those things can be achieved. In case I am accused of plagiarism, I should say at this point that I am referring to something that I wrote myself. We have had delegations from eastern Europe, Latin America, south-east Asia and Africa. A few years ago, this Parliament endorsed a visit by the Palestinian Legislative Council and agreed to share good practice. That is extremely important in today's world and very forward-looking for an institution that is as young as ours.

Scotland should be staking its place in Europe and the world and it should have the vision to promote peace and stability actively. Bill Kidd said that sometimes these aspirations are seen as a bit idealistic and naive. Elaine Smith said that, too, when she was promoting peace education during a debate in Parliament some time ago. As I said when we talked about the peace stone—the Sconestone—going around the world, if we cut off the roots to any kind of idealism, we will never advance and we will never get anywhere.

Our reputation for democratic and peaceful constitutional change means that we could be established in the world as a force in aiding conflict resolution. We can invite people here from overseas and provide a peaceful setting for mediation and negotiation. I cannot remember which countries were involved, but that was done a few years ago—I think that Angus Robertson headed it up—with some eastern European states that were suffering conflict at the time.

We can invite people here and we can send Scots outward, too, in the spirit of international co-operation and world stability. We might well be a small nation, but we can find a new way of going forward and make a real mark in the world.

17:19

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Bill Kidd for securing the debate and for his support for the march, which I am happy to support, too. The march is a truly international endeavour and those who are organising it should be admired and commended by us all. They are doing it for all our futures and for the futures of our children. They want peace, justice and equality—those are the very principles and aspirations that the Labour Party was founded on and that is why I am a member.

It is therefore, for me, a tragedy that under a Labour Government we have waged war several times over the past decade and are still fighting in Afghanistan. In Iraq, we are in a war that I have spoken against both in this chamber and outwith it, and it is currently in the spotlight again because of the Chilcot inquiry. As Linda Fabiani said, the main casualties of war are civilians. In Iraq, as in other wars, they are euphemistically described as

“collateral damage”. In reality, they are ordinary people who are indiscriminately killed in a war that is not only of extremely dubious legality but is most certainly unnecessary and inhumane.

Like the marchers, throughout history men and women have bravely tried to stop war and the obscene violence and inevitable rape, torture and slaughter of civilians that go with it. The majority of victims of armed conflict are women and children and, of course, rape is routinely used as a weapon of war.

As the marchers identify, violence against women also exists outwith the realms of armed conflict. Kofi Annan described violence against women as

“the most shameful human rights violation, and perhaps the most pervasive ... As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.”

Around the world, we need urgently to address the plight of female victims of violence. Legislation is not enough; we must create a consciousness that recognises that any form of violence against women is repulsive and totally unacceptable. I hope that the world peace march will help to show that violence against women in all its forms—I include prostitution and pornography—must end.

We have heard this week of cuts in public sector pay, school closures and rising unemployment, yet billions of pounds are being spent on Iraq and Afghanistan and, of course, on nuclear weapons—all in a world in which millions of people die of malnutrition every year.

During wars a great many people are, of course, killed, maimed or reduced to poverty, while a very few people are made rich men—it is usually men. In the aftermath of war, capitalism gains while the poor pay the price.

I was thinking about this debate through the week and on Tuesday night I watched a BBC programme about Joan Baez. I tuned into the programme because I like her music and appreciate the power and influence of the protest songs that she sang, but the programme was also very informative from an anti-war perspective, which I had not expected. It was very interesting, because Joan Baez put herself in the front line to try to stop wars and she was frequently taken to prison as she tried to persuade young men to avoid the Vietnam draft. That takes courage and commitment. World peace might actually happen if more of us were like Joan Baez and the people on the march.

However, in spite of Joan Baez's efforts, many of those young men flocked to Vietnam with the promise of glory and a dream of escaping poverty and unemployment. Of course, the idealistic notion of “serving your country” while being paid a decent

wage and learning a trade and so on remains one of the armed forces' most powerful recruiting tools.

This week, Chilcot is exposing the shambles of Iraq and Obama is digging a deeper hole in Afghanistan. Surely history cannot repeat itself yet again through a war with Iran. We must be clear that that must not be allowed to happen.

In the end, the victims of war are the poor, the powerless and the women and children. In the end, we are always left asking: what was it for? Who gained by it? What was the cost in human life?

I will finish with the words of a song, not one by Joan Baez, although she has plenty that would be appropriate, but "The Green Fields of France":

"And I can't help but wonder, oh Willie McBride
Do all those who lie here know why they died?
Did you really believe them when they told you the cause?
Did you really believe that this war would end wars?
Well the suffering, the sorrow, the glory, the shame
The killing, the dying, it was all done in vain,
Oh Willie McBride, it all happened again,
And again, and again, and again, and again."

Let us hope and pray that the march for peace can prevent further wars and abominations from happening again.

17:24

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the opportunity for Parliament to discuss and debate this most fundamental of human issues: the desire to live in peace and safety. The ambition for a peaceful world is one that I know everyone in Scotland will share with others around the world.

The diversity of the people who endorse the march for peace and non-violence demonstrates how peace unites people. There are modern cultural leaders, religious leaders and members of the monarchy. They come from different countries and cultures and have different aims in life, but they share a common ambition to have a world that is free from violence and hatred. That ambition must be at the heart of every Government's policy. As we pursue world peace, countries must also secure peace and safety within their borders.

We have had a stimulating discussion on a subject that is now and will be in future of prime importance to Scotland. There are steps that we can and should take towards having a world that is free from violence. We can start by removing nuclear weapons. On moral, economic and political grounds, renewal of the United Kingdom's nuclear system is untenable. Bill Kidd's membership of the council of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament and

his attendance at the PNND assembly and council meeting in New York in October are a testament to his commitment, and I congratulate him on securing this debate. I know that his commitment is shared by many members.

Global opinion is changing. In September, the United Nations Security Council pledged its backing for broad progress on long-stalled efforts to staunch the proliferation of nuclear weapons and ensure reductions in existing nuclear stockpiles. When President Obama spoke to the council summit after the resolution was passed, he said:

"The historic resolution we just adopted enshrines our shared commitment to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. And it brings Security Council agreement on a broad framework for action to reduce nuclear dangers as we work toward that goal."

The Scottish Government is clear in its efforts to reduce violence and promote peace. Putting an end to all forms of violence is consistent with our national outcome:

"We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger."

Elaine Smith was right to talk about the importance of tackling violence against women. The Scottish Parliament has done and continues to do much in that area.

We are 100 per cent committed to supporting Scotland's ethnic minority communities, including refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and Gypsy/Travellers, who in many ways are the most discriminated against in our society. We have allocated £9 million over a three-year funding period to organisations that try to tackle discrimination and improve the lives of minority ethnic communities in Scotland.

Scotland is a nation of many cultures and beliefs and we have built a reputation as a rich and vibrant place to live and work, but even today there are people who harbour outdated and ignorant prejudices, which detract from the kind of Scotland that we want to be part of. There is no place for racism, discrimination and religious intolerance in Scotland—not now, not ever. We are one Scotland and we must stand together to tackle the challenges that we face and rid our society of inequality and discrimination, which hold our nation back.

A clear focus for peace and non-violence must be the elimination of nuclear weapons. The UK Government has spent £320 million on the replacement of Trident—before it has even started to build the first new submarine. The approximate cost of procuring the submarines is a staggering £25 billion and the potential total cost of maintaining the system, including new infrastructure and missiles, and extending the life of the current submarines, brings the total to

approximately £90 billion. It already costs £2 billion per year to keep the current Trident fleet operational.

In a letter to *The Times* in January, three prominent defence heads wrote:

“Nuclear weapons have shown themselves to be completely useless as a deterrent to the threats and scale of violence we currently, or are likely to, face—particularly international terrorism ... Our independent deterrent has become virtually irrelevant except in the context of domestic politics.”

Elaine Smith: Does the minister agree that after spending all that money on nuclear weapons the thought that we would ever use them is quite horrendous?

Fiona Hyslop: Many people take a moral and ethical view on nuclear weapons. That is an important point that must be made, and it has been well argued in the debate. People are beginning to understand other arguments, which are to do with economics and foreign relations, about why nuclear weapons have become redundant in many ways, but for many people they were always redundant from a moral standpoint.

Scotland has historically played a role in facilitating peacekeeping efforts globally, for example through the Edinburgh Conversations and the Craigellachie peace talks, which were co-ordinated by Angus Robertson MP—Linda Fabiani mentioned them. Leading Scots have acted in a peacekeeping capacity and have shown that violent action is not the answer in any dispute or disagreement.

However, we should not be complacent. Climate change, peak oil and other global changes contribute to political instability and we need to remain alert to the potential for us to play a greater role on the global stage. We can start by leading by example on nuclear disarmament. I know that many of the members present—although, to judge by his speech, not Ted Brocklebank—would support me in encouraging the UK Government urgently to reconsider the renewal of Trident at a cost that we simply cannot afford.

Our recent white paper, “Your Scotland, Your Voice: A National Conversation” outlines opportunities for an independent Scotland to go further in its role as a leader in peacekeeping efforts. That is the point that Linda Fabiani made. Under current devolution arrangements, we can press the UK Government to consider its position on nuclear weapons, lead by example in our efforts to eliminate violence and go further to promote true peace, meaning not only the absence of violence but the presence of justice and the wellbeing of people. An independent Scotland would have further opportunities to build

on that and to foster peace in Scotland and the wider world.

Scotland may be a small country but, like Bill Kidd, I believe that we have a big part to play in the long road to world peace. In Scotland we believe that diplomacy over military intervention, understanding over hostility and integration over exclusion are the only way forward. Only by understanding others’ political, economic, cultural and religious differences and ambitions will we ever hope to gain the right basis for working towards peace.

I congratulate Bill Kidd on bringing the debate to Scotland and on fostering the opportunity for the march to come to Scotland. Perhaps the debate might, like the march, be a stepping stone into the long march towards peace. It has a strong basis and strong support in Scotland. I thank him for securing the debate so that MSPs could stake out their position and the Parliament could express its view for peace and non-violence in Scotland and throughout the world.

Meeting closed at 17:31.

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